

Press release: Colliery tips in South Wales to be inspected over next 5 years

The Coal Authority has been awarded a 5 year contract by Natural Resources Wales to undertake tip and quarry inspections in South Wales.

News story: Changes to benefits for mixed age couples

When single people reach [State Pension age](#), they move from working age benefits to pension age benefits.

Currently, couples can choose to make that transition when the older partner of the couple reaches State Pension age.

In 2012, Parliament voted to modernise the system and change the rule for couples so that the transition takes place when the younger partner reaches State Pension age. This will ensure the younger partner is in the same circumstances as other people of the same age, regardless of the age of their partner.

The government announced today that the change will be introduced from 15 May 2019.

Mixed age couples with a partner under State Pension age already in receipt of [Pension Credit](#) or pension-age [Housing Benefit](#) at the point of change will be unaffected while they remain entitled to either benefit.

If a mixed age couple claim working age benefits, the pensioner partner will not be subject to work-based conditionality. Any work-based conditionality for the younger partner will be tailored to meet their circumstances.

The government laid the commencement order today (14 January 2019) that brings this change into force from 15 May 2019. The commencement order also sets out who will be exempt from this change.

News story: Independent Monitor, Julia Wortley, discusses her new role

New Independent Monitor for the DBS discusses safeguarding, meeting staff and disclosure processes.

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Striking a balance

Disclosing police information on DBS certificates requires the right balance to be struck between public protection, and the rights of individual applicants. Julia Wortley, our new Independent Monitor, explains where her role fits into ensuring this happens.

Julia says:

This is without doubt a challenging position, but one I am delighted to take on. I know the work of the DBS is vital in terms of helping people make safer recruitment decisions, and ultimately protects some of society's most vulnerable people.

In her role as Independent Monitor, Julia provides a fully independent element to the disclosure of police information for enhanced disclosure checks. Julia, who came into post in October, recently visited us at DBS to gain a greater insight into the work carried out.

It was lovely to come and visit the team – everyone was really welcoming. I am mindful that the disclosure process is a huge team effort involving hundreds of colleagues scattered across the UK, each fulfilling their respective roles in the different parts of the process.

Getting out and about

In addition to visiting DBS disclosure staff, Julia also visited Barring staff in November, and has been out and about spending time with various police Disclosure Units.

When working with a complicated and complex process, such as the disclosure regime, shared among different teams in different geographic locations, it is essential that we always keep effective two-way communication channels open.

Julia then added:

It is also really important that each party recognises and respects the role that others have to play in ensuring that the disclosure process is efficient, effective and accountable.

Explaining the process

Julia considers one of the significant challenges in disclosing information, is that it's often seen as a mysterious and complicated process.

In cases where an individual believes that information included by the police force is not relevant to the workforce applied for, or ought not to be disclosed, they should first contact the DBS in line with the [DBS disputes procedure](#).

The DBS will then work with the police to make a decision regarding the dispute.

If the police do not agree there is a mistake, the dispute will be referred to the Independent Monitor to carry out a review of the case.

Julia explains:

We are trying to apply a process consistently to every case, but each outcome will be different according to its own unique set of factors. Some time ago I was asked to consider "what makes a difficult decision." After careful thought, I concluded that the most difficult decisions all contain three of the following elements.

1. There will be, or could be, a significant impact on someone that flows directly from the decision
2. Not everyone will agree with you that you took the right decision
3. You don't necessarily have all the information or the quality of information you would like available to inform the decision

Julia believes that making decisions about what is included on an enhanced disclosure check, contains all three of the above elements. For this reason, the decisions are always difficult and challenging. She also understands that there is often a tension between quality and speed with which any task can be achieved.

Dedication and enthusiasm

When asked what she has taken from her first contact with the departments involved in delivering disclosure information, Julia says:

What has impressed me, in all the conversations I have had, is the huge dedication and enthusiasm of everyone involved in this invaluable work.

Julia is someone who describes her lifelong core objectives as upholding fairness, and protecting vulnerable people from harm. She believes her role as Independent Monitor fits perfectly with her deep-rooted commitment to both.

When considering what she wants to achieve in the future, Julia concludes:

It is my ambition to continue to work closely with the DBS, the police and wider Home Office to ensure that the enhanced disclosure process is as efficient, effective and compassionate as it possibly can be.

More information about the Independent Monitor and the post's statutory duties can be found here: [Role of the Independent Monitor](#) (PDF, 115KB, 1 page)

[Press release: Sir Alan Duncan statement on Guatemala and the CICIG](#)

Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan statement on the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala.