

News story: Secondary school places confirmed for thousands of pupils

Pupils across the country will find out today (Thursday 1 March) which secondary school has offered them a place for September, with nine out of ten schools now rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.

[Latest figures](#) show 83.5% of pupils were offered their first choice of secondary school and 94.6% of pupils were offered one of their top three secondary schools last year, which follows the creation of 735,000 new school places since 2010.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

This morning, thousands of pupils will find out which secondary school they will be going to this September and thanks to our reforms and the hard work of teachers, 1.9 million more children are now going to good or outstanding schools than in 2010.

We are raising standards across the country so that every child can go to a good school where they are taught the knowledge and skills they need for future success and we're investing £5.8 billion to create even more good school places. This builds on the 735,000 places we've created since 2010 – meaning 9 out of 10 pupils get one of their top three choices of schools.

Academic standards are rising following the introduction of more rigorous GCSE and A levels to bring our education system level with the best in the world. Latest performance data shows:

- The attainment gap between disadvantaged secondary school pupils and their peers has narrowed by 3.2% since last year and 10% since 2011;
- More pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils and pupils on free school meals are being entered for English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects compared to last year, ensuring pupils have the knowledge and skills they need for future success; and
- The number of students entering at least four of the five EBacc subject areas have increased by 4.8% this year – up to 82% in 2017.

The data builds on the government's record of 1.9 million more children now in good or outstanding schools than in 2010, with 9 out of 10 schools awarded this rating at their last inspection. England's pupils are also now amongst the world's best readers.

Speech: What is the point of investing in an energy efficient building that could be washed away in a flood?

A speech by Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, to the Sustainability First conference: Looking to the long-term: hearing the public interest voice in energy & water

28 February 2018 at Church House, Westminster

What is the point of investing in an energy efficient building that could be washed away in a flood?

That question may sound crude, but if we're looking to the future of the public interest in energy and water, it needs to be asked.

Do we need to build more energy efficient buildings? Yes.

Do they need to be flood resilient? Also, yes.

But you don't hear about that so much. For that reason, today I'm going to talk about climate change, water, energy and why I think building a more resilient country will provide investment opportunities for businesses. And, demonstrate leadership on the global stage.

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I'd like to thank Sharon Darcy, Anne Dacey and everyone at Sustainability First for inviting me to join you today.

When discussing the environment, I can't tell you how often I've been told that "children are the future". Of course they are. And, of course, education is key. But, we don't have time to wait for the next generation to go through school before we get to grips with these issues. So, I applaud Sustainability First's New-Pin programme for bringing us adults together, so that we can benefit from an excellent education today – while we are still able to put it into practice.

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Looking at the weather this week, it may be hard to believe – but tomorrow is the first day of spring – a time of new beginnings. So much has happened this year that it's amazing to think that we are nearly in March. We are already two months into the delivery of the 25 Year Environment Plan – meaning we only have 298 months left to achieve its aims. I'm not joking. The clock is ticking.

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In a recent episode of Radio 4's Costing the Earth, the presenter Tom Heap said: "2018 could be a year of delivery or disappointment."

The 25 year environment plan sets the ambition for us to build a more prosperous nation by taking better care of our natural capital. It was launched shortly after the extraordinarily effective television series "Blue Planet 2" aired on television around the world. There is no doubt – this is a significant political moment for the environment.

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The very next day after the plan was launched, I was in Cornwall announcing £750,000 for a new team to fight plastic pollution. Our team in the south west will galvanise action to reduce the plastic pollution that winds up on beaches – beaches which bring the country considerable investment through tourism – and will serve as a model to be replicated across the UK.

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At the launch of the plan, plastic pollution received a huge amount of media coverage, but there's a lot more to it than that. The Environment Agency helped write it, and we will be responsible for delivering its aims. In my view, the following section is crucial. It says:

"We will take all possible action to mitigate climate change, while adapting to reduce its impact. We will do this by... Making sure that all policies, programmes and investment decisions take into account the possible extent of climate change this century."

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Climate change is one of the biggest threats we face. The wealthiest and most powerful people in the world know it. At last month's Davos meeting, their Global Risk Report placed climate change at the top of the list.

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The public interest will be served by managing water safely as our sea levels rise between 0.4 and 1 metre by the end of the century. Very obviously, that will bring more flood risk. Last week, I was in Bristol where around 1000 properties are currently at risk of tidal flooding. In a hundred years that number will rise to 3,600 properties. And that is only one city.

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On a visit to the Netherlands last year, flood experts told me that they used to think rising sea levels were their most immediate climate risk. This makes sense, much of the country is below sea level, some parts up to 6 metres. But, they now think the most immediate risk will be more intense precipitation events – or, "seriously heavy rain" to you and me.

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Right now, the Met Office say there is a 1 in 3 chance of a new rainfall record somewhere in England and Wales every winter. Already, there are around 5.2 million homes at risk in England – roughly 1 in 6.

Over the last 10 years, we've seen some extraordinary floods. From 2007, when flooding hit during the summer – to that in the north of England in December 2015. On December the 5th that year, 341.4 millimetres of rain fell in 24 hours at Honister Pass in the Lake District. A record. Since 1910, 9 of the 17 record breaking rainfall months or seasons have happened since the year 2000.

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The UK Climate Projections will be updated this year. We can but hope they don't make for totally grim reading, but read them we must. In line with the Paris agreement, we should aim to limit the global temperature rise to 2 degrees, but in terms of resilience we need to prepare for a 4 degree rise.

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Does all of this pose us some difficult questions? Absolutely. But, I think the key to the public interest is in seizing the opportunities that it presents us with.

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I'm an environmentalist, but I'm also an investor. I have spent over 25 years working in financial services. Successful businesses need to stay one step ahead.

That means staying:

- one step ahead of your competitors
- one step ahead of technological advancements
- and, one step ahead of the era's prevailing fashions.

Or, perhaps I could phrase that more succinctly.

Successful businesses need to stay one step ahead of the changing climate.

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Last year, I was on Countryfile talking about buildings. We were at the flood resilient house at BRE's innovation park in Hertfordshire, which has a range of adaptations such as flood resistant doors, windows and water resistant wallboard and insulation. The house is model for how we might build resiliently in the future. The next challenge is paying for it.

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The Green Finance Taskforce is a cross departmental initiative working with industry to accelerate the growth of green finance. As a member of the Taskforce, but also as Chair of the Environment Agency, I think we have an

opportunity to begin talking about the investment opportunities presented by climate resilience.

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Flood protection is good for the economy. It allows companies to do business in severe weather by keeping their properties open, and their supply chains moving, as well as the transport links that bring in customers and trade.

Flood protection schemes – by their very nature – have to be designed for specific locations. But, they present huge opportunities for growth and development on the international stage. Every nation in the world is going to have to deal with climate change – by effectively investing in resilient infrastructure we can demonstrate leadership, advertise our expertise and export innovation.

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The Environment Agency is already doing this. I spoke earlier about my visit to the Netherlands – an incredible country that is perhaps the world's greatest engineering masterpiece. But, we don't only meet with the Dutch to learn about their delta defences. It's a two way street. Members of Rijkswaterstaat come regularly to England to learn from us about how we respond to flood incidents.

We still have much to learn, but our expertise about warning and informing, and responding to flood incidents, is a significant asset to the UK's Treasury – and one that we are more than happy to share.

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You may have seen our recent flood campaign, calling on people to “Prepare. Act. Survive.” A simple message that is good advice in and of itself, but which also conveys the actions you need to take when you see our flood alerts, flood warnings and severe flood warnings.

We have come a long way since 1953, when hundreds of people died because they were unaware a coastal surge that was making its way down the east coast. Even though it took hours to do so. This deeply tragic historical event inspires us to always innovate and improve our emergency communications – and is why we are a global leader in this field.

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Today, the technology for warning the public is informed by the flood forecasting centre – a ground breaking collaboration between the Met Office and the Environment Agency. Everything they produce is available for free, meaning members of the public can find out their flood risk and receive warnings, whether they are at home or on the move. By making the data we produce freely available, we are giving private companies the ability to create their own products and services.

