

# Press release: Gove kicks off Year of Green Action

- Year-long drive calls on young people to spearhead environmental action
- Government pledges £10million boost to connect children with nature
- Greener schools and more educational visits will be delivered through the funding

Environment Secretary Michael Gove will today call on people across the country to join together to protect the environment.

Speaking at [ZSL London Zoo](#) this evening, the Environment Secretary will launch the [Year of Green Action](#) – a year-long drive to get more people from all backgrounds involved in projects to improve the natural world.

He will also allocate £10 million to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds better access the natural environment, with grants awarded to projects that will create greener school grounds and increase the number of school visits to local parks, wildlife sites, care farms and National Parks.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove will say:

I am delighted to launch the Year of Green Action. Over the next 12 months we will work with businesses and communities to create ways for people from all backgrounds to connect with nature, protect our environment, and contribute to restoring our natural world.

As the future stewards of our planet, children and young people have a vital role to play in this. The £10million boost outlined today will help ensure there are no barriers for young people to access the benefits of the natural world and importantly enable them to play their part in environmental protection.

During his speech, the Environment Secretary will call on everyone to play their part and back the Year of Green Action – from businesses to gardeners and government itself.

It will provide a focal point for organisations, individuals, communities and businesses to learn more about their environmental impact and take action to reduce it.

It comes as figures show [one in 10 children do not regularly spend time outdoors](#). The £10 million programme allocated today will help schools and education providers with the highest proportions of disadvantaged pupils to design more outdoor-focused activities, boosting pupils' contact with nature and supporting their health and wellbeing.

The funding will also increase access to care farms, making it possible for

1.3million children and adults facing disadvantage or social exclusion to benefit from activities on a working farm.

A key pillar of the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) is to connect young people with nature and the projects announced today will be delivered by [Natural England](#) with a number of partners from spring 2019, with funding from the Department of Education.

As part of this programme, the National Centre for Social Research will also be carrying out research to understand how activities in nature impact pupils' mental health and engagement with school.

Commenting on the funding, Lord Blencathra, Natural England's Deputy Chair, said:

Connecting children with nature is one of the most important things we can do for them. It can boost their health, wellbeing and learning and give them a life-long love of the natural world that leads them to cherish and protect it forever.

I hope these projects will ensure that every child has the means of discovering the wonders of our wildlife.

The [#iwill4nature](#) initiative, charity [Step Up To Serve's](#) contribution to the Year of Green Action, will also launch today. The government-backed initiative is a nationwide campaign to grow environmental youth social action and support a series of activities for young people to connect with, protect and enhance nature. This includes appointing young ambassadors to drive environmental action in their communities and encourage environmental volunteering such as litter picking, planting pollinator-friendly flowers or fundraising to maintain or enhance green spaces.

20-year-old #iwill Ambassador Nayha Patel said:

Young people, like me, are pivotal in initiating the cycle of change to improve the environment for the future. The Year of Green Action and #iwill4nature together will connect, engage and challenge people, in particular children and young people, throughout the country to ensure we make our natural world a better place. The views and energy of young people will be key to achieving this.

Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

We want every child to have the best possible start in life and grow up healthy and happy. This £10 million investment will ensure even more children can enjoy the many benefits of discovering nature, from improved mental wellbeing to better physical health.

It builds on our recently published 'passport' of enrichment activities, designed to inspire children to explore the outdoors and make the most of the world around them.

Notes:

The children and nature funding was first announced in the 25 Year Environment Plan and has been awarded to the following delivery partners:

- Resilience through Nature, a consortium of [The Wildlife Trusts](#), YoungMinds, [Groundwork](#), the Sensory Trust and Field Studies Council, have been appointed to the Nature Friendly Schools project which will help deliver greener grounds and pupil visits to green spaces for schools with the highest proportion of disadvantaged pupils.
- [Social Farms and Gardens](#), working with Thrive, will deliver the Growing Care Farming project which aims to achieve a transformational change in the scale, scope and uptake of care farming services in England for children and adults with a defined health, education or social need particularly those from disadvantaged areas.
- Community Forests and Woodland Outreach project: to be awarded

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## [News story: UK signs Eastern and Southern Africa trade continuity agreement](#)

A continuity agreement will see British businesses and consumers benefitting from continued trade with Eastern and Southern Africa after we leave the European Union.

Trade Minister George Hollingbery signed the UK-Eastern and Southern Africa agreement in London today (Thursday 31 January) with a number of representative governments.

The news has been welcomed by businesses including Princes Tuna, who say it will help to support over 4000 jobs and ensure they can keep trading without disruption.

This continuity agreement has been agreed as we prepare to leave the EU on 29 March. It replicates the effects of the existing EU Economic Partnership Agreement with Eastern and Southern Africa.

It will allow continued tariff-free imports from Eastern and Southern Africa, and removes the majority of tariffs on British exports to these countries over the coming years.

The agreement ensures that there will be no disruption to our trading relationship with Eastern and Southern Africa as we leave the EU.

Trading on these preferential terms rather than on World Trade Organization terms will deliver significant savings and help to support British jobs.

This will help to further strengthen the trading relationship between the UK and these countries, which was worth £1.5 billion in 2017.

Based on current trade flows, meat and fish exporters in Eastern and Southern Africa could save £30 million a year in tariff charges that could apply if the agreement wasn't in place, while clothing exporters could save more than £10m and sugar exporters could save around £8m.

Consumers in the UK will continue to benefit from more choice and lower prices for products as clothes and tuna from Mauritius.

These agreements are part of the UK government's commitment to supporting developing countries to reduce poverty through trade. It will help to them to grow their economies, create jobs, increase incomes and reduce reliance on overseas aid in the long-term.

Trade Minister George Hollingbery said:

The continuity agreement, signed today, marks our commitment to help developing countries increase trade and boost economies both across Africa and the UK.

The agreement will allow businesses in Eastern and Southern Africa to continue trading with the UK without any tariffs and lays the foundations for our ambitious trade for development agenda.

Africa's long-term success matters to the UK which is why we are investing in, and partnering with African nations for our mutual benefit.

Abdulla Elahee Doomun, Managing Director, Princes Tuna (Mauritius) Limited said:

Princes Tuna Mauritius warmly welcomes this agreement as the UK is the largest market for the tuna products that we manufacture.

Ensuring there is frictionless trade is critical to our long-term business success and to supporting over 4,000 direct jobs in our two factories as well as many other Mauritian businesses that provide us with goods and services.

HM Trade Commissioner for Africa, Emma Wade-Smith said:

Today's agreement will help to keep trade between the UK and nations in Eastern and Southern Africa well on track, providing continuity for businesses, consumers and exporters as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

This deal forms part of the UK government's wider commitment to supporting developing nations and emerging economies worldwide and across Africa. Providing continuity of the trading arrangements with our trading partners will help sustain jobs and further strengthen trade and investment ties between the UK and nations of Eastern and Southern Africa.

The new UK-ESA agreement replicates the effects of existing trading arrangements as far as possible. It will come into effect as soon as the implementation period ends in January 2021, or on 29 March 2019 if the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

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## **Press release: Joint statement on the new mechanism to facilitate trade with Iran**

Joint statement by the E3 Foreign Ministers Jean-Yves Le Drian (France), Heiko Maas (Germany), Jeremy Hunt (United Kingdom):

France, Germany and the United Kingdom, in accordance with their resolute commitment and continued efforts to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2231, announce the creation of INSTEX SAS (Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges), a Special Purpose Vehicle aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran.

The E3 reaffirm that their efforts to preserve the economic provisions of the JCPOA are conditioned upon Iran's full implementation of its nuclear-related commitments, including full and timely cooperation with the IAEA.

INSTEX will support legitimate European trade with Iran, focusing initially on the sectors most essential to the Iranian population – such as pharmaceutical, medical devices and agri-food goods. INSTEX aims in the long term to be open to economic operators from third countries who wish to trade with Iran and the E3 continue to explore how to achieve this objective.

