

# THE TIMES



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## More A levels in PE than French as pupils drop European languages

**Rosemary Bennett** Education Editor  
**Nicola Woolcock** Education Correspondent

PE is now more popular than French at A level, a sign of the sharp decline in European languages being studied.

Only 8,713 candidates took French, this year's results show, down 8 per cent in a year. In 1996 French was one of the

most popular A levels, taken by 22,718 students. A total of 11,307 took PE this year.

Chinese has also overtaken German for the first time at A level. The latter is in danger of disappearing from classrooms, with uptake having dropped by 17 per cent in a year to 3,058 pupils. Chinese is the third most popular language at A level, taken by

3,334 teenagers, up 8.6 per cent on last year.

Despite the more difficult content of this year's A levels, 26.4 per cent of exams taken were awarded an A\* or A, which is the highest proportion since 2012.

Boys outperformed girls at the top end, being awarded a higher proportion of A\* and As for the second year in a row.

The focus on exams rather than coursework is thought to favour boys.

The fall in modern languages is becoming a cause for concern in business and political circles. After Brexit Britain must stand on its own two feet internationally, company chiefs say.

However, modern languages are seen as difficult subjects in which to do well, not least because schools

increasingly encourage native speakers to take the A levels, even though the subjects are designed for non-native speakers. This pushes up the standards considerably. It has been estimated that up to one in five German A-level students is a native speaker.

Boys benefit, pages 8-9  
Edward Lucas, page 25  
Results table, pages 58-59

## IT chaos in healthcare puts troops' lives at risk

Alarm at computer debacle in military surgeries

**Deborah Haynes** Defence Editor  
**Chris Smyth** Health Editor

Britain's armed forces are at serious risk because of chronic computer failures at military surgeries across the country, doctors have warned.

Service personnel are in danger of being given the wrong drugs and missing life-saving vaccines because GPs are routinely locked out of patient records, medical staff have told *The Times*.

One described the IT system as "the biggest threat to patient safety that I have encountered in my 20-year career".

Almost 500 civilian and military GPs provide primary care to Britain's 147,000 full-time soldiers, sailors and air personnel in the defence medical services, rather than the NHS.

Representatives of the doctors say that they have been raising the alarm for two years with the surgeon-general, the most senior armed forces doctor, but nothing has improved. They urge Lieutenant-General Martin Bricknell to stop denying the problem and listen to the "very real concerns" from those who cannot give service personnel proper care.

Colonel Glynn Evans, chairman of the armed forces committee of the

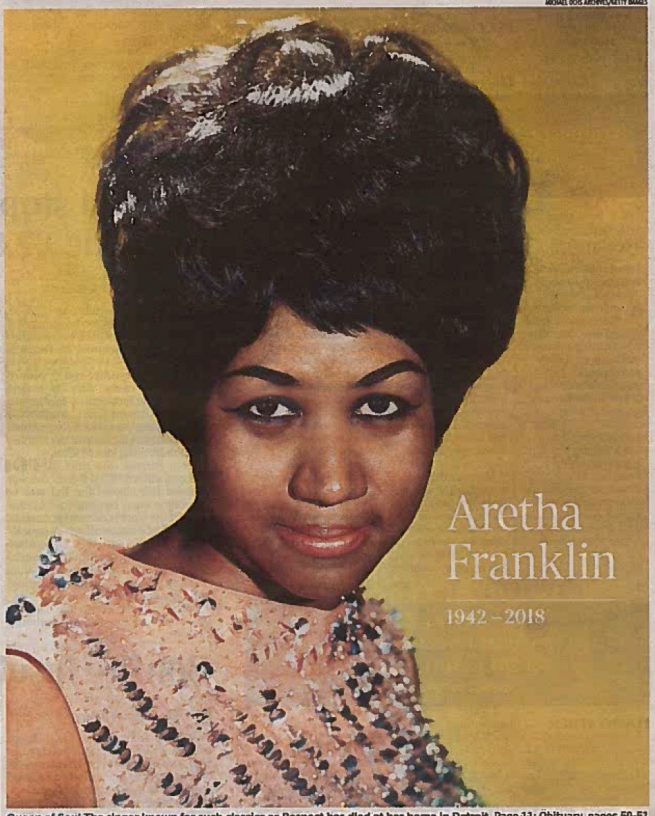
British Medical Association (BMA), said that if a similar technology debacle had happened in the NHS, surgeries would have been shut down.

