

Press release: Youth Democracy Ambassadors to celebrate Suffrage centenary

The Minister visited the school to speak to students ahead of the 100-year anniversary of the first women getting the right to vote.

She heard how students will learn about and celebrate our democracy in this centenary year.

As part of the government's celebrations of the centenary, Youth Democracy Ambassadors will be recruited this year to make sure young people's voices are being heard.

There are a number of initiatives and commemorations taking place across the UK this year including a National Democracy Week which will run from 2-8 July. The aim of the week is to engage with under registered groups and work with partners to ensure that every member of society who is entitled to do so has an equal chance to participate in our democracy and to have their say.

Minister for the Constitution Chloe Smith said:

It was fantastic to speak to students at Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School and hear about the ways they're celebrating this important milestone for women.

I hope the young women I met will apply to be Democracy Ambassadors when the scheme opens later this year. Our Ambassadors will learn how they can influence decision making and receive training to enable them to share what they learn with their peers.

Head Teacher Mrs Walker said:

We were delighted to welcome the Minister to mark the Suffrage Centenary. Our girls demonstrated a love of learning and we were proud to hear their ideas for increasing democratic engagement among young people.

Press release: New Electoral Laws proposed to combat intimidation in public life

In a speech today (6 February) to mark the centenary of women's suffrage, the Prime Minister reflected on the nature of public life and reiterated her concerns about the increasing intimidation and abuse of people taking part in elections.

The Prime Minister announced that the government will consult on a new offence in electoral law of intimidating parliamentary candidates and their campaigners. The current offence of electoral intimidation relates to undue influence on voters.

She set out plans to bring forward legislation to remove the requirement for candidates standing as councillors in local elections to have their addresses published on ballot papers, in time for local elections in May 2019.

Voters would still be informed whether or not the candidate lived locally, and candidates could still list a home address if they wished. This is in line with the approach already in place for UK parliamentary elections, in which candidates have not had to include their home addresses on ballot papers since May 2010.

The consultation on the offence of intimidation, and the change in the requirement on addresses, were both recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life in its report published in December 2017, which had been commissioned by the Prime Minister.

The Committee found that intimidation of candidates poses a threat to the integrity of the democratic process.

The measures build on work already in train following the 2016 Pickles review on tightening up the definition of intimidation during elections.

Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith said:

Intimidation is completely unacceptable in any form – and there is a clear difference between legitimate scrutiny and conduct which is fuelled by hate and personal abuse.

We can't let intimidation of our candidates, campaigners, the public and those that serve us continue unchecked.

Our democracy is a tolerant and inclusive one. By avoiding giving out personal information that can be abused and legislating against intimidation of candidates and their campaigners we can make public life more accessible to all who want to participate.

News story: Mind the gap

When (some) women first won the right to vote on this day 100 years ago, the idea that they would also have a hand in drafting legislation was laughable.

That they could be responsible for creating laws to protect women against sex discrimination, as well as discrimination on the basis of other 'protected characteristics', such as disability and race, was beyond the realm of most people's imagination.

Yet lawyers from the Government Legal Department (GLD), who advise the Government Equalities Office (GEO), do exactly that.

An average day at the office for Anna Fairclough, a GLD lawyer who advises GEO, could involve briefing Ministers to respond to questions in the House of Commons, working with policy colleagues to make sure press lines are legally accurate, or drafting regulations to help close the gender pay gap.

Recently, Anna's team has also helped to draft guidance on dress codes for employers – something which, in the future, will help those asked to wear inappropriate clothes at work. The team was also closely involved in implementing the Secretary of State's 2017 commitment to provide free abortions in England for women from Northern Ireland.

"If you look at the recent controversies around equal pay at the BBC and the President's Club – it's obvious there's still quite a long way to go," says Anna, whose remit also includes issues relating to trans and non-binary people.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 gave certain women the right to vote: to qualify, you had to be aged over 30, a property owner, married to or a member of the Local Government Register, or a graduate voting in a University constituency. Eight and a half million women met these criteria – but that number still represented only 40% of the total population of women in the UK. The Act opened the door to full suffrage, which was achieved a decade later. In 1928, the Equal Franchise Act led to all women over 21 being able to vote with the same requirements and rights as men.

The Government Equalities Office works on a number of important programmes to address gender inequality and supports the Home Secretary in her role as Minister for Women and Equalities, supported by GLD lawyers.

One of the biggest projects last year dealt with by GLD lawyers advising GEO was drafting the Gender Pay Gap Regulations. The regulations ensure large employers are bound by law to publish data publicly on differences in average pay between men and women – guaranteeing that they can be held to account on this issue.

“That’s a massively important step towards identifying the gender pay gap, and the drivers of that inequality, and making sure that this is front and centre of people’s minds.” Anna says. “It’s great to work on something that’s so progressive – we’re the only country in the world to require such extensive public reporting of gender pay gaps.

“It’s brilliant working on things that are high-profile and interesting to talk about. They’re topical, exciting. And it’s great to be in a position to have a positive influence on the way society develops.”

