

Cash boost to transform colleges across England

Sixty-two further education colleges are to benefit from a share of more than £400 million to upgrade buildings and transform campuses. The cash boost will make sure even more people are supported to get the skills they need to get a good job, levelling up opportunity across the country.

The colleges announced today will be the latest to benefit from the government's £1.5 billion Further Education Capital Transformation Fund. This significant investment is supporting the transformation of post-16 education and training by ensuring colleges are great places to learn and students have access to modern, fit-for-purpose facilities.

The funding will support colleges to undertake building or refurbishment projects that will dramatically improve learning environments, including the creation of dedicated teaching facilities for subjects, such as automotive, ICT, science and engineering. This will support more people to get the training they need to progress into rewarding jobs and plug skills gaps in local communities. Some colleges will also construct new teaching spaces to replace buildings in poor condition elsewhere in town centres or on campuses.

Minister for Skills Alex Burghart said:

Our priority is making sure that every student receives the high-quality training needed to secure a well-paid job, so that businesses in growth sectors such as construction, engineering and digital have a strong talent pipeline as we continue to level up opportunities across the country.

That is why we are investing to ensure colleges can create modern, fit-for-purpose spaces that meet the needs of students and the communities they serve – and most importantly continue to be fantastic places to learn.

The Further Education Capital Transformation fund was first launched in September 2020 by the Prime Minister.

The first phase of the fund saw an initial £200 million allocated to all colleges so they could carry out urgent remedial work to refurbish their buildings.

Following this, in April 2021, the government announced plans to work in partnership with sixteen colleges with some of the poorest condition sites in the country to upgrade their sites and ensure they are excellent places to learn. Construction is under way at one of these projects – Stafford College – and others will soon be ready to begin works.

Today's announcement is the outcome of a bidding round that was open to all colleges – for additional funding to help upgrade their campuses.

This significant investment forms part of the government's landmark reforms to further and technical education – as set out in the Skills for Jobs White Paper.

The fund builds on the action already under way to transform post-16 education and training. This includes rolling out new high quality T Level qualifications, establishing a network of Institutes of Technology, and making sure everyone, no matter where they live or their background, can gain the skills they need to progress in work at any stage of their lives.

[Fast-tracked access to benefits extended to more people nearing end of life](#)

- From today (Monday 4 April 2022) fast-tracked access to Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance will be extended to more people in the final year of their life.
- The changes will extend eligibility to this end of life support from six to 12 months.

The changes mean people who are thought to be in their final year of their life will be able to receive vital support through 'Special Rules', six months earlier than they were able to previously.

This applies to people on Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Those who are eligible will not be subject to a face-to-face assessment, and in the majority of cases they will receive the highest rate of benefits.

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Chloe Smith MP said:

Helping more people in the final year of their life get faster access to vital financial support is the right thing to do.

I hope by extending this support it will alleviate the financial concerns of those nearing the end of their life and their families in the most challenging of times.

National Clinical Director for End of Life Care at NHS England, Professor Bee Wee said:

I am really pleased to see this change which will enable earlier and faster access to financial support for people who are likely to be in their last year of life.

This additional support is of such vital importance to many people, and those important to them, during this difficult time.

Marie Curie chief executive, Matthew Reed said:

We are delighted to see this important change come into force today for Universal Credit and ESA claimants, following years of campaigning.

This will help ensure more dying people can concentrate on making the most of the limited time they have left, rather than worrying about their finances.

Marie Curie look forward to continuing to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to communicate this important change and ensure everyone now eligible gets the support they need quickly and efficiently.

CEO of the Motor Neurone Disease Association, Sally Light said:

I am pleased that as of today long fought-for changes to the Special Rules for Terminal Illness will come into effect for Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit.

We now hope that more people living with complex and unpredictable terminal illnesses like motor neurone disease will be able to access the support they need via those benefits swiftly and sensitively.

A person who makes a new claim for Universal Credit under the Special Rules for End of Life (SREL) could receive an additional £354.28 per month for having limited capability for work and work-related activity of from day one of their claim.

