

Press release: Estate agents targeted in money laundering crackdown

Estate agents have been hit with unannounced inspections as part of a week-long crackdown on money laundering in the property industry, HMRC has revealed.

Press release: Estate agents targeted in money laundering crackdown

HMRC officers visited 50 estate agents across England after they were suspected of trading without being registered as required under money laundering regulations.

The visits came as HMRC published the latest businesses hit with fines for failing to comply with the regulations. This includes estate agent Countrywide Estate Agents receiving a £215,000 fine.

HMRC will now take action against the visited businesses who have failed to comply, which can include fines, publication and criminal proceedings.

John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, said:

The vast majority of estate agents play by the rules and help us to crack down on dirty money. But I have zero tolerance for firms prepared to turn a blind eye to the law. Money laundering regulation exists to help protect honest business, so anyone who flaunts the law should know that swift action will be taken.

Simon York, Director of HMRC's Fraud Investigation Service, said:

Estate agents need to understand that criminals prey on weaknesses, so it's vital they take all steps to protect themselves. The money laundering regulations are key to that, but there's still a minority of agents who ignore their legal obligations. These inspections are a wake-up call that if you continue to trade illegally we will come knocking.

This is the first such week of action involving intelligence-led, co-ordinated activity aimed at estate agents trading without registering with

HMRC as legally required.

The visits involved HMRC inspectors questioning the businesses to establish whether they were trading in breach of the regulations. Inspectors then assess whether any further action is required.

HMRC supervises more than 11,000 residential and commercial estate agents across the UK and helps these businesses protect themselves from criminals who use property sales to launder cash or finance terrorism.

Webinars, guidance and e-learning have been produced by HMRC to help guide and educate estate agents on their money laundering responsibilities.

The UK was rated as having the most robust processes in the world for tackling money laundering by the Financial Action Task Force in a recent report.

HMRC has played a key part in this success. Over the past 3 years, it has carried out more than 5,000 interventions on supervised businesses, with 655 penalties worth £2.3 million issued in 2017 to 2018. In addition, HMRC recovered over £31 million under the proceeds of Proceeds of Crime Act.

You can see a [list of businesses not complying with the Money Laundering Regulations 2017](#).

The estate agents visited were in London (35), Leicester (5), South Bucks and Berkshire (4), Greater Manchester (3), Watford (1), Wakefield (1) and Wolverhampton (1).

You can find [educational resources for estate agents on Money Laundering Regulations on GOV.UK](#)

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News story: Changes to the board of the Financial Conduct Authority announced

- Consumer expert Richard Lloyd has been appointed as a Non-Executive Director to the board of the FCA
- Sarah Hogg has been reappointed for a second term as Non-Executive Director
- Amelia Fletcher's second term as Non-Executive Director has been extended

Consumer expert Richard Lloyd has been appointed as a Non-Executive Director

to the board of the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), the Economic Secretary, announced today (4 March 2019).

Richard has held senior roles in numerous consumer organisations, including Which?, where he was Executive Director. He is a founding trustee of the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute and is currently Chair of Resolver, the consumer complaint resolution organisation.

Richard Lloyd's three-year term will begin on 1 April 2019.

Baroness Sarah Hogg has also been re-appointed as a Non-Executive Director for a second three-year term, starting on 1 April 2019. Baroness Hogg is an experienced director of listed companies including 3i, Carnival and GKN, and public bodies including the BBC. She is the FCA's Senior Independent Director. Sarah Hogg is a member of the House of Lords where she sits as a Crossbencher.

Finally, Amelia Fletcher OBE's second term as a Non-Executive Director has also been extended for a further year, up to 31 March 2020. She will also continue to serve as a Non-Executive Director and Senior Independent Director of the Payment Systems Regulator during this period. Amelia is Professor of Competition Policy at Norwich Business School and a Non-Executive Director of the Competition and Markets Authority.

John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, said:

Richard Lloyd's wealth of experience as a consumer expert will be a valuable contribution to the crucial work of the FCA, ensuring our financial sector keeps customers at the heart of how firms do business.

I am also delighted to re-appoint Baroness Sarah Hogg for a further three-year term, and to extend Amelia Fletcher's second term by a further year. Both Sarah and Amelia have brought considerable expertise to the FCA Board, and I am grateful for their continued contributions.

Charles Randell, FCA Chair, said:

Richard's proven expertise and deep experience of both consumer issues and financial services mean he is ideally placed to further reinforce the FCA Board's consideration of consumer needs. I know he will make a significant contribution and I look forward to working with him. I am also delighted that Sarah Hogg and Amelia Fletcher will continue to serve on the board.

About the Financial Conduct Authority

The Financial Conduct Authority is the conduct regulator for 58,000 financial

services firms and financial markets in the UK and the prudential regulator for over 18,000 of those firms.

The current FCA Board members are:

- Andrew Bailey – executive FCA Board member and Chief Executive
- Catherine Bradley – non-executive FCA Board member
- Amelia Fletcher OBE – non-executive FCA Board member
- Baroness Hogg – non-executive FCA Board member
- Rt Hon Ruth Kelly – non-executive FCA Board member
- Jane Platt CBE – non-executive FCA Board member
- Charles Randell CBE – Chair of the FCA
- Nick Stace – non-executive FCA Board member
- Sam Woods – non-executive FCA Board member
- Christopher Woolard – executive FCA Board member and Director of Strategy and Competition

[News story: New leader board to celebrate top apprenticeship employers](#)

Top employers who are helping to lead the ‘apprenticeship revolution’, get more people into skilled jobs and boost British business will be celebrated through a new leader board and quality mark, Education Secretary Damian Hinds announced today.

To mark National Apprenticeship Week (4 -8 March), an annual celebration of the transformative effect high-quality apprenticeships can have on people’s lives, the Education Secretary announced plans to create:

- A new leader board of top apprenticeship employers – the new rankings will be independently judged and published annually and are expected to rate the Top 100 large apprentice employers as well as the top 50 SMEs; and
- A new quality mark for apprenticeships – developed in partnership with Community Interest Company ‘Investors in People’ to shine a light on high-quality apprentice employers.

The new leader board will recognise and promote outstanding apprentice employers, encourage employers to improve the quality of their apprentice offer, and help potential apprentices and parents to easily identify opportunities with high performing employers. The quality mark will be a symbol for accredited employers to display and will serve as an assurance of excellence.

The government overhauled the apprenticeship system almost two years ago – working closely with leading businesses to design new high-quality

apprenticeship opportunities known as 'standards' so apprentices gain the skills that employers need to that will help them land great jobs or progress in their careers.

Apprenticeships are now longer, higher-quality, with more off-the-job training and a more rigorous assessment at the end. There are now more than 400 apprenticeship standards available in everything from accountancy, fashion and law to teaching, nursing and plumbing.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

We've transformed apprenticeships in this country. But that wouldn't have been possible without the employers who have been at the forefront of developing new high- quality apprenticeship opportunities that provide great training, and the employers who have embraced the huge benefits apprenticeships are bringing to their workplaces.

This National Apprenticeship Week, I want to celebrate their contribution – giving thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to learn new skills and secure an exciting career.

Almost 164,000 people started on one of the new higher quality apprenticeship standards in 2017/18, a more than six-fold increase on the previous year.

New analysis by the Department for Education has further underlined the importance employers are placing on apprenticeships after it showed that the top ten employers from the government's Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (AAN) employ a total of 47,000 apprentices; with an additional 100,000 apprenticeship opportunities in the pipeline. The AAN is a national network of around 500 employers across the country including Lloyds Banking Group, Gatwick Airport and Nissan.

Jason Holt CBE, Chairman of the AAN said:

It's absolutely crucial that we continue to connect more employers with apprenticeships. Apprenticeship Ambassador Network members have seen the huge benefits of apprenticeships for employers and individuals. Our advocacy role does have a definite impact on take-up with employers.

National Apprenticeship Week runs from 4 to 8 March 2019 and aims to highlight the benefits of apprenticeships to employers, individuals, local communities and the wider economy. The 'Blaze a Trail' themed week will see a range of activities and events being hosted across the country to celebrate apprenticeships.

In January, the Department for Education launched its new campaign 'Fire it

Up' to help challenge outdated perceptions of apprenticeships and raise awareness of the huge variety of apprenticeship options available for people of all ages and backgrounds.

The new campaign includes national TV and social media adverts, [and a new website](#) that provides helpful advice and information as well as access to thousands of apprenticeship opportunities across the country.

In April 2017 the government introduced the apprenticeship levy to create long term sustainable funding for apprenticeships. The levy is giving employers a real opportunity to invest in high-quality training, helping to grow their business and get the skilled workforce they need to thrive and succeed. Only around 2% of all employers in England pay the levy, but this investment has supported almost 50 per cent of all new apprenticeship starts in 2017/18.

Currently, levy-paying employers can transfer up to 10% of their annual apprenticeship funds to other employers if they choose. From April this will increase 25% to provide even greater flexibility for businesses to spend their funds, and so they can support smaller employers in their supply chain to provide high-quality apprenticeship training.

The government is transforming technical education so there are range of high- quality choices on offer post-16. This includes working with industry to create more high-quality apprenticeships opportunities for people of all ages, and introducing new T Levels from 2020 – the technical equivalent to A Levels –so that young people learn the skills and get the experience needed to land a great job in a skilled profession, go onto a higher level apprenticeship or university.

[Speech: A new report on the integrity of the justice system in combating corruption in Kosovo](#)

Dear Mr. Peci,

Dear Mr. Idrizi,

Dear Mr. Musliu,

Dear Mr. Myftaraj,

Dear Presidents of Courts, Chief Prosecutors, Judges, Prosecutors, representatives of public institutions, media representatives, civil society and all of you present.