GEO lawyers also assist in work with an international flavour, such as scrutinising the legislation and policy of British Overseas Territories to test compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, so as to extend the Convention to protect women in those territories.

In the future, Anna anticipates the team will be able to go even further in advancing equality for women: “I expect there will be further work to raise awareness of acceptable dress codes and treatment of women at work, as well as projects to increase women’s political participation at every level and to encourage women to return to work after career breaks. I’m keen to see how the first year of gender pay gap reporting plays out, and how employers start making positive changes to reduce the gap.

“The past few months have seen a sea change in attitudes to women, and hopefully we’ll be working on projects that aim to seize and build upon that mood.”

[News story: Ten-year milestone for nuclear skills development](#)

Almost £4 million has been invested by the NDA in NSAN since it was launched 10 years ago – a milestone it marked with a reception at the House of Lords, opened by Lord Hutton.

NSAN was established by nuclear employers and government to address key skills challenges facing the nuclear industry. It is now the sector’s leading collective skills forum.

It has played a key role in developing the skills and workforce required for the NDA to fulfil its mission to decommission and clean-up the existing UK nuclear legacy.

David Vineall, Human Resources Director at the NDA, said:

We are extremely proud of our 10 years of partnership with NSAN. It has delivered a portfolio of world-class skills development and training activities for the nuclear industry.

It is essential the industry develops and sustains a highly skilled workforce to support the delivery of our mission; safely, securely and in an environmentally responsible way.

Jo Tipa, Managing Director of NSAN, said:

The NDA, as founder members of NSAN, has been involved in all aspects of our operation since 2007 and has worked collaboratively with us and the sector to support the development and delivery of a number of key skills initiatives.

NSAN values the relationship with the NDA and we look forward to continuing our strong partnership going forwards.

To mark 10 years of collaborative working, the NDA was presented with an NSAN membership certificate of thanks during the event.

[Find out more about National Academy for Nuclear](#)

News story: Independent review of foster care published

An independent [review](#) of foster care in England has been published today, setting out recommendations to improve the fostering system for children and foster carers.

The independent review, commissioned by the Department for Education and conducted by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers, looked at the purpose of foster care and what it means to those closely involved in the system.

It makes 36 recommendations for government, local authorities and independent fostering agencies including:

- Ensuring foster carers are supported and included in decision-making;
- Improving foster placement commissioning, and matching;
- Greater stability and permanence for children and young people in foster care.

The review is part of the government's drive to ensure that children living in foster care have access to a stable and loving environment and foster

carers get the support they need. This includes the [announcement](#) in December 2017 that the government will extend its 30-hour childcare offer to foster carers.

Nadhim Zahawi MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, said:

We welcome this thorough and insightful report into the fostering system, which first and foremost is about identifying and addressing the needs of children in foster care.

The report gives us an opportunity to celebrate foster care and to recognise the invaluable role foster parents play in the lives of vulnerable children. We are committed to supporting them in this role, and that's why we recently announced that we will extend our 30-hour childcare offer to foster children to provide extra help for foster parents.

We will carefully consider the review's recommendations, alongside those from the Education Select Committee, over the coming months to determine how they can help us to make sustainable improvements to the fostering system and to the outcomes for looked after children.

To conduct the review Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers drew on a wide range of information, including a public call for evidence as well as meetings with local authorities, independent fostering agencies, representative organisations, academics, foster carers and children and young people.

The Department published a [report](#) in July, which brought together existing evidence around the fostering system to provide an overview of current provision.

New statistics also published today provide additional analysis on looked-after children in foster care, which helped to inform the review.

The review also includes a survey of the views and experiences of children in foster care, conducted by the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield.

Reviewer Sir Martin Narey said:

Foster Carers make a remarkable contribution to the lives of children often damaged by neglect and that contribution needs to be recognised. But fostering can be made even more effective, and could make an even greater contribution to the welfare to some of the country's most disadvantaged children. Foster Carers must be allowed much greater authority in making decisions about the children in their care and they need to be liberated to offer the physical affection which is a vital and necessary part of most children's healthy upbringing.

We make 36 recommendations and if all were to be implemented, as I hope they will be, then local authorities will have foster carers who are better motivated and better appreciated. And they will be offering greater permanency for children whose lives in care are too often disrupted. At the same time local authorities should make significant financial savings through obtaining better deals from most of the independent fostering providers, the commissioning of which is too often inadequate.

And his co-reviewer, Mark Owers said:

Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days of the year, foster carers help children in care to feel safe, loved and part of their family. We can be proud of fostering, local authorities and independent fostering agencies alike. But we can do better.

Foster carers must consistently get the support they need and the respect they deserve. More children need to enjoy placement stability and a genuine sense of permanence. Commissioning has to improve. We need to help more people, and with greater diversity, to become foster carers. We are confident that our recommendations will improve foster care in England.

The Government will respond to the report and the recommendations in Spring 2018, setting out the future programme of work for the fostering system.