For example, over the last 17 years we have used airborne lasers to map and

scan the English landscape. This helps us carry out work such as flood modelling and tracking changing coastal habitats. It's called LIDAR data, which stands for Light Detection and Ranging. We publish this as open data to help businesses do all sorts of things – like civil engineering, archaeology, wine production and even create virtual reality worlds for video games.

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As you can probably tell, I'm a bit of an optimist. I believe that our opportunities outweigh the challenges, and we have much to gain – even in the face of climate change.

But, I'm not naïve. The human condition is what it is. The public interest is not going to be served entirely voluntarily by enlightened businesses.

We need the law. However, if the law isn't properly enforced, it is meaningless. There will always be a role for a tough, independent regulator.

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Last week, we published the state of the environment report for water. In this, we highlighted that there are still far too many serious pollution incidents which damage the local environment, threaten wildlife and – in the worst cases – put the public at risk.

Over the last decade, water companies have been responsible for around 60 serious pollution incidents every year. More than one a week.

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Last year, Thames Water were ordered to pay a record £20 million following a series of significant pollution incidents on the River Thames. The fine was the biggest in the Environment Agency's history – but I would like to see the fines made proportionate to the turnover, or operating profits, of companies, and for the courts to apply these penalties consistently. Company boards need to take environmental risk seriously, and not see it as an operational expense. Anything less is no deterrent.

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Tough regulation is important – but we're not all stick and no carrot. We work very closely in partnership with water companies. I am always impressed by their innovation whenever I visit. They do a difficult job and, most of the time, they do it well, and they are our allies in ensuring that this country is resilient.

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Tough regulation, alongside partnership and collaboration, is effective: the Environment Agency's regulation of the oil industry has resulted in significant emission reductions of sulphur dioxide.

It is ALSO good for business. It can:

- drive innovation
- enhance brands
- encourage more efficient ways of using resources
- help with the development of new technologies
- reduce costs
- and create new markets.

But it also costs money, and the Environment Agency – like any public service organisation – has the responsibility to reduce costs to the taxpayer.

In order to deliver in the future, we will have to mobilise more money from other sources. Most of our charges have been fixed for at least six years and do not reflect the level of service we provide. So, we set up the Strategic Review of Charges to reform our charging regime from 2018 to 2023.

We expect businesses to be competent and we want them to manage their own relationships with communities in order to build trust. Over the last two months, we have consulted on these new proposals and are currently looking closely at the views expressed in response. There will be more to say on this in due course.

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In conclusion:

The challenges are many, and every single one of them will be exacerbated by climate change. We need to encourage investment in this country so that we can pay for the services needed to keep communities resilient – including environmental regulation.

There is no point in investing in an energy efficient building if it isn't flood resilient. The future of the public interest in energy and water demands us to make sure our investments do both of these things. And right now, in early 2018, environmental issues are at the top of the agenda.

So let's get moving and let's get delivering.

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Thank you very much.

Speech: DFID Country Director's speech at the CBE Stakeholders' Annual Review

Honourable Minister of Education
Chief Director of Ministry of Education
Director General of Ghana Education Service
Mr Chair
Team Leader of CBE
Distinguished representatives of Government
Country Directors and other

representatives of CSOs/NGOs Members of the Press Corps, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning everyone,

As Country Director for the UK's Department for International Development in Ghana, it is a pleasure to join you today to celebrate the long history of achievements of the Complimentary Basic Education (CBE) programme and to consider future sustainability and support.

The UK Government has had a longstanding partnership with Ghana to support Education. DFID has been engaged in supporting CBE for the last decade – initially supporting School for Life (SFL) to implement CBE programmes to reach out-of-school children and then moving on to support a more systemic approach focussed on building the capacity of Government and communities to be able to implement the CBE approach.

Investing in good teaching and supporting the most marginalised children access education is at the heart of DFID's new global education policy 'Get Children Learning'.

Education has the power to change lives and open the door to better employment, more active citizenship and well-informed health decisions that can benefit future generations. At its best it can transform the prospects of poor and marginalised children and CBE is one programme where we have seen this happening.

