

Press release: Spotlight on child protection in family courts



A panel of experts will review how the family courts protect children and parents in cases of domestic abuse and other serious offences, Ministers announced today (Tuesday 21 May).

- Panel to make recommendations and report back in three months
- Public 'Call for Evidence' to gather views on how the current system can be improved
- Focus on ensuring the family court works in the explicit interests of the child

The three-month project aims to ensure that the family court works first and foremost in the explicit interests of the child, such as their safety, health and well-being. The MOJ-chaired panel will consist of a range of experts including senior members of the judiciary, leading academics and charities.

A public call for evidence will also be launched imminently and will look to those with direct involvement to share their experiences.

The move follows responses received through the government's domestic abuse consultation in which concerns were raised around the family courts' response to potential harm to children and victims. In addition to calls for better protections for children, some claim that domestic abusers are using the court system to re-traumatise their victims.

Every day family court judges do outstanding work making difficult decisions in highly emotive cases where the paramount consideration is the welfare of the child. Ministers now want to take a closer look at how existing safeguards in the court process are working in practice and, if necessary, strengthen them.

Justice Minister Paul Maynard said:

Some of the most vulnerable in our society come before the family courts, and I am absolutely determined that we offer them every protection.

This review will help us better understand victims' experiences of the system, and make sure the family court is never used to coerce or re-traumatise those who have been abused.

Its findings will be used to inform next steps so we can build on the raft of measures we have already introduced to protect victims of domestic abuse.

Specifically, the work will:

- examine the courts' application of Practice Direction 12J – this relates to child arrangement cases where domestic abuse is a factor
- examine the courts' application of 'barring orders' which prevent further applications being made without leave of the court under the Children Act 1989
- gather evidence of the impact on the child and victim where child contact is sought by someone alleged to have, or who has, committed domestic abuse or other relevant offences

The panel will consider how the family courts handle a range of offences including rape, child abuse, assault, sexual assault, murder and other violent crime, with the government committed to ensuring the right protections are in place for victims and their children.

This will build on the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, published in January, which includes measures to ban abusers from directly cross-examining their victims in family courts, on top of the £8 million of funding announced to support children affected by domestic abuse.

Last year, we made changes to make it easier for victims of domestic abuse to obtain and provide the evidence required to access legal aid, including removing the time limit from all forms of evidence for domestic violence. And we have allocated £900k in funding for organisations to providing specially trained staff to offer dedicated emotional and practical support to domestic abuse victims before, during and after hearings in the family court. Further details on the review, the composition of the panel and the call for evidence will be announced in due course.

Notes to editors:

- The Children Act 1989 states that the welfare of the child must be the court's paramount consideration when making any decision about their upbringing, including with whom the child is to live or spend time, and there is no automatic right to parental involvement.

- In circumstances where there is evidence of domestic abuse, the courts are bound by law to consider potential harm to the child and parent.
 - The court also has a duty to consider a range of factors, such as the wishes and feelings of the child (including instances where a child wishes to see a parent) and any evidence of risk of harm to the child and to the other parent, and has a wide discretion to conclude what is in the best interests of the child.
 - Practice Direction 12J sets out what the court is required to do in any case where domestic abuse is alleged or admitted, and applies to any application relating to children where there are allegations that a party or child has experienced domestic abuse.
 - Practice Direction 12J was revised in October 2017 to place greater emphasis on both the indirect harm that domestic abuse can cause to a child and parent, and the impact of non-physical forms of abusive behaviour. The Children Act also makes clear that the presumption of parental involvement will not apply where there is evidence that the involvement of that parent in the child's life would put the child at risk of suffering harm.
 - Section 91 (14) of the Children Act 1989 empowers the court, when disposing of an application under the Act, to make an order that prevents future applications without leave of the court. This review will explore how the court handles multiple and repeat applications and whether this is used to coerce and frustrate victims.
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News story: 'Eco Innovators': government calls on next generation to design the future of transport

- government launches competition for young people to design electric vehicle chargepoints of the future
- 'Eco Innovators' competition aims to inspire young people to use their creative and engineering skills
- winners will have their designs made into real-life prototypes supported by industry experts

The government has today (21 May 2019) launched a competition for 7 to 19 year olds to design the electric vehicle chargepoints of the future, inspiring the next generation of engineers – a key aim of the modern Industrial Strategy.

The 'Eco Innovators' competition – announced by Science Minister Chris Skidmore at the launch of the [Engineering: Take a Closer Look campaign](#), a legacy project of the hugely successful Year of Engineering campaign – calls on students to submit creative designs for public electric vehicle

chargepoints, an increasingly recognisable and critical part of UK streets.