The creation of INSTEX is a major first step taken by E3 countries today. The operationalisation of INSTEX will follow a step-by-step approach: The E3 together with INSTEX will continue to work on concrete and operational details to define the way the company will operate; the E3 will also work with Iran to create an effective and transparent corresponding entity that is required to be able to operationalise INSTEX.

INSTEX will function under the highest international standards with regards to anti-money laundering, combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) and EU and UN sanctions compliance. In this respect, the E3 expect Iran to swiftly implement all elements of its FATF action plan.

The E3 underline their commitment to pursue the further development of INSTEX with interested European countries to make this instrument in support of trade exchanges with Iran operational by following the steps set out above.

Speaking at the EU Foreign Ministers' meeting in Bucharest, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Today we have taken a significant step forward in delivering our commitment under the Iran nuclear deal to preserve sanctions relief for the people of Iran. We – the E3 – have registered a new Special Purpose Vehicle which, when operational, will allow legitimate trade between Europe and Iran.

This is a clear, practical demonstration that we remain firmly committed to the historic 2015 nuclear deal struck with Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, for as long as Iran keeps implementing it fully.

The SPV will facilitate legitimate trade under European and international law. Its immediate focus will be on enabling trade in goods where the immediate need of the Iranian people is greatest, i.e. foodstuffs, pharmaceuticals and consumer goods. Registration is a big step, but there is still more work to be done. The E3 are working closely to address all the technical and legal aspects required to make this vehicle operational. That includes work with Iran to establish necessary counterpart structures. The Iran nuclear deal remains central to international efforts to halt nuclear proliferation and is crucial for the security of the region. But we are clear, this commitment does not in any way preclude us from addressing Iran's hostile and destabilising activities.

[PDF of E3 statement](#) (PDF, 179KB, 1 page)

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## Press release: Investment Minister visits Düsseldorf to promote UK-Germany trade

Investment Minister Graham Stuart will travel to Düsseldorf (Thursday 31st January – Friday 1st February) to meet with key German businesses to discuss future opportunities for UK-Germany trade and investment relations.

The Minister, along with Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner (HMTC) for Europe Andrew Mitchell, will meet senior members of the North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) government, including Minister of Economy Professor Dr Andreas Pinkwart, the Lord Mayor of Düsseldorf as well as businesses including Bayer.

This morning, HMTC for Europe Andrew Mitchell opened the new Consulate-General office alongside representatives from the NRW federal state government. The British Consulate-General in Düsseldorf represents the UK Government in NRW, Rhineland-Palatinate, Hessen and Saarland.

The two Ministers will also announce a Technology Cooperation Dialogue between the UK and the Government of NRW, that will bring together stakeholders from industry, science and innovation, together with policy makers to tackle areas like clean growth, the future of energy and the potential of digital technology.

As the UK's second largest trading partner, total trade between the UK and Germany was worth £132.2bn in the year to end Q3 2018. Latest figures also show that investment from Germany into the UK has also increased, totally £63.3bn in 2017 – a 4.2% rise from 2016.

The Minister will also speak about the UK Government's plans for future engagement with the region to wide range of German companies that invest in the UK or are active in the market, British companies with a presence in NRW, as well as business organisations including the Regional Chambers of Trade and Industry.

Minister for Investment Graham Stuart said:

Germany is a hugely important and longstanding economic partner for the UK, and I hope my visit to North Rhine-Westphalia will further build on our relationships with our key German investors in the UK.

Opening the new Consulate-General office demonstrates the UK's continuing commitment to the region and Germany as a whole. The Consul-General and the wider will work with UK and German businesses and with the NRW Government to take forward our

economic, political and cultural relationship.

Bayer AG Board Member & Head of Innovation, Kemal Malik said:

The relationship between the UK and NRW is historic with 71 years of history linking the towns of Dusseldorf and Reading, which is home to our UK Headquarters in the heart of the Thames Valley.

As a Life Sciences company, we are proud to Chair the Thames Valley Life Sciences Partnership which, under the Life Sciences Sector Deal, seeks to strengthen the UK's position as a world leader in research. This will ensure we are at the forefront of new industries in the areas of genomics and AI-driven diagnostics in the future – all of which could dramatically change our healthcare systems and patient outcomes for the better. It is this commitment which demonstrates that the UK remains a fertile investment ground for research and development in the future.

Ties between the UK and NRW are not just economic and political but also cultural. There are hundreds of school exchanges and town-twinning partnerships, including a 71-year-old relationship between the City of Düsseldorf and Reading in the UK.

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## **Speech: Universities Minister sets vision for higher education**

Thank you for inviting me to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) to give my first speech as Universities Minister. As one of the oldest and most prestigious centres of dramatic arts training in the UK, I'm delighted to see how RADA is not just producing exceptional talent for our world-leading dramatic arts sector, but extending its reach far beyond the Academy's walls through community partnerships and industry collaborations. And I know the same approach is true of many higher education institutions across the country. I may have only been Universities Minister for several weeks, but even in this short space of time I've seen plenty of instances of universities and colleges up and down the country acting as vital pillars of their communities: educating the next generation of students; feeding our world-leading industries with vital knowledge and skills; continually pushing the boundaries of what is possible with ground-breaking research; and working closely with local businesses to create jobs and help solve some of the greatest societal challenges of our time.

I feel very privileged to be Universities Minister. My predecessors have said

they felt it was the best job in government. And I have to agree. Having begun my career as a historian and university lecturer, I understand the power of higher education and want to use this occasion today to outline to you my early priorities and vision for the sector, and how we can work together to meet the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

I understand I am speaking to you at an unprecedented time of change, what with Brexit coming ever closer and the uncertainties this causes in terms of future recruitment, staffing, student numbers and funding. I also understand the uncertainty caused by the ongoing Review of post-18 education, which is looking at how we can ensure post-18 study routes in England are joined up and supported by a system of funding that works for students and taxpayers alike.

I want to reassure you today that I hear your concerns and I am keen to work with you during this difficult period. I have already started having conversations with many of you about these important issues and I am eager that these conversations continue over the weeks and months ahead. I know there is much to discuss. I am also certain there will be an appropriate occasion for me to address these issues in detail in the future. But, for the purposes of my speech today, I want to look at the broader themes unpinning higher education and their impact on the continued health of the sector. Let me start by taking a step back. Over the past few months, hundreds of thousands of prospective students have made some of the biggest decisions of their lives when preparing their UCAS applications to university. Twenty years ago, I was in the very same situation.

Clearly, there have been many significant changes to higher education since my days as an undergraduate: the student finance system has evolved, student number controls dropped and a range of new regulatory instruments advanced and developed. The coming into effect of the Higher Education and Research Act in 2017 means plenty of changes are still afoot. As the first major regulatory reform of the English higher education sector in 25 years, the HERA created the Office for Students (OfS), a new body to regulate and fund higher education providers. It also created UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), which brings together the seven UK research councils, Innovate UK and Research England to take a strategic approach to research and development activities across the country. With these changes has come increased accountability. And it is now more important than ever that our higher education system delivers for students.

This means providing value for money – not just for students and graduates, but also for government and taxpayers who contribute substantially to the way the sector is funded. It also means providing a first-rate student experience to ensure that all students, of all backgrounds and circumstances, receive a top-quality education and a fulfilling university experience that will enrich their lives and future careers.

On that point, I would like to thank my predecessor for his invaluable work on enhancing student mental health support and helping to drive a significant step change in the way universities are looking out for student wellbeing.

This includes the three pillars of the government's new deal on student mental health. The first is the University Mental Health Charter led by the Charity Student Minds; the second is tackling the transition issues students face, especially when moving from school or college into university; and the third is looking at improving information sharing so that institutions can get better at involving families and friends in supporting students in difficulty.

