

Press release: Reforms proposed to put consumers at the heart of UK competition regime

Business Secretary, Greg Clark, attended an event hosted by Lord Tyrie, the Chairman of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), at which the proposals were launched. These are its initial responses to a request from the Business Secretary last summer for Andrew Tyrie to review the system.

The reforms would be a boost for enterprise, not least by helping to ensure that companies which play by the rules are not disadvantaged by rivals who do not. And they would benefit consumers by enabling the CMA to intervene earlier and more robustly on their behalf.

The economy and businesses benefit when the relevant authorities can get to quicker decisions. The CMA's work is often slowed by a complex web of laws that have accumulated on the statute book over many decades. This is now even more of a problem, given today's growing digital economy and increasingly fast paced markets. Proposals are needed to tackle this.

The proposals also put the consumer at the heart of the UK competition regime. The CMA's ability to intervene earlier and more robustly on the side of people would be boosted by:

- a new statutory duty on the CMA, and courts applying competition and consumer laws, to treat the interests of consumers, and their protection from detriment, as paramount
- a new statutory duty on the CMA to conduct its investigations quickly, supported by powers to take action against firms supplying misleading or false information
- a statutory responsibility to address the adverse effect on the consumer in all aspects of the CMA's markets work

These and other reform proposals are being published today as part of the CMA's contribution to the Government's review of the competition regime and its ongoing reform work flowing from its Consumer Green Paper.

Andrew Tyrie, Chairman of the CMA, said:

The UK is an excellent place to do business, one in which innovation and dynamic companies can thrive. But the growth of new and rapidly emerging forms of consumer detriment, partly caused by digitisation, and the public's increasing doubt about whether markets work for their benefit, both now require a response.

We have an analogue system of competition and consumer law in a digital age. Similar observations are being made about comparable regimes elsewhere in the world.

Reform is essential. Hence these far reaching proposals, which will enable the CMA to act more rapidly, and put the consumer first, so as to make the CMA more effective in the third decade of the 21st century.

Business Secretary Greg Clark added:

These proposals provide a firm basis for further work. They are an encouraging step in the right direction and should now form part of the proposals on which we will consult in the competition review.

[News story: Designing new mobility traffic systems: Apply for funding](#)

The growth of new mobility technologies such as drones, electric vehicles and self-driving cars will bring new challenges for traffic networks across the country. To meet the potential of this technology, it is essential to design systems that future-proof the UK's transport infrastructure.

Innovate UK and Oxfordshire County Council have up to £250,000 for organisations to help develop a traffic management system that can accommodate both traditional vehicles and new mobility technologies throughout Oxfordshire.

This is a Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) competition, with funding from the GovTech Catalyst, which helps the public sector to identify and work with innovative businesses.

An integrated and interactive network

The new system must be able to collect data from numerous sources, including infrastructure owned by Oxfordshire County Council such as CCTV, traffic light control systems and number plate recognition.

To support data gathering, the system must:

- use information from sources on the Internet of Things and share this data with different teams and organisations
- allow Oxfordshire County Council to identify data gaps
- produce data metrics that can adapt to council policies, including changes in performance indicators

Applicants are encouraged to include solutions that:

- enable communication between traffic management and road users
- identify which modes of transport are being used
- explore integration with other council functions, such as emergency planning and social services
- integrate with artificial intelligence and machine learning

A 2-phase competition

The competition will comprise of 2 phases. In phase 1, organisations must develop a feasibility study, including the proposed architecture and estimates of ongoing costs and development. A total of £250,000 has been allocated to phase 1.

In the second phase, successful applicants will develop a test system to be installed at the Oxfordshire County Council's Urban Traffic Management Control Centre in Kidlington. Each applicant will receive up to £500,000 to develop their prototype and undertake field tests for 1 year.

Competition information

[Press release: Environment Agency Board member reappointed](#)

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, has reappointed Maria Adebawale-Schwarte for a second term on the Board of the Environment Agency. Maria's second term will run from 1 July 2019 until 30 June 2022.

All appointments to the Environment Agency Board are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. The reappointment complies with the Ministerial Governance Code on Public Appointments.

Board members provide non-executive leadership challenge and support to the Environment Agency's executive through regular Board meetings, committees and groups. They also undertake individual lead roles on relevant issues and with local operational teams.

The Environment Agency is a Non-Departmental Public Body set up under the Environment Act 1995 to take an integrated approach to environmental protection and enhancement in England. It has major responsibilities in flood management, water resources and quality, climate change, land quality, chemicals, pollution prevention and control, waste, conservation and biodiversity, fisheries conservation, air quality and navigation.

There is a requirement for appointees' political activity (if significant) to

be declared. Maria has confirmed that she has not undertaken any significant political activity during the past five years.

Environment Agency Board members receive remuneration of £350 per day. Maria will receive £16,800 per year based on a time commitment of four days per month.

Biographical details

Maria Adebowale-Schwarte

Maria is an urban place and cities strategist, focusing on the environment, local economic and social prosperity, green spaces, cross-sector collaboration and community participation. She is currently the Director of Living Space Project, an urban place making and green space think tank and consultancy. Maria is also an adviser to charitable foundations and grant-makers.

Maria was the first recipient of the Clore Social Leadership Environment Fellowship and her prior appointments include Commissioner of the UK Sustainable Development Commission and Commissioner of English Heritage. She has served on a number of advisory committees for Defra, MHCLG, Natural England, Big Lottery Fund, Joint Ministerial Task Force on Climate Change and Nesta and was a member of the Raynsford Review of Planning task force.

Maria is on the board of the Heritage Lottery Fund, a Commissioner on the Mayor of London's Sustainable Development Commission and an Affiliate Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

[Press release: MOD Sealand to be innovation hotbed for Defence](#)

The two MOD executive agencies have agreed to look at various new, innovative ways in which they can work together across a range of science, technology and engineering areas to make MOD equipment programmes more cost effective, more resilient for longer and better suited to the operational needs of the UK Armed Forces, in particular.

Dstl has set up a 'pathfinder' function within DECA's main facility at MOD Sealand to begin planning for the rapid establishment of a joint Dstl/DECA collaboration team. This will see staff from both organisations taking part in exchanges, apprenticeship opportunities, education, continuing professional development, 'best practice' benchmarking visits and inter-Agency networking.

Over time they intend to find new ways of working to support the UK

Government's Prosperity Agenda through collaboration with industry, wider Government and the devolved Governments of the UK, as well as allied and partner nations.

Gary Aitkenhead, Dstl Chief Executive, commented:

This is an exciting venture and will further enable Dstl to optimise and expand its capacity and capability through working with our strategic partners. It also provides Dstl with a firm presence in North Wales with significant opportunities for our employees and those seeking a science and technology career in the region. We will also be looking to grow our supply chain network in the North West and in Wales, and look forward to developing relationships with high quality business there.

Geraint Spearing, DECA Chief Executive, said:

This initiative provides both Agencies with a fantastic opportunity to collaborate in supporting UK MOD and deliver effective, sustainable solutions into the future. We are looking forward to working closely with Dstl through this partnership, focussing not only on technologies and support solutions, but also importantly on skills development which is high on our agenda both regionally and nationally.

DECA has a long and illustrious history in providing specialised services in support of UK Defence ensuring delivery of repair, maintenance, overhaul, upgrade and managed services for in-service and future military platforms across Defence. Most recently, securing a further £500m assignment to provide pivotal avionics and aircraft component support to the RAF and Royal Navy's new F-35 fast jet aircraft which will fly from RAF Marham and the UK's two new aircraft carriers.

Dstl is an executive agency of MOD, run along commercial lines. It is one of the principal government organisations dedicated to science and technology in the Defence and security field, with six sites: at Porton Down, near Salisbury; Portsmouth West, near Portsmouth; Fort Halstead, near Sevenoaks; Sandridge, near St Albans; Langhurst, near Horsham; and, Alverstoke, near Gosport. Dstl works with a wide range of partners and suppliers in industry, in academia and overseas.

[News story: Consultation on awarding organisation controls for centre assessments](#)

Ofqual has today (25 February 2019) published [a consultation on proposed changes to the way awarding organisations manage and oversee centre assessments](#). These changes are intended to ensure that appropriate controls are in place so that standards are consistent, whenever and wherever an assessment is taken.

Our rules allow awarding organisations to devolve some responsibility for assessments to schools, colleges and training centres, including through a practice commonly known as Direct Claims Status. However, we have found evidence to show that the variety of approaches currently in place to manage this provide different levels of oversight. We have also found that the terms 'moderation' and 'verification' are often used interchangeably and inconsistently with our rules.

[This consultation](#) recognises that centre assessment is central to the way many different qualifications function, and does not look to end it. Instead, we propose to:

- clarify our existing definition of moderation, and provide a new, separate definition for verification
- require awarding organisations to produce centre assurance strategies that explain how their centre assessment arrangements work
- set minimum requirements in certain qualifications
- set minimum requirements for awarding organisation verification processes, including a minimum of two monitoring visits and an additional unannounced visit per centre every year

Sally Collier, Chief Regulator, said:

We have conducted a detailed review of the use of centre assessment and believe that there are risks that can be managed better. We know that there are circumstances in which learners and employers can benefit from centre assessment, particularly in terms of the potential speed a qualification can be awarded. But the controls that awarding organisations have in place with centres must be sufficiently robust for the public to have confidence that assessment standards are being maintained between training providers and over time.

Ailin O'Cathain, Head of Policy, Federation of Awarding Bodies, said:

We welcome the opportunity to feed back on the proposals on

Moderation and Verification of centre assessments. We will be working closely with our members in the coming weeks to gather their views and feed back on the proposals. It will be important to view the proposals in relation to the validity of qualifications, which is something our members are committed to.

It will also be important to focus on the manageability of the proposed requirements. We will need to ensure they add value without placing a disproportionate burden on awarding organisations or the centres we work with.

Mark Dawe, Chief Executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said:

While to many it sounds like a technicality, the differences between verification and moderation are critical, particularly in terms of the timely confirmation of apprentices and students achievements. Ofqual have been very clear in their proposed approach and the potential issues.

As well as the regulatory approach, assessment organisations will need to commit to process speeds, whatever form of assessment is used.

We are interested in hearing from anyone concerned with how qualifications are assessed, including awarding organisations, training providers, business groups, colleges, trade bodies, schools organisations, employer partnerships and learners.

Those who are involved in centre assessment will also be an important source of feedback, and we particularly welcome their input.

[The consultation](#) is open until 20 May 2019.

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