The competition aims to encourage budding innovators, engineers and artists to learn more about the vital engineering sector and zero-emission transport. Winners of each of the 2 age categories will have their winning designs made into real-life prototypes with support from industry experts and their chargepoint displayed at the Electric Vehicle Experience Centre in Milton Keynes.

Future of Mobility Minister, Jesse Norman, said:

The government's ambition is for the UK to have one of the best charging infrastructure networks in the world for electric vehicles, as we move towards a zero emission future.

I am delighted to be one of the judges of this terrific competition. We will be looking for really imaginative chargepoint designs that can play a big practical role in encouraging more people to buy and drive electric vehicles.

Nusrat Ghani, 2018 Year of Engineering Minister, said:

It's an exciting time for engineering and I've seen first-hand the impact the Year of Engineering campaign has had, inspiring young people from all backgrounds into careers across the sector.

The 'Eco Innovators' competition encourages young people to see engineering as an exciting and creative career path, helping them shape the world around them and make a real difference.

Science and Innovation Minister Chris Skidmore said:

The UK has an extraordinary engineering history, from Ada Lovelace's instrumental role in developing the first computer to Frank Whittle inventing the turbojet engine. I want our future to be as innovative as our past and to do that we must boost STEM skills across the country.

The Engineering: Take a Closer Look campaign will play a crucial role in inspiring the next generation. I am proud to be leading on this important campaign, as we seek to upskill people to meet the challenges of tomorrow through our modern Industrial Strategy.

The submissions to the competition will be judged by a panel from organisations including the RAC Foundation, the National Grid, the National Transport Design Centre, Design Council, Living Streets, EV Thank You, the Office for Low Emission Vehicles and the minister, Jesse Norman.

As outlined in the [Road to Zero Strategy](#), the government is investing £1.5 billion to support the transition to greener transport, aiming to end the sale of new conventional diesel and petrol-fuelled cars and vans by 2040.

Through the modern Industrial Strategy, the government aims to inspire the next generation of engineers who will meet the [Grand Challenges](#) of the future, identifying how low-carbon, sustainable transport can play a key role in supporting the global transition to a cleaner, greener economy.

Engineering: Take a Closer Look will continue to encourage young people from different backgrounds into considering a career in engineering and support the delivery of the high-skilled jobs of the future.

The 'Eco Innovators' competition is open to students from 21 May 2019, via www.gov.uk/engineeringcloserlook. The competition closes at 18 October 2019. The winning entries will be announced shortly thereafter.

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[Speech: Secretary of State address to City Week](#)

1. Introduction – the prophets of doom were wrong

If there is one sector in our economy that represents a combination of old-fashioned British grit and determination alongside global innovation and leadership, it must surely be financial services. Time and again doom-mongers have predicted the demise of the City. And time and again they have been proved wrong.

From the Big Bang deregulation of financial markets in 1986, when some predicted London would struggle to continue to compete as a global financial centre. To cries that the end was nigh for the City of London when the United Kingdom decided against joining the Euro – a decision that I believe has stood the test of time. To the 2008 financial crisis, which brought the sector to the brink. All wrong. But the City of London has not just survived

the onslaught, it has positively thrived in the face of some formidable threats.

And as we prepare to leave the European Union, once again the death-knell has been sounded on the future of the UK's financial sector. Now I understand people's concerns – we are in the middle of a fundamental change of direction, and the unwillingness of Parliament I have to say to give certainty exacerbates the situation. But I am convinced that when the dust settles the City of London will do what it always does, which is to emerge fitter, stronger and more dynamic than ever.

2. The strength of UK financial services

Since the referendum in 2016, the United Kingdom has maintained – and even strengthened – its position as a global financial centre: I would argue as the leading financial centre. Just today, Deloitte's Crane Survey shows that construction of new offices in London has hit its highest level since the referendum.

Office space under construction between October 2018 and March 2019 amounted to 13.2 million square feet: the equivalent of more than 22 Shards, up 12% compared to the previous survey, while volume of new office construction activity was 3.5 million square feet: some 38% higher than the previous survey. Office space under construction between October 2018 and March 2019 amounted to 13.2 million square feet: the equivalent of more than 22 Shards worth of office space – and a 12% increase compared to the previous survey.

It's a far cry from the doom and gloom predicted when the UK voted to leave the European Union in 2016, and reinforces the City's global pre-eminence as an investment destination. And this follows on from recent OECD figures which show the total value of foreign investment stock into the UK increased by a further 5% to £1.46 trillion in 2018, making the UK now home to more foreign investment than Germany, Spain and Poland all put together.

And the financial sector stands at the heart of that success. Our deep and liquid global capital pool, a pioneering regulatory framework, and world-class advisory, legal and related professional services have helped us run one of the greatest trade surpluses in our history: at around £43 billion a year. Some 4.2% of the UK's working population, nearly 1.4 million people, are employed in finance and insurance. And, with two-thirds of these employed outside London, it's important to remember that the City's influence is not confined to the square mile; it stretches right the way across the UK with new jobs and opportunities being created all the time. The depth of our professional infrastructure runs from London to Edinburgh, to Bristol to Belfast. Goldman Sachs, for example, is opening a new office in Milton Keynes, creating up to 250 jobs. The new UK challenger bank OakNorth investment is bolstering its ranks, taking on new staff in Manchester, the Midlands and the South West to keep up with demand for its demand for business loans.

KPMG has announced plans to create up to 400 jobs over the next three years in Glasgow. This is truly a sector which benefits every part of the United

Kingdom.

And it is of fundamental importance to the overall strength of our economy. According to the industry body TheCityUK, our banking sector is the largest in Europe. London alone hosts over 250 foreign banks, more than New York, or Paris or Frankfurt combined. It is our largest tax payer, contributing around 11% of total UK tax receipts – or £72 billion on the latest figures – paying for the schools, hospitals, security and the other public services on which we all rely. Those who threaten its viability or stoke up resentment against the sector should remember how much it pays the bills. It is the ability to innovate, to adapt and to change that keeps us on top. The UK was the first Western centre to embrace Islamic finance: the first to offer a Sharia-compliant bond, for example – and remains its leading western centre.

We also host the second largest offshore centre for Chinese renminbi clearing. Twice as many dollars are traded in the UK as in the US, and twice as many euros are traded in the UK as in the Eurozone.

The UK has more than 40% of the global market in Fixed Income, Currencies and Commodity trading. We have the second largest centre for debt financing globally after the United States. And we are – by far – the largest capital market in Europe, accounting for 20% of the bond and loan market, and 33% of all Initial Public Offerings and private equity activity in Europe. And of course the United Kingdom is the home of the FinTech revolution, making sweeping changes, delivering more control, access and increased competition.

It has been estimated that we have more software developers than Berlin, Dublin and Stockholm all combined. And of course we have Level 39, Europe's largest fintech accelerator. And last year the UK attracted more venture capital investment than anywhere else in Europe, with £6.3 billion. And these advantages are showcased in our Fin Tech sector, with around 1,600 firms contributing approximately £7 billion to our economy and supporting over 75,000 jobs. Furthermore, the UK is now the number one investment destination in the world for mergers and acquisitions, ahead of the US, ahead of Germany and ahead of China, according to a report by EY. And these are just some of the achievements, I could go on and for a little bit of encouragement I might! But the point I want to make really is this: that this Government believes in the City and is behind you every step of the way in your success.

Our financial services are of huge value to this country's overall prosperity and I am convinced that you will remain at the heart of the global financial system whatever the outcome of the Brexit process.

3. Facing the challenges ahead

Of course, there's no room for complacency and we must face up to the fact that there will be significant challenges as well as opportunities ahead, not least because a number of new players will become apparent. I recognise that, for many firms in this room, the period since the Referendum has been one of uncertainty. So please be assured that we firmly believe the best approach is to leave the EU with a deal and we are continuing to work hard, including with parties across Parliament, to find a way forward. But whatever the outcome, I want you to know that this Government will remain your champion.

We will never jeopardise the City's success. We recognise your difficulties, we recognise your importance, and we want to work with you to give certainty and stability wherever possible as we move towards our new deep and special partnership with the European Union. But it is also worth stressing, and I think it does not happen enough, that there is a world beyond Europe and there will be a time beyond Brexit.

Britain stands on the brink of a new era in our trading history, continuing our close cooperation with our partners in European Union who still represent 44% of our exports, while reaching out as an independent trading nation for the first time in 40 years to friends old and new in the wider world. While our established partners such as the EU will continue to be of great importance, the locus of economic power is shifting rapidly, with an estimated 90% of global economic growth projected to occur outside the European Union over the next five years. That is where the markets are going to be, and that is where we need to be.

The world is becoming increasingly well educated, wealthier, and more urbanised. And it is predicted that the share of global GDP of the seven largest emerging economies – including China, India and Turkey – could increase from around 35% to nearly 50% of global GDP by 2050, which would mean that they overtake the current G7. It is a seismic shift in global economic power. When I try to explain it to people, I point out them that by 2030, China will have more than 220 cities with a population of more than 1 million people. The whole of continental Europe will have 35. It is worth understanding the scale of the change. This historic shift in global economic and demographic power will reshape the opportunities of international trade in the years to come.