With children unable to go to school due to poverty, distance to schools or family demands, this programme has enabled almost 250,000 children to have a second chance at education and the chance to transform their lives through DFID and USAID funding.

Last years' learner assessment showed that 80 to 85% of learners had significantly improved their literacy and numeracy skills. Evidence from the tracker study, which has monitored these children into primary schools and compared them with a comparison cohort in primary school, has shown that the programme has effectively prepared them for the transition to formal primary school with levels of numeracy being equivalent between CBE and formal primary children and CBE children doing better in local language literacy.

Ladies and gentlemen, A couple of weeks ago I visited a CBE learning centre in Tolon in Northern Region and saw at first hand the strong commitment to the programme from the district authorities, the community and the children. I was struck by how attentive the children were in the classroom, the quality of the local language teaching materials and the enthusiasm of the community facilitator.

After 5 years we are now in the final cycle of support from DFID/USAID for this programme. It is evident that the capacity-building approach of districts and Implementing Partners to work together, supported by Crown Agents, has paid dividends in order to enable CBE to be sustained by the Government of Ghana.

We are also pleased to note that CBE is recognised as part of the Education Sector Plan 2018-2030 and that there are a number of conversations taking place on how to continue to be able to support children who have missed out on the opportunity to enrol in primary school at the right age or who have dropped out to have a second chance.

We are particularly pleased that this year has seen a twin approach with downstream Implementing Partners working with district authorities in 23 districts and GES implementing directly in 14 districts.

This is in line with Ghana's commitment to move 'beyond aid' and finance the education sector to enable every young child, boy and girl, to have access to education.

Honourable Minister, the UK commends the Government of Ghana for its admirable vision of Ghana 'beyond aid' and for your ambitious economic transformation plans.

Late last year in London, the British Prime Minister met with His Excellency the President and noted that, as Ghana moves beyond aid, the UK-Ghana relationship is changing from one focused on aid to a partnership of mutual economic benefit.

DFID's development offer is changing in response. DFID is shifting focus away from large scale resource transfers in Education and other social sectors towards technical assistance and a new UK-Ghana partnership based on economic development, investment, trade and strategic political cooperation.

In Education, our joint work and commitment to the sustainability of CBE is a step on this path.

But whilst the programme to date has helped thousands of children, the scale of the challenge remains. Approximately 450,000 children between the ages of 6 and 14 remain out of school in Ghana. We must continue to ensure the sustainability of this approach, which has proven to be effective and successful, as Ghana moves beyond aid and aims to deliver on its commitment to achieving SDG 4: to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

With this in mind, I wish you all a successful Annual Review meeting over the next few days and we look forward to continuing the important discussion on how we ensure future cohorts of children who miss out on an education have the chance to access CBE.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank our partners on CBE: The Ministry of Education, The Ghana Education Service and the National Service Secretariat for their enthusiasm and commitment to the CBE programme; our Implementing Partners (Afrikids, Action Aid, ProNet, LCD, GILLBT, Care, PLAN, IBIS/OXFAM, School for Life, and World Education); Crown Agents, IMC Worldwide and UNICEF; and, finally, the communities who have made the programme the success that it is.

We are grateful to all stakeholders for the achievements made so far on the

CBE programme. We thank you for joining with the United Kingdom and the USA in this venture which has enabled almost 250,000 Ghanaian children to have the second chance at an education that we hope will transform their lives.

Thank you.

Speech: Speech by Ambassador to Mongolia at the 55th Anniversary of UK-Mongolia Diplomatic Relations Reception

Your Excellency, Minister of Defence, MPs, Ladies and Gentlemen. Today, fifty-five years ago, the UK and Mongolia established diplomatic relations. Much has changed in our countries since 1963. But some things have not changed. In fact, reading through the documents on our early relations many things haven't changed at all. They have simply grown – possibly unimaginably for those who wrote them – from that early dialogue.

There were discussions about increasing Mongolian exports to the UK, of bringing innovative UK equipment into Mongolian industry. Discussions on student exchanges. And, appropriately given where we are tonight, and the phenomenal success of Mongolian Opera singers in the last two BBC Cardiff International Singer competitions – how to link the Opera singers of our two countries.

