

[News story: Statement from the Justice Secretary on John Worboys](#)

John Worboys was convicted of horrific crimes. My thoughts and unreserved sympathy are with his victims for whom news of the Parole Board's decision to order Worboys' release must have reawakened the most appalling memories.

It is a priority for this government that victims of rape and sexual assault have full confidence in the criminal justice system. While sentence lengths for these horrific crimes have increased by over 30% since 2010 and more victims are coming forward, there is still more to do.

While it is right that the Parole Board should remain an independent body, I believe that there is a strong case to review how to allow greater openness about the decision-making process.

We also need to make sure arrangements across the criminal justice system ensure victims are both heard and, if they wish, kept informed about their case.

I have talked to the Victims' Commissioner, Baroness Newlove, and the Chair of the Parole Board, Nick Hardwick, about what changes we could make to help victims of crime and provide greater transparency about the Board's work. I want to make sure we consult victims groups and others, and to start this work now so that decisions can be taken before Easter.

[Press release: Professor Nick Hardwick welcomes government support for transparency](#)

Professor Nick Hardwick, Chair of the Parole Board said:

"I welcome the support from the Lord Chancellor for my call for greater transparency of the parole system.

"It is sad that it has taken the Warboys case to get us to this point. I hope it will mean that in future we will be able to be more open with victims and the public about our decision making and that provides reassurance that the safety of the public is always uppermost in our minds."

News story: Government announces plans to extend pub opening hours for Royal Wedding

The government has launched a [public consultation](#) on plans to extend licensing hours on the nights of Friday 18 and Saturday 19 May until 1am the following morning, to give everyone the chance to celebrate the occasion.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

The Royal Wedding will be a time of national celebration, and we want everyone to be able to make the most of such an historic occasion.

I hope that this relaxation of the licensing hours will allow people to extend their festivities and come together to mark what will be a very special moment for the country.

Licensing hours orders have previously been made for occasions of national significance including the Queen's 90th birthday, the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in 2011, and the World Cup in 2014.

Chief Executive of the British Beer and Pub Association, Brigid Simmonds, said:

This is great news for pubs and pub-goers and shows the government has listened to our calls to put pubs at the heart of the Royal Wedding celebrations.

Visitors see the Great British pub as a cultural icon, almost as much as the Royal Family. Extended hours would give a £10million boost to the trade and make the most of the expected increase in tourism.

The government proposes to make a licensing hours order under Section 172 of the Licensing Act, which would extend opening hours for the sale of alcohol to benefit those premises in England and Wales which are not normally licensed until 1am.

The 4-week public consultation will give the public the opportunity to submit their views on the proposals. The government will also seek the views of specific stakeholders, including the police, licensing authorities and alcohol awareness groups.

The Royal Wedding will coincide with the FA Cup Final. There have been no reports of increased disorder as a result of the previous extensions to licensing hours including the extension for the weekend of Her Majesty's 90th birthday, which coincided with 2 Euro 2016 matches involving England and Wales, and the extension of licensing hours during the World Cup 2014.

[News story: Retailers and academics join government effort to tackle acid attacks](#)

This is part of a series of voluntary commitments proposed by the government.

Today the government has published the details of the voluntary commitments, as well as a list of those retailers who have already signed.

Waitrose, B&Q, Morrisons, Wickes, Co-op, Screwfix and Tesco are among the major brands to sign the voluntary commitments on the responsible sale of corrosive substances. The British Independent Retailers Association will this month be encouraging all its members to sign up.

The publication comes as the University of Leicester launches a major research project, commissioned by the Home Office, into the motivations of offenders who carry and use acid in violent attacks.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins, said:

Acid attacks have a devastating impact on their victims, leaving both emotional and physical scars. I'm pleased that so many of the UK's major retailers are joining our fight to combat this scourge and signalling they are committed to selling acids responsibly.

This is the next step of our [acid attacks action plan](#) that has already seen us consult on new laws to restrict young people's access to acids.

It is also vital we gain an insight into the motivations and behaviours of those who carry out these unspeakable attacks, which is why we have commissioned a major piece of research that will help us understand more about this crime.

The [voluntary commitments](#) will see the retailers:

- agree not to sell products to those under 18 that contain potentially

harmful levels of acid or corrosive substances – including applying Challenge 21/25 policies when asking for age identification, staff supported by till alerts, supervision and inclusion of these products in age restricted sales training.

- agree that equivalent age restriction measures are applied to products sold online.
- Agree to comply with the Poisons Act and promote awareness to staff and what this means for the sale of products which contain levels of acid and other corrosive substances which are either regulated or reportable under the Act.

The voluntary agreement has been introduced now to ensure immediate action is taken by retailers on a voluntary basis, in advance of new legislation including the ban on sales to those under 18 being brought before Parliament and put into effect. We welcome the support and action being taken by retailers now to restrict access.

National Police Chiefs' Council lead for Corrosive Attacks, Assistant Chief Constable Rachel Kearton said:

The use of acid to commit acts of violence is particularly abhorrent – perpetrators aim to leave their victims with horrific and life-changing injuries.

Tackling the scourge of acid attacks requires a coordinated approach across a number of different organisations and sectors. I commend all those major retailers and independent stores which are now taking steps to help prevent acid attacks from taking place.

The majority of us find it hard to believe that anyone would choose to throw acid over another person. This new research project will enable us to improve our understanding of why offenders are motivated to use acid as a weapon and assist us in stopping attacks in the future.

The academic research being undertaken at the University of Leicester will see criminologists examine the motivations and decision-making processes behind carrying and using acid as a weapon, the characteristics of offenders and their relationships with their victims, as well as how the substances are purchased and transported.

Professor Teela Sanders from the University of Leicester's Department of Criminology said:

This project taps into the expert skills of researchers at the

University of Leicester with case file analysis and interviews with serious violent offenders in prisons. This most needed research on this phenomenon will produce important recommendations for government to take forward.

The steps announced today form part of the Acid Attack Action Plan announced by the Home Secretary in July 2017. The Home Office also recently concluded its consultation on proposals to ban the sale of products containing the most harmful corrosive substances to under 18s, make it an offence to possess a corrosive substance in a public place without good reason and introduce minimum custodial sentences for those repeatedly caught carrying acid without good reason.

National President of British Independent Retailers Association (BIRA), Vin Vara said:

BIRA represents thousands of hardware stores across Britain.

As specialist retailers we want to make sure that our customers get the expert support and advice they need to ensure the responsible sale of any of our products.

We take our duty to supply and sell these substances very seriously and we are happy to back the government's commitment to address and limit the sale of them.

[News story: Boost for school standards with primary literacy drive](#)

A Centre of Excellence for Literacy Teaching is one of a range of measures launched today by Education Secretary Justine Greening to help more children from disadvantaged backgrounds master the basics of reading in primary school.

Today's series of announcements represents the next steps towards delivering on the Government's ambitious social mobility action plan [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#), published on 14 December.

The plan identifies how the Department for Education will deliver equality of opportunity for every young person, regardless of where they live, through five key ambitions. Today's measures will deliver progress in the first two core ambitions, Ambition 1 to close the word gap in the early years and Ambition 2, closing the attainment gap in school outcomes between

disadvantaged young people and their peers.

Education Secretary Justine Greening said:

School standards are rising with 1.9 million more children being taught in good or outstanding schools than in 2010.

Our ambition is that no community will be left behind on education. Today's literacy investment will help make sure that not just most, but every child arrives at school with the vocabulary levels they need to learn. And our investment will mean that once they are at school, every child will get the best literacy teaching. We've already seen what a difference our approach on phonics has made for children in England.

It is thanks to the hard work of teachers, and the government's drive to raise school standards to make Britain a country fit for the future, that there are already 1.9 million more children in schools rated good or outstanding than in 2010. Last month a new study found English children had risen up the international literacy league tables, and were now significantly better readers than their American, Canadian and Australian counterparts.

However, too many children arrive at school struggling with language and literacy, making it harder for them to master the fundamentals of reading that many children take for granted. Research has shown that five-year-olds who struggle with language are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11 than those with good language skills.

The social mobility action plan focuses £800 million of government resources to close these gaps and level up opportunity for every child, ensuring no community is left behind. This will ensure that Britain is a country that truly works for everyone, ready to make the most of the opportunities provided by Brexit and could provide a £20 billion boost to the economy.

Programmes announced today (Saturday 6 January) include:

- A new Centre of Excellence for Literacy Teaching that will set up a national network of 35 English Hubs across the country – backed by £26 million investment – to work with schools in challenging circumstances and help raise standards. The centre will also promote and share effective practice with a particular focus on language and literacy teaching in reception. This mirrors the already successful approach with Maths Hubs – high performing schools which share their knowledge with other schools locally;
- From April 2018, new phonics and reading partnerships will be set up, to drive improvements in teaching and encouraging more pupils to enjoy reading a wide range of literature. Another 20 phonics and reading roadshows will also be run across the country and include a specific

focus on reception teaching. This new investment worth £435,000 will build on the successes of the phonics programmes, which have already helped put 154,000 more six-year-olds on track to become fluent readers since 2012;

- £5.7 million through our Strategic School Improvement Fund for initiatives that boost literacy and numeracy skills in early years and primary education in 469 schools around the country, benefitting around 40,000 children; and
- Inviting organisations to bid for the contract to launch a £5 million fund to trial approaches across the North of England that will help parents and carers to support early language development at home. Research shows that this early home learning environment plays a vital role in developing a child's vocabulary, and provides additional benefits to those gained from attending formal early education.

The Government is also announcing today a new £7.7 million curriculum fund – delivering on a manifesto commitment – to encourage the development of high quality teaching resources by organisations, including by leading cultural and scientific institutions. These resources will help teachers deliver the government's new curriculum while reducing workload and giving them more time to focus on what they do best – teaching.

The new Centre of Excellence for Literacy Teaching will be tasked with establishing the network of hubs, similar to the successful Maths Hubs established in 2014 that are helping to improve maths teaching across the country, including in schools in challenging circumstances. A procurement exercise to set it up will be launched later this year.

The establishment of a new national network of school-led English Hubs will promote and share excellence around the country – drawing on and developing the evidence base – with a particular focus on reception year.

Good phonics teaching, as highlighted by England's highest ever results in the [2016 PIRLS study](#), provides an excellent foundation for reading. The Phonics Screening Check, put in place in 2012, encourages teachers to use this method and since its introduction has helped put 154,000 more six-year-olds on track to become fluent readers since 2012.

To help teachers use this method the government has funded nearly 50 roadshows – designed to promote the effectiveness of phonics and showcase best practice – and today's investment of £100,000 will fund another 20.

Alongside this, a £335,000 fund will be used to create 20 enhanced Phonics and Reading partnerships in 2018-19. These partnerships will still address phonics, but also how schools can encourage pupils to enjoy reading and improve effectiveness in teaching in reception.

Since 2010 the government has introduced a range of reforms to improve

standards in schools including a brand new primary curriculum, more rigorous Key Stage 2 tests and continuing investment in core school funding which is rising from almost £41 billion in 2017-18 to £43.5 billion in 2019-20.

As a result, latest figures show the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers in a combined measure of English, reading and maths has fallen in each of the last six years and by more than 10% at Key Stage 2 since 2011.