

## **News story: Tax-Free Childcare opens to children under 9**

In April 2017 HM Revenue and Customs started rolling out Tax-Free Childcare, which helps working parents with the cost of childcare with up to £2,000 of support per child per year, or £4,000 for disabled children.

Today, Tax-Free Childcare opens to parents whose youngest child is under 9, or who turns 9 today. The scheme will open to all remaining eligible families with children under 12 on 14 February 2018. This means all eligible parents will be able to apply for Tax-Free Childcare before the end of this financial year.

Parents, including the self-employed, can apply online for Tax-Free Childcare by visiting [Childcare Choices](#). Parents can also access the government's childcare calculator through Childcare Choices, which helps parents to choose which government childcare support is best for them.

Since opening the childcare service, through which parents apply for 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare, more than 325,000 customers have successfully applied and are now using the service. Of these, more than 170,000 have a Tax-Free Childcare account.

### **What's Tax-Free Childcare like?**

The government is giving more help with the cost of childcare to working parents than ever before. It introduced Tax-Free Childcare in April 2017, and has doubled the free childcare available to working parents of 3 and 4 year olds to 30 hours a week for families in England. In 2019/20 the government will be spending around £6bn on childcare support – a record amount of support.

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## **News story: Bids open to host annual Armed Forces Day National Event in 2019**

The military parade at the Armed Forces Day National Event 2017 in Liverpool.

In 2019, Armed Forces Day will celebrate eleven years of supporting our Armed Forces Community, from serving personnel and reserves to veterans, cadets and families.

The eleventh Armed Forces Day, on Saturday 29 June 2019, will be a chance for the British public to show their gratitude to the Armed Forces for their hard work and sacrifice, to keep us safe at home and abroad.

Defence Minister for the Lords, Earl Howe, said:

This is a fantastic opportunity for a town or city to be at the centrepiece of the nationwide celebration as events and celebrations take place up and down the country.

In recent years the Armed Forces Day National Event has been held right across the country, showing the spectrum of British society – from the nation's capitals like Edinburgh and Cardiff to Liverpool and coastal communities like Cleethorpes and Blackpool.

This year's event will be hosted by the historic North Wales seaside town of Llandudno. The hosts, Conwy Council, have a spectacular range of celebrations planned to show their gratitude to the Armed Forces community. Councillor Gareth Jones, Leader of Conwy County Borough Council, said:

We are proud and privileged to be named as the Host of the National Armed Forces Day in 2018.

Conwy County has a deep affiliation with the Armed Forces and a strong historical link. Llandudno will be a great destination to showcase the outstanding work of the Armed Forces past and present.

The event will be supported by all the North Wales Councils and key colleagues across Wales. Serving personnel and veterans of our Armed Forces Community will be assured of a very warm welcome and an event that thanks them for their commitment to keeping the country safe.

Anyone interested in becoming the 2019 host should contact the Ministry of Defence Armed Forces Day team for more information by email at [armedforcesday-events@mod.uk](mailto:armedforcesday-events@mod.uk) or by telephone on 020 7807 0970. The deadline for applications to be considered as host is 15 March 2018.

More information about Armed Forces Day is available at [armedforcesday.org.uk](http://armedforcesday.org.uk)

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**[News story: Could it be Edward, urgent](#)**

# appeal for family of Bedfordshire sergeant killed in World War 1

Edward Norton was a Sergeant of the 7th Battalion Durham Light Infantry when he lost his life in September 1918. His body was never found. Today, the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre is appealing for his family to get in touch after a set of human remains were discovered near the town of Gavrelle in northern France, the place where he fell a century ago.

Born in Stotfold, Bedfordshire in 1881 to Augustus and Mary Ann Norton. Edward originally served in the Bedfordshire Regiment before transferring to the Durham Light Infantry. He married Susan Agnes Bushwell in 1907 and according to the 1911 census, his last known address was 22 Pondwicks Road, Luton.

Now an appeal has been launched by the MOD JCCC to trace Edward's surviving relatives so they can be invited to undertake a DNA test to prove whether or not the remains are his. If there is a match, the family will be invited to attend a full military burial service in March.

Louise Dorr from the JCCC said:

As a result of our extensive research, these remains are very likely to be 1 of only 2 missing soldiers, so there should be a very good chance of identifying him. He is to be buried in France on 15 March. Rather than bury him as an unknown soldier, I would love to be able to identify him so that his headstone may bear his name.