He described the chaos as the biggest concern of his members. "They are worried about the systematic failure of the IT system not allowing them to deliver safe medical care," he told *The Times*. "My members tell me this represents potentially material risk to the soldiers, sailors and airmen they look after."

MPs expressed alarm at the warnings and promised to raise questions when parliament returned next month.

The doctors say:

- GPs' computer screens freeze "virtually daily"; patient records disappear; appointments are lost; and confidential notes on one patient's health pop up on a doctor's screen during a different patient's consultation.
- Doctors face a choice at times between passing personnel as fit to be deployed without being able to check their medical history or keeping them at home as a precaution.
- Cancer treatment for personnel in Northern Ireland is being delayed because the military computer system will not connect to that of the NHS, continued on page 4, col 1.



Aretha Franklin  
1942 - 2018

Queen of Soul The singer known for such classics as Respect has died at her home in Detroit. Page 11; Obituary, pages 50-51

### IN THE NEWS

**MPs back e-cigarettes**  
Bus and train companies should consider allowing passengers to use e-cigarettes to improve public health, a committee of MPs has said in a report. Page 2

**Queen's doctor killed**  
Peter Fisher, 67, a homeopathic physician to the Queen, was killed in a collision with a lorry in central London as he took part in National Cycle to Work Day. Page 5

**Imam 'urged Jihad'**  
An imam at the mosque attended by the Manchester Arena bomber has been accused of 'calling for armed jihad' six months before the suicide attack. Page 15

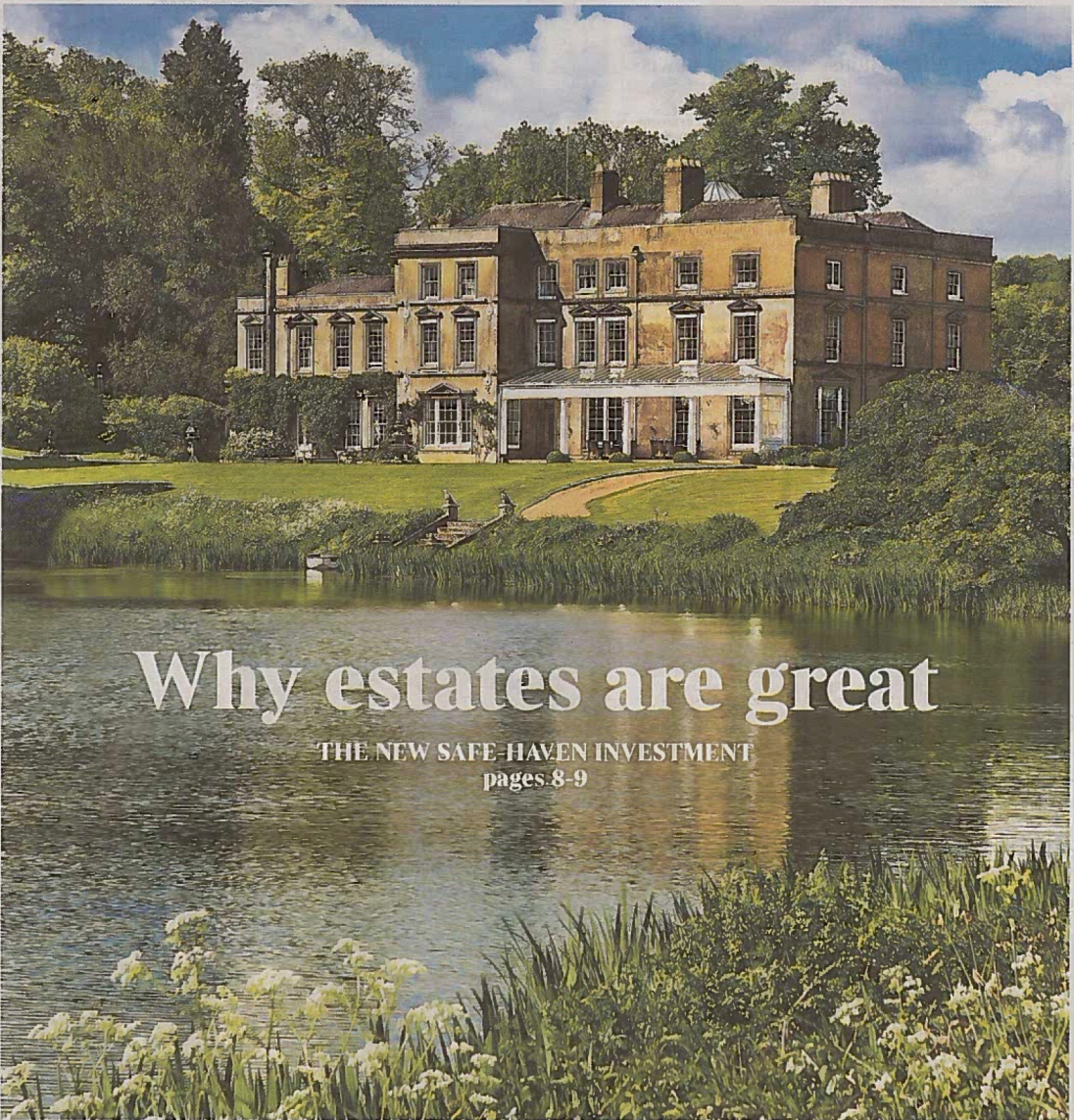
**Italy bridge danger**  
Ten thousand bridges in Italy held up by decaying concrete are in danger of collapsing, an expert has said after at least 38 people died in the Morandi Bridge tragedy. Page 28