As a constituency MP, I have seen first-hand the devastation that is caused when a student slips through the net. So, I intend to continue my predecessor's good work in this area. In March, I will be hosting a roundtable on University Mental Health Day, and I will correspond with the Chair of the information sharing task group to ensure meaningful improvements are being made. I am also interested in listening further to the wider issues around transition to university, including students' experiences of the private rental market, and receiving the healthcare and support they need both in and out of term-time.

My vision for our universities and colleges is a positive one. I'm not going to be a Minister who comes in and beats up or needlessly berates the sector. Instead, I want to restate my commitment to you today to work in partnership with you to ensure our higher education sector remains one that works for everyone and of which we can be proud in generations to come.

Today in England, 18-year-olds are entering higher education at a record rate, including 18-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds. I celebrate the fact that more people are going to university. It may not be the right option for everyone, but anyone who can benefit from it should be supported to go. Just last week I responded to a tweet by a mixed-race girl questioning whether going to Oxbridge will be right for her. Of course, I tweeted straight back saying "yes, go and make the most of a wonderful opportunity"!

Despite the evident progress that has been made, her hesitation shows there is still much more to be done to improve access to higher education. It is clearly not acceptable that, in this day and age, where you come from, or who you are, can still determine your life chances and likelihood of going to university. It is not acceptable that only 13% of white boys in receipt of Free School Meals go on to higher education. It is not acceptable that only 18% of pupils in the North East of England on Free School Meals go on to university. And it is not acceptable that only 28% of Black Caribbean boys in receipt of Free School Meals progress on to higher education, compared to 51% of Black African boys and 64% Chinese boys. There is clearly still much work to be done. I want to see a world where the percentage of students with disabilities is more reflective of the percentage in wider society. I also want to see more people going to university from care backgrounds, from military households, and from other currently under-represented groups. These are just some of the "burning injustices" that the Prime Minister pledged to tackle when she assumed office. And now that I am Universities Minister, I am determined to help her break down these barriers relentlessly.

Given the extent of recent regulatory changes, I understand the prospect of increased government intervention may raise alarm bells in the sector. But let me reassure you today that, as a former academic myself, I fully

appreciate the concept of institutional autonomy. And I believe so much of what is good about our universities today has come about because of the freedom they have been able to exercise.

But we must be honest with ourselves and face facts: this government invests substantially in higher education and has a responsibility to see that it works for everyone. We cannot just sit back on our hands and wait for more progress – especially when there is a clear and urgent need to equip people with the skills this country needs for the future.

With the UK's departure from the European Union coming ever closer, all eyes are turning to creating a new vision for life in a post-Brexit Britain – a vision not just for jobs and our economy, but a vision for our future education, knowledge and skills. I want to reassure everyone in the sector today that I am committed to placing higher education right at the heart of this vision.

Determining this vision comes down to the question of what we want our post-18 education system to look like – not just by next year, but by the end of the next decade, by 2030. To make real progress, it is imperative we have a long-term plan.

Thanks to advancements in data collection and insights, we already have a very good picture of how far the sector has come. We have already published 10 years' worth of Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data and, by 2030, we'll have published 10 years more. Through data such as this, we are becoming ever richer, and an advanced analysis of this data is going to be crucial as we shape the sector going forward.

As Universities Minister, I recognise the power of LEO data to generate positive headlines and provide an important source of information for students who want to see how much they could earn after graduation. To improve students' access to this information, as well as other open HE data, we are already running the Higher Education Open Data Competition, which supports the development of cutting-edge and innovative digital tools to help present this data to prospective students in an easily accessible and comprehensible way.

I also realise the LEO data could be developed further. So I am keen to engage with the sector to explore how to make the most of this data going forwards. For one, I want to look at ways of making this data more readily available to the academic research community to allow for more in-depth analysis. I also intend to set up a Data Advisory Committee to help me ensure, as Minister, that we are making the most of the opportunities thrown up by these rich new datasets and that they are being used in the best way possible – to ensure they are reaching those who could benefit from them; that they are being used in context; and that their insights and implications are being fully understood. Having more data in higher education ultimately provides us with new and exciting opportunities. The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), which is leading the way in providing students with greater transparency and choice, is another example of positive change. We are now firmly in the throes of institutional TEF Year 4, as well

as the first pilots of the subject-level TEF.