If eligible for New Style ESA, a person making a new claim could receive the highest rate of benefit of £117.60 per week from day one of their claim to support them in the last months of their life.

Clinicians still have discretion under the updated rules and will be supported by a realistic and straightforward definition, which aligns with current NHS practice.

The changes to SREL will be extended to Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Additional information

- Special Rules for End of Life were previously referred to as Special Rules for Terminal Illness (SRTI).

Media enquiries for this press release – 0115 965 8781

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[Strong signs of recovery across education, but challenges remain](#)

The reports find that much good progress has been made across the education sector to help children and learners recover the knowledge and skills they missed out on during the pandemic. However, amid strong signs of recovery, it's also clear that many education providers continue to face challenges, some of which could have longer-term consequences.

The [4 reports, which follow on from those published in December](#), draw on evidence from around 280 inspections and multiple focus groups with inspectors to understand how early years, schools, further education and skills, and prison education providers are responding to ongoing issues, and the approaches they are taking to help children and learners catch up.

Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, said:

We have seen lots of really good work across early years, schools and further education this term. Most providers are using effective catch-up strategies to spot gaps in children and learners' knowledge and skills and help get them back to where they need to be. In many cases, those gaps have closed altogether. And we've also seen promising improvements in children's well-being and behaviour.

But elsewhere concerns remain, and it's clear that the pandemic has created some lingering challenges. I'm particularly worried about younger children's development, which, if left unaddressed, could potentially cause problems for primary schools down the line.

Early years

Today's report finds that the pandemic has continued to affect young children's communication and language development, with many providers noticing delays in speech and language. Others said babies have struggled to respond to basic facial expressions, which may be due to reduced social interaction during the pandemic.

The negative impact on children's personal, social and emotional development has also continued, with many lacking confidence in group activities.

Children's social and friendship-building skills have been affected. Some providers reported that toddlers and pre-schoolers needed more support with sharing and turn-taking. To address this, staff were providing as many opportunities as possible for children to mix with others and build confidence in social situations.

There continues to be an impact on children's physical development, including delays in babies learning to crawl and walk. Some providers reported that children had regressed in their independence and self-care skills. As a result, several have increased the amount of time children spend on physical activities, to develop gross motor skills.

An increasing number of providers were concerned that, compared with before the pandemic, fewer children have learned to use the toilet independently. This means that more children may not be ready for school by age 4. Providers were also concerned about obesity and dental health, so have focused on providing well-balanced meals and increased time for physical activity.

Many providers reported difficulties retaining high-quality staff since the start of the pandemic. This has left some short of skilled practitioners, which has affected the quality of teaching and catch-up strategies.

Some providers are concerned about their long-term sustainability given fluctuations in numbers of children on roll.

Schools

Today's report finds that the pandemic continued to hinder pupils' learning and personal development into this year. Leaders still described gaps in pupils' knowledge, particularly in mathematics, phonics and writing stamina. However, compared with last term, more leaders said these gaps were closing.

Inspectors saw schools were using effective strategies to check what pupils have learned and to adapt the curriculum to fill gaps in knowledge and skills. Some schools were using regular assessment to identify what pupils

have remembered and providing time to revisit concepts that had not been learned well remotely.

The pandemic's impact on some pupils' mental health and well-being remained a concern. Leaders talked about pupils having lower levels of resilience and confidence, and increased levels of anxiety. Many schools were providing in-house support for these pupils because external agencies often had long wait times. This has been particularly challenging for special schools, who rely on a lot of support from other agencies.

Some schools were using the National Tutoring Programme to help pupils who need additional support, but most told Ofsted they preferred to train their own staff as tutors rather than using tuition partners, mainly due to a lack of available tutors. However, this placed additional pressures on school staff.

Staff absence related to COVID-19 was a challenge for schools in the spring term, which was exacerbated by difficulties recruiting supply teachers. This resulted in increased staff workloads, as schools used their own staff to cover lessons.

Further education and skills (FES)

Providers have continued to respond to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic with creativity and resilience. New elements have been added to programmes to reflect the pandemic's impact on the employment landscape, and there has been increased collaboration across the sector to address gaps in learning.

