

News story: National Apprenticeship Awards 2017

In its fourteenth year, the National Apprenticeship Awards 2017 will search for England's top apprenticeship employers and apprentices; whilst recognising those individuals that make a significant contribution to apprenticeships.

The awards are open for entries for apprentices and apprentice employers to be named 'the best of the best' on a regional and national level, in 10 categories:

Employer Categories

- Small Employer of the Year (1 to 24 employees)
- Medium Employer of the Year (25 to 249 employees)
- Large Employer of the Year (250 to 4,999 employees)
- Macro Employer of the Year (5,000+ employees)
- Newcomer SME of the Year (up to 249 employees)
- Newcomer Large Employer of the Year (250+ employees)

Apprentice Categories

- Intermediate Apprentice of the Year
- Advanced Apprentice of the Year
- Higher or Degree Apprentice of the Year

Apprenticeship Champion

- Apprenticeship Champion of the Year

The Apprenticeship Champion of the Year is open to individuals who go above and beyond to champion Apprenticeships, this category includes apprentices themselves but is also open to those who have made a significant contribution to apprenticeships, for example, those individuals providing careers guidance and working in schools, colleges and other organisations.

Once again the very best employer category entries will also have the additional bonus of featuring in the prestigious annual Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers list.

Sue Husband, director of the National Apprenticeship Service said:

"These awards are a top accolade for all the hard work apprentices and employers are putting into apprenticeships. They are real examples of the many benefits apprenticeships bring to apprentices themselves and their employer. As winners 'the best of the best' gain public recognition for their achievements and really are inspiring ambassadors of apprenticeships.

"The 2016 National Apprenticeship Awards final, once again, showcased

fantastic talent, commitment and determination from everyone dedicated to improving skills through apprenticeships. We are looking forward to sharing and celebrating further successes for 2017.”

The application site has opened today (27 March 2017); apply online at apprenticeawards.co.uk. Guidance documents for employers and apprentices making applications are available to download from the awards application site. Only entries submitted through the online system will be accepted.

For those considering entering the 2017 awards – a series of webinars to find out more about the process will be announced shortly.

[News story: New Government Veterinary Services blog launched](#)

The Government Veterinary Services (GVS) [blog](#) is a place for government vets to share stories about the interesting and varied roles they undertake.

The blog’s aim is to raise awareness of the range of career options available to vets in government to inspire veterinary graduates and non-government vets to consider a government veterinary career.

Vets from all government departments in the United Kingdom (UK) can get involved and contribute a blog.

Vets have worked in government for more than 150 years, protecting the animals and people of the UK against disease threats, and helping to improve animal welfare.

There are more than 600 vets employed in a range of government departments across the UK, with the majority (approximately 350) being employed by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). Other departments include:

- The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Welsh Government
- Scottish Government
- The Food Standards Agency
- The Food Standards Agency Scotland
- The Ministry of Defence
- The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
- The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland)
- The Home Office
- The Defence, Science and Technology Laboratory
- Public Health England
- The Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Nigel Gibbens, UK Chief Veterinary Officer said:

Government Veterinary Services want to inspire veterinary graduates and vets in private practice to consider a career as a government veterinarian – there is no veterinary role that is wider in scope, impact and influence than that of a government vet.

As the Government's Chief Vet, I'm thrilled that the Government Veterinary Services has given us the opportunity to create a platform to demonstrate the important role we play in protecting the livelihoods of farmers, the health and welfare of their animals and public health across the country.

The blog can be viewed at <https://vets.blog.gov.uk/> and can also be accessed from the [Government Veterinary Services GOV.UK page](#), a portal for veterinarians to find out more about the work of government vets. GVS supports public sector veterinary professionals and promotes veterinary policy to other vets and the public. It works to attract and retain talented individuals to the profession and improve the skills and capability of veterinary professionals across government.

You can subscribe to the blog to receive [email updates](#) when new blogs are posted.

Press release: CMA continues crackdown on cartels

In the furniture parts case the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has [issued 2 decisions](#) finding 3 companies guilty of illegal cartel conduct and imposing fines totalling £2.8 million. This follows the earlier admission by the companies that they had broken competition law by agreeing not to compete on price and sharing out which customers they would supply – reducing customer choice and giving the appearance of competition where there was none.

Separately, the CMA is also publishing the [full text of its final decision](#) in its case against 5 model agencies and their trade association, which were fined over £1.5 million for colluding on prices.

Stephen Blake, Senior Director for Cartels, said:

Today's announcements highlight the CMA's drive to crack down on cartels, which cheat customers of the benefits of competition, as well as damaging the wider economy.

The announcements also come soon after the launch of our [first advertising campaign](#), specifically designed to encourage those who have witnessed or been involved in cartel activity to report it and help us keep business fair.

Without this kind of help, illegal cartel activity may go undetected for years, causing real harm to consumers, businesses and the economy.

Today's decisions in the furniture parts case follow [January's announcement](#) that Thomas Armstrong (Timber) Ltd and Hoffman Thornwood Ltd had agreed to pay fines totalling over £2.8 million after admitting market sharing, co-ordinating prices, bid-rigging and exchanging commercially sensitive information. Another company, BHK (UK) Ltd, also confessed its involvement in cartel activity shortly after the start of the investigation, and has not been fined as it was the first to come forward under the CMA's leniency policy.

- In one decision, the CMA found that between April 2006 and September 2008 BHK (UK) Ltd and Thomas Armstrong (Timber) Ltd took part in an illegal cartel in respect of the supply of chipboard and MDF based drawer wraps to the UK bedding, office and domestic furniture industry.
- In the second, the CMA found that between July 2006 and September 2008, and between at least September and October 2011, Thomas Armstrong (Timber) Ltd and Hoffman Thornwood Ltd took part in an illegal cartel in relation to the supply of chipboard and MDF based drawer fronts to the UK bedding industry.

The CMA's investigation into these companies was launched on the basis of information provided to the CMA's dedicated [cartels hotline](#).

Last week the CMA launched its first [advertising campaign](#) to encourage people who have witnessed or participated in illegal cartel activity to report it so it can take action to stamp it out.

Notes for editors

1. The Competition Act 1998 prohibits agreements, practices and conduct that may have a damaging effect on competition in the UK. The Chapter I prohibition covers anti-competitive agreements and concerted practices between businesses ('undertakings') which have as their object or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the UK. Article 101 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), covers equivalent agreements or practices which may affect trade between EU member states.
2. Any business found to have infringed the prohibitions in the Competition Act 1998 or the TFEU can be fined up to 10% of its annual worldwide group turnover. In calculating financial penalties, the CMA takes into

account a number of factors including seriousness and duration of the infringement(s), turnover in the relevant market and any mitigating and/or aggravating factors.

3. Thomas Armstrong (Timber) Ltd and its parent company Thomas Armstrong (Holdings) Ltd have been fined £1,509,000 for their involvement in the drawer wraps cartel and £684,000 for its involvement the drawer fronts cartel. The liability of Thomas Armstrong (Holdings) Ltd arises from the fact that it held 99.95% of the shares in Thomas Armstrong (Timber) Ltd during the relevant period, and is therefore presumed to have exercised decisive influence over Thomas Armstrong (Timber) Ltd and to form part of the same 'undertaking'.
4. Hoffmann Thornwood Ltd and its parent company Consolidated Timber Holdings Ltd have been fined £625,000 for their involvement in the drawer fronts cartel. The liability of Consolidated Timber Holdings Ltd arises from the fact that it held 100% of the shares in Hoffman Thornwood Ltd during the relevant period, and is therefore presumed to have exercised decisive influence over Hoffman Thornwood Ltd and to form part of the same 'undertaking'.
5. The fines imposed include a discount to reflect savings to the CMA resulting from the companies' admissions and co-operation with the investigation. The non-confidential version of today's infringement decisions, including the basis for the calculation of the fine, will be published on the [case page](#) in due course following the redaction of commercially sensitive information.
6. Further information on the model agency case, including a link to the CMA's published decision may be found on the [case page](#).
7. Anyone who has information about a cartel is encouraged to call the CMA cartels hotline on 020 3738 6888 or email cartelshotline@cma.gsi.gov.uk.
8. Under the CMA's [leniency policy](#) a business that has been involved in a cartel may be granted immunity from penalties or a significant reduction in penalty in return for reporting cartel activity and assisting the CMA with its investigation. An undertaking may qualify for immunity or a reduced penalty where it comes forward after the start of an investigation, has a genuine intention to confess that it has engaged in cartel conduct, and provides information that adds significant value to the CMA's investigation. Individuals involved in cartel activity may also in certain defined circumstances be granted immunity from criminal prosecution for the cartel offence under the Enterprise Act 2002.
9. The CMA also operates a [rewards policy](#) under which it may pay a financial reward of up to £100,000 in return for information which helps it to identify and take action against illegal cartels.
10. An individual or business affected by the anti-competitive behaviour in this case can rely on the CMA's infringement decision if making a claim in the courts for damages against the companies concerned. The level of any damages awarded will be for the court to determine.
11. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For more information see the [CMA's homepage](#).
12. The CMA crackdown on cartels campaign webpage is:

<https://stopcartels.campaign.gov.uk/>

13. For CMA updates, follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Flickr](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

14. Enquiries should be directed to Simon Belgard on 0203 738 6472 or press@cma.gsi.gov.uk.

News story: VMD on social media

We are now on Twitter and Facebook.

Look out for our tweets about forthcoming VMD news and events from [@vmdgovuk](#). In line with standard practice across Government we will not be replying to tweets. But we will be retweeting our stakeholders' messages and we'd like people to follow us too.

Our Facebook page is primarily to help us stop people trading veterinary medicines illegally by having Facebook remove such posts and to deter such criminal activity.

GOV.UK will remain our main channel for the important information you need to know about veterinary medicines. Social media messaging is not replacing this.

We will publish the VMD's protocol on social media on GOV.UK.

News story: Government commits to drawing up new guidance to support working mothers of premature babies.

- Guidelines will include advice on flexible working and requests for additional time off
- Key stakeholders will be invited to provide their views on best practice
- Guidance to be published on ACAS website shortly

To mark Mother's Day the Government is committing to ensure employers know how best to support working mothers who give birth to premature babies.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will work with the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), and invite the views of premature baby charities to develop guidelines for employers on how

to support their staff.

While the government expects employers to be compassionate and flexible during this difficult time, the guidance will make it easier for both working parents and employers to access advice.

The guidance will cover everything from how employers can offer flexible working arrangements following a premature birth to how to handle requests for additional time off. ACAS will publish the guidance on its website shortly.

Business Minister Margot James said:

While most employers treat their staff with compassion, it's incredibly important that they know how best to support their staff at what can be a very difficult time for working parents.

New and expectant mothers must feel confident of their rights in the workplace and this new guidance will go some way to offering those reassurances.

The UK's maternity system is one of the most generous in the world. Eligible mothers can take up to 52 weeks of leave and up to 39 weeks of pay.

The Government will keep the impact of these measures under review but does not rule out legislating in the future.

Further information

1. In 2014, the Government extended the right to ask for flexible working to all employees in work for more than 26 weeks. Previously only parents and carers had a right to request flexible working
2. Around 20 million people are now eligible to apply for flexible working, with an estimated 60,000 people a year already taking advantage of new working arrangements. Employers must have a sound business reason for rejecting any request.
3. Shared Parental Leave was introduced to give working families more flexibility to share childcare responsibilities.