**Apprentices 'failed'**  
School leavers are being failed by the government's apprenticeship levy because fewer are receiving training than before the scheme began, employers have said. Page 35

**Tennis world cup**  
The Davis Cup is to be turned into a world cup-style event after the International Tennis Federation's proposal received a vote of approval at its annual general meeting. Pages 65; 72



# Bricks & Mortar



## Why estates are great

THE NEW SAFE-HAVEN INVESTMENT  
pages 8-9

Allow your walls to sparkle **page 6**

Tour the new hotspots **pages 10-11**



## COVER STORY

In partnership with

MANSION GLOBAL



Gyms such as this one in Manhattan in the US will soon be appearing in UK developments. Below: the pool in the Holland Park Villas development, a scheme of 72 apartments in Kensington, west London. Prices start at £1.675 million

## Stay at home and develop a six-pack

People shopping for a home in a luxury block require a gym to be part of the deal. When you pay a seven or eight-figure sum for an apartment, it's reasonable to expect the chance to acquire a six-pack. Your flat may be the ultimate comfort zone, but in the basement gym you want to be tested to the limit, as well as receive tuition in mindfulness and better eating habits. No more slumping on the sofa. It's downstairs for dynamic stretching, yoga and metabolic system development in a facility bristling with thousands of pounds' worth of machines, under the tutelage of a buffed-up personal trainer.

This change in tastes is the result of an increase in the number of UK buyers of luxury new-build properties who live full-time at their homes, rather than leaving them empty for months. These buyers are also members of a generation accustomed to gyms that cater for every exercise trend and technological innovation for the measurement of achievement.

This demographic shuffle is leading to a shift in the marketing of flats and also the growth of a wellness industry that manages gyms and spas, and provides bespoke diet and training regimes for residents. The soulless, low-tech basement room, with a running machine and a pile of weights, is making way for 20m pools and boxing-themed areas, with punchbags and a Muhammad Ali mural on an exposing brick wall. A boxing gym, backed by Anthony Joshua, the world heavyweight champion, is one of the features that ensured that the Chilterns, a scheme in Marylebone, central London, punched above its weight. All apartments have been sold, including the five-bedroom duplex penthouse, at a rumpus price of £20 million.

Not so long ago the emphasis of marketing literature for luxe apartments was the master suite, with its walk-in wardrobe. Now the space that enables you to fit into the outfits hanging in those wardrobes has become a top selling point. The brochure for Holland Park Villas, a scheme of 72 apartments in Kensington, west London, cites its "unsurpassed amenities", including a gym, Pilates studio and 20m pool

managed by Bodyism, the Notting Hill gym that caters to the rich and famous, including Rita Ora and Pippa Middleton.

Nathalie Schyllert, the company's chief executive, explains that the facility at Holland Park Villas is more than a gym.

"We bring the community together for the ultimate wellness experience. You invest in much more than an apartment or a home — you invest in a lifestyle."

Since 58 of the 72 Holland Park Villas flats have been sold, it seems that help with nutrition and movement has appeal. Indeed, Nicholas Gray, the sales director at Native Land, a developer, believes that wellness is seen as an essential by his target clientele.