The mission of my Department is to build a future for the UK's international trade in this emerging environment: to open new markets, build new export and investment opportunities, investment into the United Kingdom and investment out from the United Kingdom, and, perhaps most importantly, champion the cause of free trade and trade liberalisation, especially in services in an era where protectionism is increasingly lifting its ugly head. In 2017-18 alone, my Department supported a total of 332 financial and related professional services projects, securing or safeguarding over 15,000 jobs in this country.

We have launched four public consultations, to seek new Free Trade Agreements when we leave the European Union, with the United States, with Australia – [political line redacted] – to New Zealand, as well as the potential to seek accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, CPTPP – which is always easier to say now than it is later in the day. Our new Export Strategy will help the UK climb the ranks of the 21st century's great trading nations by encouraging, informing, connecting and facilitating finance for firms to realise their full exporting potential, and that is particularly true for SMEs where we need to find new exporters.

In addition to this, we continue to work with key economic partners around the world. For example, I was recently delighted to address Qatar Day, which highlighted the mutual opportunities for business across asset management,

cyber security, capital markets, sustainable finance and FinTech, for UK and Qatari companies. Qatar incidentally has over £35 billion of investment in the UK, much of which is here in London. And FinTech is at the heart of our global technology and innovation strategy and our growth agenda. That's why we are continuing to roll out our FinTech Bridges – links between Governments, regulators and private sectors – in priority global markets, from Singapore to China, from Hong Kong to Australia, where we launched our FinTech Bridge Pilot Programme last month. And these Bridges will promote regulatory cooperation to reduce barriers to entry in one another's markets. We are also working to leverage the UK's unique expertise and capacities to assist development in emerging economies. For example, in January my team visited Latin America to discuss how the UK's insurance and risk modelling knowhow might help these emerging economies adapt and mitigate against the effects of climate change. And both the UK Government and industry are developing an international road map for greening the financial system.

And my Department will be key to helping leverage UK expertise to combat climate change through Green Finance, in which the UK is – yet again – a world leader. The Government is also working with the London Stock Exchange and the wider capital markets community to target local currency bond issuances.

Just last Friday, the Indian state of Kerala issued the first sub-sovereign level bond for developing infrastructure in the UK, following in the steps of countries like Indonesia who did the same last year, showcasing once again the contribution the City is making to finance infrastructure worldwide and contributing to our international development agenda, a fact that is not nearly widely enough understood.

4. Conclusion

I know there are many people who are concerned that Brexit means Britain turning in on itself and becoming more introspective. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As we leave the European Union we will become more open to the world, not less, and more open to the great opportunities that lie beyond European shores. The financial sector and its related professional services will be at the centre of these new opportunities. Never before have prospects globally been so great. Yes of course there are challenges, as there always have been.

But I can assure you that the British Government stands ready to help you seize these opportunities, to make our financial sector's future even brighter than the past has been.

... accelerating financial inclusion by giving people better tools to save, to manage, to borrow and invest their money... ... supporting the financial products, technical expertise and experience needed to grow developing economies, which will be in all our interests... ... and building a more stable, secure and prosperous future, both for the United Kingdom and our partners around the world.

We have a great opportunity to shape the world around us. In fact, we always have a binary choice: to shape the world around us, or be shaped by the world around us. We must have the confidence and courage to do that shaping. The City has led the charge before. It will do so again. Thank you.

Statement to parliament: Oral statement to Parliament on the Ebola crisis in DR Congo

Ebola is back, this time in the eastern DRC. It is the largest outbreak in the country's history, the second largest in the world, and the first in a conflict zone. So far 1,209 people have died. And we must do much more to grip this situation.

This is not a simple question of virus control. If it were we could simply repeat what we were able – at huge risk and cost – to do in Sierra Leone and Liberia – and even to some extent what the government of the DRC and the WHO were able to do in Equateur and western DRC in the first six months of last year, that is to get out into village after village, identifying all the cases, tracing all their contacts and the contacts of the contacts – and through preventing further chains of transmission, contain the outbreak.

But, this is not a situation like this, this is North Kivu, this is the centre of a conflict, dominated by dozens of separate armed groups, largely outside government control. Such groups have begun to attack and kill health-workers – meaning that key international experts have had to be withdrawn from the epicentre of the virus. And the decision not to allow this area to participate in the recent election partly on the grounds that it is an Ebola area has fuelled suspicions that Ebola is a fabrication developed by hostile political forces.

