



CONNEX Connects

Spring 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to the Spring Connex Education Partnership Newsletter! With longer and brighter days upon us, we have pulled together articles from across the education sector which have sprung to our attention, as well as looking forward to some upcoming events and opportunities this term.

New British Sign Language GCSE Announced

In December 2023 the subject content for a new GCSE in British Sign Language (BSL) was published, which it is hoped will provide pupils with a valuable opportunity to learn an important life skill and ensure better inclusivity for all pupils within the education setting. Parents, teachers and organisations from the deaf community provided **'overwhelmingly positive support'** following a 12 week public consultation, the DfE have said. The provisional aim is for the exam board syllabus to be ready for September 2025. Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan said:

"It's fantastic to see such an overwhelming amount of support across both the education sector and the deaf and hearing communities for this new GCSE."

In this edition, we cover:

- British Sign Language GCSE
- Family Hubs Opened Nationwide
- Teacher Recruitment and Retention Boost
- Maths Champions
- Calls for Libraries to be Mandated
- Automated External Defibrillators
- Student Loan Repayments for Eligible Teachers
- Outdoor Learning Grants
- BBC's Budding Reporter Competition 2024
- Electric Vehicle Charge Points
- Tackling Disposable Vapes
- Dates for your diary
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The GCSE will be open to all pupils and recognised and accepted in school performance tables. The content will cover areas such as recalling a range of signs, understanding signs to interpret sentences (including understanding and applying knowledge of grammar) as well as the history of BSL. This GCSE builds on the recently published Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan. It is thought that the introduction of this knowledge rich subject leans into the Prime Minister's plan to introduce a new baccalaureate style qualification.



With data showing that 83% of parents are unaware that a child's brain is already 90% developed by age 5, the government is looking to highlight how small, every day activities can aid this early development. This campaign goes hand in hand with other newly introduced support for families, which it is hoped will ensure that families are able to access appropriate support in every area across the country when they need it. Further information on Family Hub's and early language development can be found [here](#).



Family Hubs Now Open Nationwide

The government has launched its **Little Moments Matter** campaign, with 75 family hub centres opening across the country. These centres will offer a range of support services, which will act as a 'one stop shop' for parents and carers. Services provided will include early language and communication development, parent and carer mental health support, and home development programmes. The Little Moments Together campaign serves to highlight how parents can make the most of every opportunity with their children, no matter how small, to aid their development.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Boost

In a bid to improve the current teacher recruitment and retention crisis, the government have introduced new measures which it hopes will support with these challenges. In January, schools minister Damien Hinds announced new investment to deliver a three-year mental health support programme, for school and college leaders.

Further measures include:

- New guidance to prevent and tackle harassment of school staff
- Early recommendations to the **Workforce Reduction Taskforce**, which aim to reduce teacher workload by 5 hours a week over the next three years
- Highlighting opportunities to safely harness artificial intelligence



These initiatives build on previous measures announced by the government such as their ambition to pay every teacher, entering the profession, a **starting salary of at least £30,000** and restating their commitment to honour their **Education Staff Wellbeing Charter**, with further updates expected in the future, two years after its launch.

Mr Hinds thanked teachers for their **'hard work'** which has seen, **"standards in education rise significantly since 2010, with nearly 90% of schools now rated good or outstanding."**



Maths Champions

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) are looking for Early Years (EY) settings to take part in The National Day Nurseries Association's Maths Champions programme. This online, one year programme seeks to support a senior leader to **'drive improvement in maths practice'** in their setting. Previously conducted trials, of the same programme, indicated that in settings where they had a 'Maths Champion' pupils made, on average, a further 3 months additional progress than pupils in the control group setting.

In addition, the trials also found a positive impact on children's language outcomes, as well as improved confidence for practitioners responsible for teaching maths



The impact of the Maths Champions' Programme on longer term maths and language outcomes will be reported in due course, with positive results expected. The EEF are onboarding new participants from February to May 2024, and Private, Voluntary or Independent and school-based EY settings are invited to apply through the **accelerator fund**.

Let there be Libraries

Celebrated writers Julia Donaldson, Phillip Pullman and Michael Morpurgo have called on the government to ensure that all British schools have libraries. Pullman is the latest to join the call saying that there **"is nothing more certain to improve children's abilities – and desire – to read richly and well."** The topic was first raised by Julia Donaldson, when speaking about the reading crisis among British children on BBC Radio 4. She believes a school's library provision should become part of an Ofsted inspection.

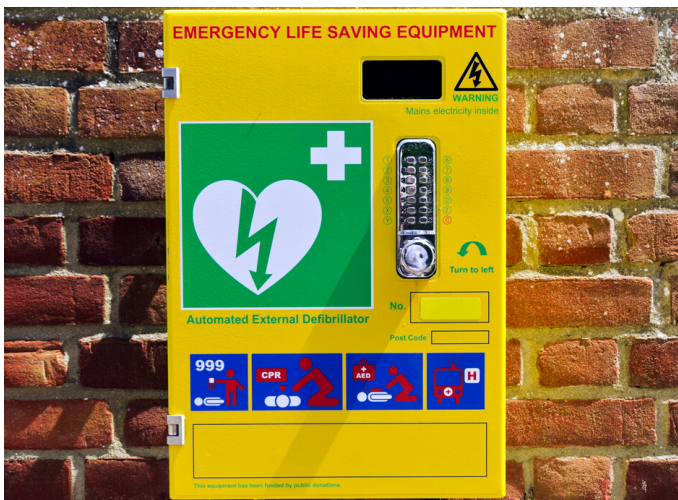


The Guardian reports that despite all British prisons being required by law to have a library, the number of secondary schools with a library is falling, and 14% of Primary schools are also without one. The calls come after a worrying report released last year, by the National Literacy Trust, showed over half of 18-year-olds now report that they don't enjoy reading as a pastime. The writers are all in agreement that a library should be at the heart of every school and is fundamental to the promotion of reading for pleasure and future reading outcomes.