The requirement for specialised onsite fitness-led Rhodium, a property management group, to diversify. The company already supplied concierge services to schemes in Belgravia, Chelsea and Mayfair. Dean Main, the company's founder, saw that the gyms in some

schemes lacked privacy, which meant that failure to hold the plank for more than a few seconds became an embarrassment.

Residents want private studios, and tailored eating and exercise plans.

Rhodium provides guidance on every aspect of the good gym, in partnership with Dan Helge Hansen, the founder of MER, the Norwegian luxury fitness brand.

Residents of Chiltern Place, another Marylebone scheme, are benefiting from the partnership. Only 12 of the 55 apartments at this 16-storey block remain for sale; prices start at £2 million.

The collaboration between Rhodium and MER will also be on display at the gyms in two Northacre developments: the Broadway, a development of 268 homes in Westminster, where prices start at £1.56 million, and No 1 Palace Street, a scheme of 72 apartments in a grade II listed, Beaux Arts-style building close to Buckingham Palace (prices from £2.5 million). Rhodium believes that staying ahead in the wellness and fitness sector depends on innovation, which suggests that some of the extras in the New York schemes will soon be arriving on these shores. The buyers of homes at One Manhattan Square, overlooking the East River, will enjoy a hammam, indoor pool, wellness spa and an adult treehouse. Anne Ashworth

# Why country e

Mansions with land and sporting rights are the new safe haven for investors, reports Carol Lewis

Political and economic uncertainty in Britain and farther afield is leading to a boom in sales of grand country estates not seen since the financial crash more than a decade ago. Jess Simpson, the founder of Jess Simpson Property Search, a buying agency, says: "This year approximately £50 million worth of prime rural estates have sold in England, with a similar figure on the market or under offer."

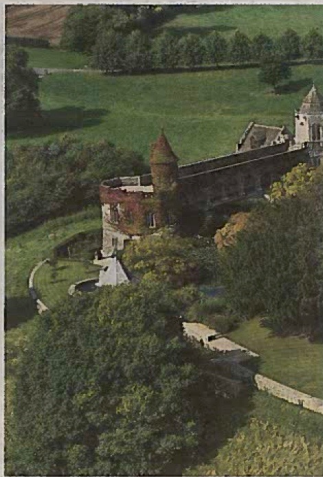
Many of these properties, which include large houses surrounded by extensive acreage, can cost about £20 million and often change hands off market. The main drivers for buyers include the desire to own a sporting estate, a wish for a house shrouded in the privacy of mature parkland, or somewhere to stash the cash and create a legacy for children and grandchildren.

Simpson says: "The average price has increased by 10 per cent this year, with some estates in the south of England commanding the greatest premiums. The sale of the Kingston Lisle estate is a good example. The house, which needed a lot of work, and its 250 acres had been on the market for four years. It sold in spring for more than the guide price to a European buyer."

The 13-bedroom, grade II listed Kingston Lisle, near Wantage in Oxfordshire, which came with mature woodland and parkland, a "high pheasant and partridge shoot", lakes, paddocks, arable land and a private golf course, was on the market for £18 million.

"We haven't seen this level of activity in the super-prime market since 2007. There are buyers out there, and the key things they want are an impressive house in the centre of an estate, a long drive, a cottage and sport. They want to be within reach of London, but tend to come by helicopter so their reach has expanded. For instance, I recently sold an estate in Shropshire for about £10 million. The same estate in the Cotswolds would have cost £20 million."

"People are thinking that the London market isn't going anywhere. They are worried about inflation. There is the prospect of a Corbyn government, so they want to pull money out of



their businesses, or funds, before capital gains tax goes up. They want their money in something safe and tangible such as a house or an estate. There is also a certain sense of 'life goes on' despite the political uncertainty," she says.

"Another trend is the willingness to take on a restoration project, which, historically, is something people have not been prepared to do. They want to bring the houses up to date for modern entertaining. They will rewire, replumb, restore and add modern amenities such as an indoor pool, spa, sun suite, bathrooms and garages; and there

Above: Otterington Hall in North Yorkshire is on the market with Strutt & Parker for £3.95 million

## Trend alert Mirror, mirror



▲ Decorative beaded edge mirror tray, £24.50 lauraashley.com

◀ Mirrored jewellery box, £24.40 lauraashley.com



## COVER STORY



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