Fifty-five years on the UK is Mongolia's second largest export market, British companies have invested billions into Mongolia. And British innovation and technology is strengthening Mongolian business and industry across the country. Examples of this, I would like to thank tonight's principal sponsors Transwest, representing Joy Global's UK-made conveyors and Komatsu, and Cummins. Across Mongolia you can find heavy machinery and trucks, including Komatsu's, powered by formidable Cummins engines made in the UK.

I am, also delighted to be able to make two announcements this evening. Firstly, almost as I speak, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Theresa May, is informing the UK parliament of the appointment of Julian Knight MP as her Trade Envoy to Mongolia. Secondly, that UK Export Finance, the world's oldest export credit agency, will increase support available for UK trade with Mongolia to £200million. And also the ability to support transactions in Mongolian Tugrug, as part of its world-leading local currency financing offer. This will allow Mongolian buyers of UK goods and services to access finance in your own currency.

Fifty-five years on the UK and Mongolia are working closely together on some of the greatest global challenges. Peace-keeping, human rights, climate-change, sustainable development, countering the illegal wildlife trade.

Fifty-five years on the UK government's Chevening Scholarship scheme, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, is flourishing, as are the ever growing links between UK and Mongolian universities and our vibrant alumni network.

When I am asked about diplomatic relations, there is often the sense that I am being questioned about the first word: diplomacy. The treaties, MOUs, bilateral agreements that provide the formal structures for our countries' work together. But we should never forget that critical second word. Relations. A country, a culture, an ethos are the sum of its people. People and ideas shape the world we live in.

The UK and Mongolia stand together today as proud democracies. Outside this building you can see the work of a Mongolia artist, Batmunkh. A Mongolian rendition, in an appropriate medium for a Mongolian January, of the Houses of Parliament. Behind it the Ikh Khural. But you will also see a sculpture of the Beatles. They released their first single in 1963. And their music. Their message – unmediated by diplomats or governments – helped inspire a generation of young Mongolians to shape the country and democracy you live in today. Tonight is the last formal event that I will host as British Ambassador to Mongolia. And, how fitting that my abiding memory of you and Mongolia is exactly that of my first predecessor, Sir Terence Garvey. In his report back to London after handing over his credentials in 1963, he wrote: 'no effort was spared... to mark the occasion with gestures of friendship. The effect of this was much enhanced by the natural grace, good humour, good manners and friendliness of the Mongolians.'

For all of the grace, good humour, good manners and friendliness that you have show to me, and to the British Embassy and the United Kingdom over the last 55 years, thank you. I am confident that together our two countries and two peoples will continue to turn our vision and ideas into realities. Here, in the UK, and globally, for the next 55 years to come. And from me, personally, I hope it is goodbye and not farewell.

[Press release: Appointment of UK Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Mongolia &UK Export Finance increases support](#)

UK-Mongolia celebrated the 55th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations on 23 January 2018.

Her Majesty's Ambassador Catherine Arnold launched the year-long celebration with an official reception and she announced the appointment of UK Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Mongolia and UK Export Finance's decision to increase support. Julian Knight MP has been appointed by Prime Minister Theresa May to act on behalf of the British Government to support and increase trade and economic co-operation between the United Kingdom and Mongolia.

UK Export Finance, the world's oldest export credit agency, also announces an increase in support available for UK trade with Mongolia to £200million. UK Export Finance can now also support transactions in Mongolian Tugrug, as part of its world-leading local currency financing offer. This will allow Mongolian buyers of UK goods and services to access finance in their own currency – or to 'buy British, pay local'.

The British Ambassador to Mongolia, Catherine Arnold, said: 'These are two significant announcements to support and grow the trade and investment partnership between the UK and Mongolia. On 23 January 1963 the UK became the first Western country to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia. Our first diplomat arrived a year later and we have had diplomatic representation here in Ulaanbaatar ever since. Our partnership has been sustained and unwavering over the last 55 years. I am delighted to launch our 55th anniversary year with these two significant trade announcements. The UK remains committed to working with Mongolia both here and globally, to strengthen our economies, increase sustainability, and nurture democracy and human rights.'