She added:

There are still so many 1000s of men lost in the Great War who have no known grave. To be able to identify just 1 of them takes a huge amount of research. Most importantly, it brings their individual story to an end and fills in the gaps in their family history.

If you can help with tracing Edward's family, please call Louise on 01452 712612 extension 5465 or via email: [DBS-JCCCCommem4S03@mod.uk](mailto:DBS-JCCCCommem4S03@mod.uk).

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## **News story: The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport reappoints Nicola Roche to the Board of UK Sport.**

Nicky Roche was a Senior Civil Servant until 2013, including within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. She is now Director of Strategy for Sporting Assets, a social enterprise which works with communities to use sport for wider social benefit such as employment, health and education. She has been reappointed to the Board of UK Sport and will continue to chair their major events panel. She is a Trustee of the Rees Care Leavers Foundation and the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust. She recently chaired the independent panel supporting DCMS in assessing English city bids to host the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Nicky was Chief Executive of TdFHUB2014ltd, leading the co-ordination of the first three days of the 2014 Tour de France from Yorkshire to London. In 2007, she became Director of Operations, Government Olympic Executive. Alongside being one of the leaders on the logistical delivery of the Games, as a member of the senior leadership team Nicky also helped ensure that the budget of £9.3bn was managed and outcomes were on time and to quality. Prior to this Nicky held the post of Director of Sport and Board Member for DCMS. Nicky was awarded a CBE for services to the staging of the London 2012 Games. She is a keen horse rider and an athletics fan.

The role is remunerated at £218 per day and this appointment is made in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments. The appointments process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Under the Code, any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years must be declared. This is defined as including holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation, or candidature for election. Nicola Roche has declared no personal political activity.

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## **News story: New Countryside Stewardship Offers open for applications**

The Countryside Stewardship scheme has opened for farmers and land managers

to request 2018 application packs today (15 January).

[Four simpler, and quicker to apply for, offers](#) are being introduced this year to complement the existing Higher Tier and Mid Tier offers and open up the scheme to even more farmers and land managers. Unlike existing offers, all landowners who make a valid application for any of the four new packages will be guaranteed funding through the scheme.

This application window is an opportunity for farmers new to Countryside Stewardship (CS), or those coming out of previous stewardship agreements, to sign up for an agreement that will be guaranteed for its lifetime, to protect wildlife, boost biodiversity and deliver environmental benefits for their local communities.

Earlier this month, Environment Secretary Michael Gove outlined government plans to replace existing farm subsidies outside the EU with a new system of public money for public goods. Ahead of this, the new CS offers are an opportunity for even more farmers to establish positive environmental practices on their land and prepare for the future.

The RPA and Natural England have been tasked with simplifying the scheme, to save farmers time and cut down on paperwork. As part of this, farmers applying for the new CS Offers who meet the eligibility requirements will be able to get an agreement to deliver as few as 3 options, or as many as 7 up to 14, depending on the offer applied for. The new CS Offers are a chance for those who've been put off the scheme in the past to look again at what's on offer and what they might be able to achieve on their land.

The government has made clear its intention to go on supporting farmers for many years to come to deliver public goods, in terms of producing high quality food, boosting biodiversity and making our countryside a safe haven for our iconic wildlife.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

We've seen farmland birds recover in numbers and biodiversity boosted on farms signed up to Countryside Stewardship agreements, however we have listened to those who said the schemes had become too complicated. The new Countryside Stewardship offers available this year are much simpler to apply for and cover a full range of different farm types, so farmers can deliver environmental benefits wherever and whatever they farm.

My message to farmers who've been put off Countryside Stewardship in the last few rounds is to take another look and see what's on offer this year. We've listened to farmers and we've simplified the offering to create a universal scheme to appeal to farmers new to stewardship and those coming out of ELS so they can continue the good work on their farms.

Farmers and land managers have until 31 May to request a paper application

pack. Farmers intending to apply online this year will be able to create their Online Arable Offer application pack from 20 February. See further details of the new [Offers for Wildlife](#).

Applicants can request more information on all the Offers available from Natural England Enquiries Team by telephone: 0208 026 1089; email: [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk); or writing to:

Enquiries, Natural England, County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester, WR5 2NP