Here we are – and we know why we are here. It has become something of a tradition to discuss these reports. In a way I am embarrassed, having seen Ehat's report, to say that, as the British Embassy and as the British Government, our priority is the fight against corruption and the strengthening of the fight against corruption in Kosovo. Because we all have heard about the results. But the time has come, and it is clear to me, and I believe it is also clear to you, that Kosovo is 100% responsible for the fight against corruption.

EULEX's exit from [its executive role in] Kosovo is something to be welcomed, because it is clear to us all, both for citizens and for international friends, who is now responsible for this fight in Kosovo. Responsibility is no longer divided with third parties and actors. Praise and criticism – both belong to you. And I must say something else. The international community is demanding something of Kosovo. It is not pleading, or offering to help Kosovo, but it is demanding. It is demanding of Kosovo not to become a nest of corruption and organised crime. Because a country from which money laundering originates, where there can be safe havens for this, poses a threat to us – it is a threat to Europe, and we will not accept it any more. And that means it is a threat to Kosovo. If Kosovo is perceived not to be on the side of justice, but on the other side, this will be very dangerous for Kosovo.

Since 2014, together with all of you I have attended these round tables. We have discussed a lot. We have demanded and promised performance and results. But, what are the results so far? Is there a high profile case that has been convicted, and resulted in an effective sentence of imprisonment, for corruption? Unfortunately, statistics show that there is not a single case. With such results and such punishments, and the impunity they create, an environment is created for corruption to flourish. With such a system, it is very difficult for Kosovo to make progress, provide a better life for its citizens and ensure economic development and integration into the European Union.

With these results – impunity and lack of convictions – the environment is very favourable for corruption to flourish. It will be hard for Kosovo to progress, to ensure a better livelihood for its citizens, economic development and European Union integration, with such a justice system.

The findings of this monitoring report continue to show that the fight against corruption remains a priority on paper only. In the last three years, according to the report, the courts have issued 58 indictments against 67 high-profile persons. At first glance, this seems promising. However, when one notes that all of these indictments ended in acquittals, this is disappointing. What is not working? We all see corruption. Why is it not being countered?

What was interesting for me personally was the statistic showing that only 12 high-profile people were indicted during their term of office, while in 55 other cases indictments were issued only after the suspect had completed his or her term of office. Does this mean that being in power serves as a shield against the judiciary?

Of all the indictments for corruption in the last three years, only one guilty verdict has resulted in a prison sentence, upheld by the Court of Appeal, in the case of the former Mayor of Klllokot. But even this was only a suspended sentence.

The report also shows the performance of each prosecutor, special prosecutor, and judge of first and second instance, in corruption cases. I won't comment on individual cases – you can read them for yourself. How is it comprehensible that not a single high profile corruption indictment was upheld by a court? Are indictments in high profile cases being filed intentionally by prosecutors to play political games, or is there a problem with the judges or a lack of courage? Because this is evidence of a culture of impunity, and this can no longer be sustained.

I do not believe there is further scope for complaints (excuses). Working conditions are not bad now. Kosovo has enough laws, but what is lacking is enforcement. And this is Kosovo's problem.

If undue political influence is so inevitable that you are failing to enforce laws to fight corrupt politicians, it's time for you to make way for others. It is time for those heroes of justice, the ones I have been talking about for the last three years, to come to the fore. I do know that there are many police officers, prosecutors and judges who are clean, qualified, professional, impartial, honest, and brave and it is time for them to come to the fore.

In one of these round tables, some time ago, we discussed whether all judges, prosecutors and police officers need to be subject to a detailed vetting process about their past.

We know that the vast majority of citizens do not trust the justice system, and are not satisfied with the services it provides. In this regard, we have discussed the need for a system to ensure integrity. I do not want to talk about "vetting". Vetting is a process. But for me it is very clear that every country, not just Kosovo, but every country in the world, needs a process, a mechanism, a structure through which it can prove that the justice system works with integrity. Not only with professionalism, not just with qualifications, but with constant integrity. And this is not a problem in Kosovo alone. Each country faces these problems. I do not want to blame anyone, but I think the problem was that in the 20 years since the conflict, no organisation has supplied Kosovo with such a structure. I think that would have helped a lot. So, it is a pleasure for us to cooperate with the Ministry of Justice with large project interventions, especially in this field. Not to impose something on Kosovo, but to help the structures, the Prosecutorial Council, the Judicial Council, the Ministry, the judicial system, with mechanisms that Kosovo can govern, and which Kosovo needs. We can help you as international partners. But this year, the time has passed, when we as internationals would take the responsibility for this. So we will stand by you. Because it is in the UK's interests for Kosovo to succeed in this fight. But now, the full responsibility must be taken by Kosovo. We will be there to help. But the time has come for results.

Thank you.