Sixth form colleges noted that many learners had lower levels of knowledge and skills, and were adapting their curriculum to help them make progress.

Work experience placements remained difficult to secure, particularly in health and social care, but providers were working hard to offer alternatives.

The disruption to GCSEs experienced by the newest intake of learners had adversely affected behaviours and attitudes. Providers reported that social skills and confidence had dwindled, and more disruptive behaviour was observed.

The recruitment and retention of staff was challenging for many providers. In some cases, this had impacted on the quality of education and increased staff workloads.

Mental health concerns remained high. New learners who had enrolled from school were experiencing higher levels of exam anxiety. Providers were offering additional support to help learners increase their stamina and prepare for formal examinations.

Many apprentices were not at the required level to take their end-point assessments, and a significant number remained on programmes beyond their planned end date.

Prison education

The number of prisoners participating in education, skills and work was increasing, albeit slowly. But prisoners' participation was still a lot lower than pre-pandemic levels. In some cases, no classroom activity had taken place since March 2020.

Many prison leaders had taken a cautious approach to reintroducing face-to-face classes. This has had a particularly negative impact on prisoners who find it difficult to learn independently, for example those with low levels of literacy and numeracy, who speak English as an additional language, or who have additional learning needs. In some cases, prison leaders were providing one-to-one support for these groups.

Pandemic-related restrictions have reduced the number of prisoners who can take part in face-to-face education. Leaders have therefore had to prioritise which prisoners they offer these opportunities to. Some leaders have prioritised those who have already engaged well with remote education, rather than prisoners with the greatest need for support.

The few education, skills and work activities that were taking place were generally of a good quality. However, the support and resources available did not meet the needs of all learners.

As they returned to the classroom, staff in most prisons were assessing prisoners to identify any gaps in learning due to COVID-19. However, this information was not always used to plan the curriculum in a way that would meet their needs and help them to catch up on missed learning.

Support for prisoners identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) remains insufficient.

An increased number of COVID-19 outbreaks has led to staff absences at all levels, including managers, who have had to turn their hand to operational issues. This has meant that leadership activities, such as planning for an effective curriculum and assuring the quality of education, have been neglected.

[Prime Minister's statement on Ukraine: 3 April 2022](#)

Press release

A statement from Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Russia's despicable attacks against innocent civilians in Irpin and Bucha.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Russia's despicable attacks against innocent civilians in Irpin and Bucha are yet more evidence that Putin and his army are committing war crimes in Ukraine.

No denial or disinformation from the Kremlin can hide what we all know to be the truth – Putin is desperate, his invasion is failing, and Ukraine's resolve has never been stronger.

I will do everything in my power to starve Putin's war machine. We are stepping up our sanctions and military support, as well as bolstering our humanitarian support package to help those in need on the ground.

The UK has been at the forefront of supporting the International Criminal Court's investigation into atrocities committed in Ukraine, and the Justice Secretary has authorised additional financial support and the deployment of specialist investigators – we will not rest until justice is served.

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[Foreign Secretary statement on appalling acts by Russian invading forces](#)

Press release

Foreign Secretary statement on appalling acts by Russian invading forces in towns such as Irpin and Bucha.



Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

As Russian troops are forced into retreat, we are seeing increasing evidence of appalling acts by the invading forces in towns such as Irpin and Bucha.

Their indiscriminate attacks against innocent civilians during Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine must be investigated as war crimes.

We will not allow Russia to cover up their involvement in these atrocities through cynical disinformation and will ensure that the reality of Russia's actions are brought to light.

The UK will fully support any investigations by the International Criminal Court, in its role as the primary institution with the mandate to investigate and prosecute war crimes. The UK-led effort to expedite and support an International Criminal Court investigation into crimes in Ukraine was the largest State referral in its history.

We will not rest until those responsible for atrocities, including military commanders and individuals in the Putin regime, have faced justice.

At this time, more than ever, it is essential that the international community continues to provide Ukraine with the humanitarian and military support it so dearly needs, and that we step up sanctions to cut off funding for Putin's war machine at source.

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