Have you registered your AED to The Circuit?

The Department for Education (DfE) is calling on all schools to register their Automated External Defibrillator (AED) devices to **The Circuit**. This national network links AEDs directly to ambulance services, which enables them to send a person in need to the nearest device when seconds count. The updated **guidance for schools**, shared by the DfE, includes important information about:

- How you can use the funding to obtain an AED
- Registering your device on the The Circuit
- Best practices for using and maintaining these devices



Student Loan Repayments for Eligible Teachers

If you teach chemistry, biology, physics, computing or languages you may be eligible to claim back student loan repayments. Teachers who taught one of these subjects for at least 50% of their week during the 2022/23 tax year may be eligible. However, you must also have completed your Initial Teacher Training (ITT) between the 2013/14 and 2020/21 academic years, inclusive, to be eligible.

Be quick, as you only have until the end of March to do this. You can check full eligibility criteria and how to claim your repayments [here](#).

Outdoor Learning Grants Available

If you haven't made use of the National Education Nature Park and Climate Action Awards funding, what are you waiting for? The Department for Education have made available a grant of £15 million to support young people in getting outdoors and learning about the natural world around them. You can use the funding for a number of items, which can be used for lessons across the curriculum. There are a number of qualifying criteria which you can read more about [here](#). Why not take a look, and see if you can bolster your outdoor learning equipment in time for Spring!



Attention! Budding Reporters

This year's BBC Young Reporter Competition is now open for pupils aged 11-18. Perhaps you have a thriving newspaper club or pupils passionate about storytelling, this competition could light the touch paper to a future career in journalism. The BBC are looking for original stories from young people, about important issues in the world around them. Successful ideas could appear on radio, TV, online or on social media. You can find out more about the competition, including top tips for those who wish to enter, on [BBC Teach](#). Entries must be submitted by Sunday 24th March at 11pm



Electric Car Charge Points for Schools

Schools can now claim funding to install electric charge points on the premises, in a bid to support electric vehicle drivers and accelerate the rollout of electric vehicle charge points. The new grant will provide up to 75% of the cost of purchasing and installing equipment and charge points. The grant is available to all state funded schools and education institutions. Read more about the development [here](#).

Tackling Disposable Vapes



The government have announced plans to tackle the rising number of young people using disposable vapes. These measures will primarily target the marketing of vapes at young people and under-age sales. Despite it being illegal to sell disposable vapes to under 18's, an alarming number of young children are still able to gain access to, and use, vapes. The design and marketing of these brightly coloured, 'fun flavour' vapes is thought to be the "key driver behind the alarming rise in youth vaping", according to the government. [Figures from the Action on Smoking and Health \(ASH\) charity suggest](#) 7.6% of 11 to 17-year-olds now vape regularly or occasionally, almost double the number in 2020.

Key Dates for Your Diary

We know that many of our schools make huge efforts to mark landmark and national days. March is a busy month with the following international events. Will they make it onto your school calendar?

- ✓ **International Women's Day – 8th March**
- ✓ **World Poetry Day – 21st March**
- ✓ **Earth Hour – 25th March**



Working Together to Safeguard Children

In December, the Department for Education updated the [Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance](#) for 2023. These changes are already reflected in our [Advanced Safeguarding Course](#) which you can access through [Connex Academy. Working Together to Safeguard Children update course.](#)

Connex Academy regularly offer free Twilight Toolkit webinars focusing on current themes for schools. Register with Event Brite to hear about our latest webinars coming up [Register Now](#). We also look forward to sharing more training opportunities regarding safeguarding later in 2024. Watch this space for more information.

School Resources Hub

We are delighted to be partnering with Anna Freud and the DfE on the Mental Health Resource Hub.

A DfE initiative launched in November 2023 the [whole school or college approach resource hub](#) provides a rich toolkit of signposted resources to support whole school or college approaches to mental health and wellbeing. Courses and resources featured on the hub have had to meet key criteria and Connex Academy are delighted that two of our courses have been selected, alongside others from NSPCC and Mind. Over 15,000 resources have been accessed/downloaded so far, and the hub has had over 82,000 hits already! Thank you to all of you that submitted your valuable tools and resources, and we hope you are similarly seeing increasing visits to your webpages.

Senior Mental Health Lead Grant Extension



Apply for a senior mental health lead training grant, with [Connex Education Academy](#), to equip your mental health lead with the knowledge and skills to implement an effective whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing.

All schools and colleges can claim a £1,200 grant by 31 March 2024 for their mental health lead to attend DfE quality assured training, with Connex Academy, for training to take place anytime in the spring or summer academic terms. The training will help your mental health lead develop your setting's holistic approach to promoting and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils, learners and staff.

If you previously claimed a grant and your trained lead has left your setting, you can also now apply for a 2nd grant.

**Connex Education Partnership does not have any professional affiliations with organisations referenced throughout this newsletter. We share information that we believe will be of use and interest to schools in good faith, and in the spirit of sharing good practice for the benefit of all.*