As a result, Mr Speaker, communities are reluctant to come forward when they have symptoms, they're reluctant to change burial practices or accept the highly effective trial vaccine.

The Congolese army and government – which have successfully contained nine previous outbreaks over the last 45 years – is struggling to operate in the epicentre of this outbreak. And so too are the UN peace-keepers and the WHO.

And although this area is very dangerous and difficult to access, it is not sparsely populated. The epicentre of the outbreak is Butembo, which has a population of a million people. The surrounding areas contain almost 18 million people.

Now to be clear, the current disease profile poses – according to all our

expert analysis here – at the moment only a low to negligible risk to the United Kingdom. So this statement should not be a cause for panic at home. But this outbreak is potentially devastating for the region. It could spread easily to neighbouring provinces and even to neighbouring countries.

Now I want to take a moment to commend all of those – both the Congolese Government and the international community – who are working in these very difficult situations to bring this disease under control. My predecessor, the Right Honourable member for Portsmouth North paid tribute to Dr Richard Valery Mouzoko Kiboung who was killed in an attack by an armed group on the 19th of April while working for WHO in the Ebola response on the frontline. I would like to, and I imagine the whole House would join with me in expressing deepest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Dr Richard and to all those who have lost loved ones as a result of this outbreak.

We now need to grip this situation and ensure that the disease is contained.

As you can imagine, this has been my key priority in the emergency field since I was appointed just over two weeks ago. I spent the weekend in discussions with Sir Mark Lowcock, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, and with the Director-General of the WHO, Dr.Tedros, who has so far paid eight visits personally to the affected area.

I have also spoken about the response to the Deputy-Secretary-General of the UN, Amina Mohammed, and I am pleased to see that there has been a real step up in terms of the UN staff on the ground, in terms of coordination and in terms of the seniority of those staff, particularly in places like Butembo.

Both the Health Secretary and the Foreign Secretary have been supporting this agenda in recent meetings over the last four days, at the G7 health meeting and the WHO meetings in Geneva. I have also convened a meeting with a number of international experts in the field, including Brigadier Kevin Beaton, who helped to lead to the UK military response in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and the chief medical officer to the UK government,

I have concluded, on the basis of their advice, that we need not only to provide more money immediately to support the frontline response, that's the health workers, but also to support the vaccination strategy and to put more of our expert staff on the ground, into the response.

This is not just about recruiting doctors – we need people who understand and can work with the DRC government, the military and even the opposition forces – in order to create the space for us to work.

We need people who know the UN system well so that they can drive and shape the UN response. And these people need to be not in London but on the ground because they need to be able to learn and adapt very quickly as the disease spreads.

We are already deploying epidemiologists through our Public Health Rapid Support Teams, in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care. I am also considering deploying officials with specialities in information

management, adaptive management, anthropology and strategic communications.

It is, however, important for us all to understand that this is not a problem that the international community can solve from a distance. This is a political and security crisis as much as a health crisis – and the response must, in the end, be driven by local health-workers and leaders.□

But there are some positive signs.

DFID has been a key player in developing a new experimental vaccine for Ebola, which is proving highly effective.

Over 119 thousand doses have been administered in eastern DRC. This is an achievement that has probably saved thousands of lives. Modelling from Yale suggests that the use of the vaccine has reduced the geographic spread of Ebola by nearly 70%. And this isn't just about statistics – this is about Danielle, a 42-day old baby in eastern Congo who survived Ebola last week thanks to the inspiring work of community volunteers, themselves Ebola survivors, and frontline health workers, supported by UK aid.

And of course we cannot do it alone. This needs grip and urgency – but it also needs humility.

Eastern DRC is one of the most difficult operating environments on earth. One of the reasons that I have been talking to in detail about this issue to Mark Green, who is my US opposite number – is not only that we share the US analysis but also that the Americans will inevitably be major players in this response – in terms of finance and in terms of expertise, as indeed they were in the Liberia Ebola outbreak.

We need many more international donors to match our financial contributions and to sustain the international and local health operations in the field. And this is why the UK has just hosted an event specifically on Ebola, to build support for the response in the World Health Assembly in Geneva. This is also why I have agreed that my colleague the Africa Minister, should visit Eastern DRC immediately.

To conclude, this is a very dangerous situation, where the Ebola virus is only one ingredient in a crisis which is fuelled by politics, community suspicion and armed violence.

We need to act fast, and we need to act generously. But above all we need the right people on the ground who are completely on top of the situation, who are able to come up with quick solutions, and guide us in keeping up the support and yes, sometimes the pressure, on the UN system, on NGOs, on opposition politicians, and the government of DRC to get this done.

The stakes are very high. I will keep the house updated on our response. □□