Although I appreciate the TEF has raised questions, no university should shy away from it. The independent review of the TEF, which launched earlier this month and is chaired by Dame Shirley Pearce, provides an important opportunity to take stock of the TEF from a constructively critical perspective. As part of the review, I am pleased to note that Dame Shirley has commissioned the Office for National Statistics to carry out an analysis of the statistical information used in TEF assessments and its suitability for generating TEF ratings. This review gives us the best chance to look at the TEF from all angles, and I hope that you will take the opportunity to make your views known to Dame Shirley over the consultation period ahead.

As much as I see the value of more data, I am also aware of concerns it has given rise to about the value for money of certain courses, disciplines and institutions. On this, I believe we need to take a step back and ask what exactly value for money means in the context of higher education. Successful outcomes for students and graduates are about much more than salary: if we are to define value purely in economic terms, based on salary levels or tax contributions, then we risk overlooking the vital contribution of degrees of social value, such as Nursing or Social Care, not to mention overlooking the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences – the very disciplines that make our lives worth living.

How you define value for money depends heavily on how you envisage the kind of world you want to live in. For my part, a society without people to care for each other; to support each other; to teach the next generation; or to step in selflessly in times of crisis is a very sad society indeed. Equally, although I am officially Minister for Science, I take great pride in wanting to be Minister for the Arts and Humanities as well – disciplines which enrich our culture and society, and have an immeasurable impact on our health and wellbeing.

As we move forwards into the future, the last thing I want to see is value judgements emerging which falsely divide the Sciences and Engineering from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. To do so would be a travesty. Our future success depends on all these disciplines being completely intertwined.

The government has already acknowledged this fact in our approach to the Industrial Strategy. As a joint Minister in BEIS, I am taking forwards work to alleviate the grand challenges, whose success depends not just on advancements in science, but on a recognition of the human condition. To achieve our ambitions, we don't just need scientists and engineers, but a whole host of people with the human and cultural skills to make the science work.

Institutions like RADA are performing a key role in nurturing the creative talent this country needs. Just last week I met students enrolled on creative arts courses at Ravensbourne University and was struck by the power of their discipline to enhance other sectors and industries as well as fuel its own.

The UK is a global leader in the creative industries. The UK video games industry, which combines the best of advancements in science and the Arts, is

the largest in Europe, contributing over £1.5 billion to the UK economy. It is no coincidence that over 60 universities in the UK are offering courses to feed this booming industry. Innovation doesn't distinguish between creative skills and scientific knowledge; indeed it thrives on it. So, we should be doing all we can to ensure our higher education sector continues to provide the pipeline of creative talent our research and development needs.

This takes me on to my next point, which has to do with the breadth and depth of course provision. As knowledge progresses, so too does innovation. To be fit purpose in the future, it is vital the sector continues to develop not just the subjects people study, but the way in which they study them.

Just this week, Parliament approved regulations to enable more universities and colleges to offer accelerated degrees. These are identical to conventional degrees in every way but one: they can be completed one year sooner than the standard equivalent. Accelerated degrees allow students to save significantly on tuition and living costs, as well as save on time, as students can start or return to work a year earlier than their counterparts on standard three-year courses.

I realise accelerated degrees are not for everyone. But they certainly work for the students I met recently who are enrolled on two-year courses at both Middlesex University and St Mary's University Twickenham. And they are just one way that the sector can expand its offerings for those who are looking for something different from their higher education experience.

Three-year, classroom-based degrees are not necessarily the norm, and they certainly won't be the norm in the future, as we strive to enhance graduate employability and tailor degrees to the needs of the future workforce. The rise in popularity of Degree Apprenticeships is certainly showing us that we can break the traditional mould around higher education, by giving people a chance to earn while receiving first-class degree-level education. Having held a roundtable with students on Degree Apprenticeships at Manchester Metropolitan University last month, I have seen for myself how Degree Apprenticeships can provide high-quality routes into sustainable careers.

I know as well as you do that the work of our universities is not just about purely academic pursuits detached from the real world, and that being academic can also mean being technical and vocational. There is a strong track record of collaboration and joint working between universities and businesses in this country, and plenty institutions are now offering industry placements or sandwich years. Aston University, for one, has strong links to employers, and more than 70% of its students undertake a year in industry as part of their degrees.

Our modern universities are particularly well-placed to be supporting businesses in their local areas – producing 63% of all graduate start-ups and supporting almost 23,000 SMEs. These institutions are key to our economy and key to unlocking people's potential, with their wide range of high-quality Level 4 and 5 qualifications. Technical qualifications like these are crucial to meeting the skills requirements of industry, as well as giving students the flexibility and portability of qualifications they need. I am keen that

universities are supported to develop their technical education offerings, and I have been delighted at the way in which universities have engaged so extensively in the current competition to develop a network of new Institutes of Technology (IoTs), which are set to play a key role in delivering the higher technical training our country needs. For too long, the university experience has been seen as something for the young. But I know not all undergraduates are under 20 and I have met many students over recent weeks returning to university later in their lives. As we head towards the future, we have an added imperative to ensure that higher education works for everyone and that mature students cannot just re-skill, but re-re-skill themselves at whatever point in their lives they choose to do so. We must never close the door on that dream.

In my vision for the sector, people should be free to embark on higher education at any time that is right for them. We should build bridges to make this happen. By 2030, I want us to have built a post-18 education system that gives people the flexibility they need – so that no-one who has quit higher education, for whatever reason or circumstance, has to feel they have dropped out with no routes back in later in their lives.

Building these bridges requires a ‘student-centred’ approach. This is why we should all be thinking about how to redouble our efforts to enhance participation in higher education to ensure all students have the best chance at staying the course.

Higher education providers plan to spend over £860m this year on access and participation activities across the sector. This is a significant amount of money that could make a real difference to people’s lives. I want to ensure this money is being used in the right way, in the areas that need it most – not just to raise aspirations to get people into higher education, but to ensure university works for them while they are there. To continue the positive efforts my predecessor started in this area, I am keen to host a roundtable with leaders across the access and participation space to understand how we can work together to make this happen. The Office for Students (OfS) is also rightly taking the lead in this area, as well as in some of the big issues facing the sector at the moment, including grade inflation and the large rise in unconditional offer making. The high standing of UK higher education is in our gift. To preserve it, we must be guided by what is right for students. The OfS is guided by exactly that, and I encourage all of us to work with it as it makes sure the next generation of students can access higher education, participate and succeed.

As Minister for Science and Research as well as Universities, I recognise that universities are not ‘big schools’. With research and innovation functions, I understand that higher education institutions are complex ecosystems, which rely on the success of post-graduates as well as undergraduates. For that reason, I want to ensure that Masters and PhD students are not lost from the access and participation debate, and I urge you all to look at how we support our thriving post-graduate communities to enhance our future prosperity.

As part of the Industrial Strategy, the government has committed to achieving

2.4% investment in R&D by 2027. But this money is not going to make a difference without a strong talent base. That is why we need to be thinking now about how we can get more people staying on for PhDs in the future.

I understand the present climate may be one of unpredictability. But let us not forget, today, that we share a common goal and a common mission to create and maintain the best, most innovative and most flexible higher education sector in the world. Let us be guided in creating this vision by what is best for the common good – and ultimately what is best for individual students and our country.

So, I ask you now: by 2030, when we think about the higher education sector we want to see, will it still be appropriate to talk about academic education versus technical education; to talk about Science versus the Arts; or indeed to talk about FE versus HE? Will we still be thinking about undergraduates over postgraduates; about school-leavers over mature learners; and about those on traditional three-year degrees over other modes of study?

By 2030, I hope not. And I sincerely hope, that when it comes to creating the higher education sector of tomorrow, we will no longer be talking about parity of esteem but, instead, be driven in our mission by a unity of purpose.