

Record numbers of nursing students as pandemic inspires next generation

The final figures from this year's admission cycle show there were 29,740 acceptances to nursing and midwifery courses in England, 6,110 more than last year and an increase of over a quarter (26%). This year, 23% (6,770) of acceptances were from students aged 35 years and older, a 43% increase on last year.

The number of new nursing applicants to English providers between 15 January and 30 June was 68% (4,600) higher than the same period last year. The lockdown period (23 March to 30 June deadline) itself saw nearly double the number of applications to nursing relative to the same period in the year previously.

Minister for Care Helen Whately said:

It's fantastic to see so many people choosing to pursue a career in nursing and midwifery, with over a quarter more students starting on courses. This year has shown just how much we depend on nurses. I have no doubt that their incredible work has inspired the next generation to pursue careers in the NHS and social care.

This year we've also introduced a new training grant for nursing students of at least £5,000 a year, helping to remove the barriers for anyone considering this brilliant career.

With over 14,800 more nurses working in our NHS compared to last year, we are on our way to delivering 50,000 more by the end of this Parliament to help us build back better.

In September the government introduced training grants for eligible nursing, midwifery and many allied health profession students of at least £5,000 a year, which does not need to be paid back. Additional payments of up to £3,000 will be available for specialisms struggling to recruit, including learning disability and mental health nursing and to help students cover childcare costs.

Figures to the end of August show the number of nurses in the NHS in England increased by 14,813 compared with last year.

[The end-of-cycle 2020 data resources](#) will be available on the UCAS website.

Boston Barrier flood gate fully operational

The Boston Barrier gate is now fully ready and working to give an enhanced level of flood protection to over 13,000 homes and businesses in the town.

As the centrepiece of the flood scheme, the barrier gate can be raised in just 20 minutes, responding quickly to threats of North Sea tidal surges.

With the whole of the £100m [Environment Agency](#) scheme now two-thirds complete, the project will provide Boston with one of the best standards of flood defence outside of London. Once the scheme is fully completed in 2022, flood risk to over 14,000 homes and 800 businesses will be greatly reduced and allow for the effects of climate change for the next 100 years.

This barrier is part of the [government's long term investment](#) in flood and coastal defences. Since 2015 it has invested £2.6bn to better protect the country from flooding and coastal erosion and is on course to have better protected 300,000 homes by March 2021. Earlier this year, the government announced a [record £5.2 billion investment](#) in flood and coastal defences and the [National FCRM Strategy](#) will help build a better prepared and more resilient nation.

The Boston Barrier project is expected to be fully completed in 2022.

Minister for Floods, Water and Emergencies Rebecca Pow said:

Flooding has a devastating impact on lives and livelihoods, but for communities like Boston the barrier project brings a real sense of support for the years ahead, better protecting 13,000 properties.

We are determined to support flood-hit communities as we build back greener and we are investing a further £5.2 billion over the next six years to reduce floodrisk to hundreds of thousands more homes.

Environment Agency chief executive Sir James Bevan said:

Reaching this stage of the Boston Barrier project represents a huge development for the town and for the Environment Agency.

During this most difficult of years, I want to thank all of the teams who have shown great dedication and determination to reach this important milestone in a Covid-secure way.

Now that the barrier gate is fully operational, Boston is better prepared for what winter may bring, this year and for many years to come.

Environment Agency Boston Barrier project director Adam Robinson said:

It gives me great pleasure to see the barrier gate fully operational following rigorous testing.

This marks a huge leap forward for the scheme and there is now a significant reduction to the risk from tidal flooding in Boston. The majority of properties covered by the scheme will be better protected for a similar event to that of December 2013.

Work on the scheme, which has been identified by government as critical infrastructure, continues in line with the government's coronavirus advice with measures in place to ensure safe working procedures on site.

Our team have worked incredibly hard throughout the pandemic to minimise disruption while maintaining the health and safety of staff, suppliers and members of the public. That effort has definitely paid off and means we now have a winter-ready operational tidal flood defence.

Further stages

The next stages of work will focus on tying-in the further parts of the scheme downstream, including:

- Installing a replacement flood gate at the Port of Boston wet dock entrance.
- Work to tie the project into the Haven Banks Improvement Scheme, a separate Environment Agency project to raise and strengthen the existing flood banks running from the Barrier towards The Wash for a distance of 5 km.

Background information

- The Boston Barrier is a critical infrastructure project and national priority project for the Environment Agency, delivered by BAM Nuttall Mott MacDonald Joint Venture.
- Over 800 properties were flooded across the town in a tidal surge on 5 December 2013. The surge highlighted the need for improved tidal flood defences in Boston, and the barrier scheme became a national priority project for the Environment Agency's Six-Year Programme six months later.
- With total funding of over £100m, the scheme will protect Boston town centre against a tidal surge similar to what was experienced in 2013.
- When complete, the scheme as a whole will give 14,000 homes and 800 businesses a better standard of protection against tidal flooding, giving Boston one of the best standards of defence outside of London.
- It will help deliver economic benefits to the area estimated to be worth over £1billion.
- The Boston Barrier project was granted the Transports and Work Act

legislation which gave the permissions to start the project in December 2017, and had spades in the ground at the beginning of January 2018.

Winter readiness

- The Environment Agency is prepared to take action this winter wherever it is needed. Throughout the year, it has continued to build and repair flood defences. It has 250 high-volume pumps available and 6,500 trained staff across the country, including 314 trained flood support officers.
- The Environment Agency is also making the most of new technology to prepare for and respond to floods:
 - It uses drones and aeroplanes to map river channels and the extent of flooding
 - Nimble, remote-controlled boats help it monitor river flows and collect data
 - It uses its [flood warning system](#) to directly alert over 1.4 million properties at the touch of a button when flooding is expected.
 - It uses a wide range of social media and media channels to increase the reach of its warning messages.

Plan to regenerate England's cities with new homes

- New measures to help cities and their high streets recover from the pandemic
- More homes in urban areas – tackling unaffordability and making the most of brownfield land with £100 million of funding
- Revision of '80/20' funding rule to help level up all parts of England

New measures to level up England's cities, recover from the pandemic and help provide much-needed new homes have been set out by Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick today.

Following a consultation launched in the summer that sought views from planners, councils and the wider public, the Government has announced its plan for enabling the delivery of more homes across England.

A housing need formula is currently used to provide a starting point in the process of local planning for new homes. An updated method will now be introduced to help councils to enable the delivery of 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s, while prioritising brownfield sites and urban areas.

Under the proposals, cities will be encouraged to plan for more family homes – which are the right size and type for families to live in – and to make the most of vacant buildings and underused land to protect green spaces. The plans will encourage more homes to be built in England's 20 largest cities

and urban centres, boosting local economies by supporting jobs in the building sector, and revitalising high streets with the footfall new residents bring.

The Government also intends to revise the so-called '80/20 rule' which guides how much funding is available to local areas to help build homes. This will establish a new principle to ensure funding is not just concentrated in London and the South East.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

This Government wants to build more homes as a matter of social justice, for intergenerational fairness and to create jobs for working people. We are reforming our planning system to ensure it is simpler and more certain without compromising standards of design, quality and environmental protection.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated and magnified patterns that already existed, creating a generational opportunity for the repurposing of offices and retail as housing and for urban renewal. We want this to be an opportunity for a new trajectory for our major cities – one which helps to forge a new country beyond Covid – which is more beautiful, healthier, more prosperous, more neighbourly and where more people have the security and dignity of a home of their own.

A new expert Urban Centre Recovery Task Force has been set up to advise on the development and regeneration of our great town and city centres. The Task Force includes Peter Freeman, the visionary behind the redevelopment of Kings' Cross and new Chair of Homes England.

To further support local areas in delivering these homes, and following the £20 billion investment in housing announced as part of last month's Spending Review, today the Government is also:

- Allocating more than £67 million in funding to the West Midlands and Greater Manchester Mayoral Combined Authorities to help them deliver new homes on brownfield land, as well as confirming an additional £100 million of funding for brownfield development.
- Announcing that in January the Government plans to launch a new £100 million Brownfield Land Release fund to support brownfield development, estates regeneration, development on public sector land and self and custom-build serviced plots in coming forward. This will be open to councils across England, apart from those Mayoral Combined Authority areas that recently benefited from our £400 million brownfield fund. A significant portion of this new £100m will go supporting self and custom-builders – a growing sector which Government is committed to. We invite councils to use the time between now and the prospectus launch to start to consider and prepare their bids.

- The Government is today encouraging councils to ensure that appropriate numbers of family homes come forward, with the right mix of home sizes, types and tenures for local communities.

To ensure tall buildings are in areas that are appropriate, the Government has issued a London Plan direction to the Mayor of London asking boroughs to set a definition for a tall building, based on a minimum of 18m height.

During the pandemic, the Government has made it easier for cities and towns to adapt to the challenges they have faced. This includes making it easier to demolish and rebuild unused buildings as homes, providing restaurants, pubs and cafes with the freedom to provide takeaway services, and making it easier for businesses and communities to host markets and stalls so customers can be served safely. Today's changes build on this to enable the delivery of stronger, more prosperous and more resilient places for people to live in.

Today, the Government is also:

- Announcing it will work to agree with the GLA a strengthened role in London for Homes England, the Government's housing accelerator. This would enable them to work more closely with the GLA, Boroughs and development corporations to help deliver sites in London and the preparation of bids for the new National Homebuilding Fund. This will help close the gap between what London is delivering now and what it needs to.
 - Confirming over £12 billion of investment in affordable housing over the next five years, including the new Affordable Homes Programme, as announced in the Spending Review last month. The new programme is open and can be used to support councils and housing associations in delivering affordable homes. The programme will unlock a further £38 billion in public and private investment in affordable housing
 - The Government intends to revise the '80/20 rule', establishing a new principle for future funding from the £7.1 billion National Home Building Fund that better reflects our commitment to levelling up and our ambition to deliver 300,000 new homes each year by the mid-2020s. We want funding to be distributed more fairly across England, and not just concentrated in London and the South East.
 - Today's announcements follow proposals launched earlier this month to tackle the housing shortage in urban areas by enabling commercial premises to be converted into new homes through a fast-track planning permission process. This will help to give high streets a new lease of life, removing eyesores and transforming unused and derelict buildings, while making the most of our brownfield land.
 - The new standard method follows a consultation on the method launched last August called 'Changes to the Current Planning System'.
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Delivering tangible, positive impacts for the South Sudanese people

Thank you very much, Mr. President. Let me begin by thanking Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy for his update and also to SRSg Shearer and USG Lowcock. Their briefings today provided a stark illustration of the dire and deteriorating humanitarian situation faced by millions of South Sudanese, as well as the urgent need for the full implementation of the Peace Agreement. I take what David Shearer said about the fact that the violence is by no means as bad as it was previously, and that is a mercy, but it is a sad and profound reality that over two years since the Peace Agreement and one year since this Council visited Juba, millions of South Sudanese are yet to see real peace dividends.

This year, we've seen the declining food security picture affecting millions and catalysed by subnational violence, slow implementation of the Peace Agreement and record flooding. As Mark Lowcock has been clear, the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, released on Friday, showed that there is likely to be a famine occurring in Western Pibor, and thousands more people living in famine like conditions in five other counties.

Now, colleagues, resolution 2417 places an onus on this Council to take action when we see a clear link between conflict and food insecurity. This is unmistakably the case in South Sudan.

The situation will only worsen if we do not act. Now is the time for to step up and show leadership. The United Kingdom is one of the major humanitarian donors in South Sudan. This October, we committed a further \$10 million in assistance in addition to our humanitarian aid spend, which last financial year has totaled \$218 million. But colleagues, international support and humanitarian aid cannot solve this alone. Ultimate responsibility lies with South Sudan's government. And it's a great shame that, again, the representative of South Sudan has not made a rule 37 request to be with us in this Council today as we discuss the plight facing millions of his countrymen.

We call on the government of South Sudan to accept the gravity of the situation, support the release of the full IPC analysis, and to cooperate and provide unfettered access to humanitarian partners. Efforts to impede the IPC process help nobody and although humanitarian aid is crucial, the bottom line is that this crisis can only be resolved if the South Sudan's leaders show political will.

Now, Mr. President, we must also recognise the manmade nature of this crisis. Successive cycles of violence, have resulted in forced civilian displacement, abductions and notable increases in sexual and gender based violence. We welcome the positive steps taken to build state-level institutions, and we commend the commitment last week to finalise state and county level appointments. This is a significant step. However, we need to ensure that

these structures deliver tangible, positive impacts on people's lives, and governors and state officials must ensure unfettered humanitarian access as an immediate priority.

Mr. President, stability is vital. It can only be achieved through a fully inclusive process. We welcome the recent recommitment by non signatories of the Peace Agreement to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, and we call on parties to continue to engage constructively in the Rome process.

But let me repeat our call to South Sudan's leaders to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in this process.

Mr. President, the fact that famine is likely to be occurring should be a wake up call to us all. At this moment of renewed crisis we call on all parties to redouble efforts to realise lasting peace and stability. It is therefore vital that UNMISS is able to carry out its mandate unhindered. Bureaucratic and physical impediments are a direct contravention of the Peace Agreement, the status of forces agreement and international peacekeeping norms.

In closing, Mr. President, as we look to the end of South Sudan's first decade as an independent nation, our hope remains that a partnership can be forged between the donor community, the United Nations and South Sudan's government and that 2021 will see a renewed effort to help end this humanitarian catastrophe. South Sudan's government need to see the donor community and the UN as partners to help them to resolve this crisis. South Sudan's leaders need to put their people first.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Argentina and the UK Joint Webinar: COVID-19 vaccines in Latin America and the Caribbean

Press release

Argentina and the UK Joint Webinar: Vaccine profiles, distribution challenges and countering vaccine disinformation in Latin America and the Caribbean.



On 14 December 2020, Argentina's Health Minister, Ginés González García and the UK's Minister of State for the Americas, Wendy Morton MP opened the virtual seminar "Vaccine profiles, distribution challenges and countering vaccine disinformation in Latin America and the Caribbean". The event brought together senior officials and medical experts from across the region to discuss efforts to bring the COVID-19 pandemic to an end and how best to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Published 15 December 2020