

News story: Fairer pay for criminal defence advocates in legal aid cases

The reformed Advocates' Graduated Fee Scheme (AGFS) will ensure that pay better reflects the actual work being done by criminal defence advocates and that advocates are being fairly remunerated for work in more complex cases.

The changes will bring the scheme in line with modern practices, taking into account the fact that more and more evidence is submitted electronically.

The process of determining fees will be simplified so that advocates can better understand how they will be paid for their work before they take on a case.

The new scheme is part of ongoing reforms to deliver a modern and effective justice system, whilst ensuring that legal aid is available in cases where it is most needed.

A Ministry of Justice spokesperson said:

These changes will create a simpler and more modern pay system for defence advocates in legal aid-funded criminal cases.

We have listened to the views of legal professionals to ensure that advocates will be paid in a way that better reflects the reality of the work they do.

The government previously consulted on the fee proposals and has taken on feedback from professionals to help shape the scheme.

Significant changes have been made to the original proposals to ensure that the vital contribution of junior barristers and solicitor advocates is better recognised in the new scheme.

The changes will come into effect on 1 April 2018 and will keep spend on fees at the current level, so that the reforms come at no additional cost to the tax payer.

Notes

The [AGFS consultation response](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

News story: CCTV in slaughterhouses: Legislation laid in Parliament

Legislation to make CCTV cameras mandatory in slaughterhouses in England to safeguard animal welfare has been laid today (23 February) by Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

The legislation will come into effect from May 2018, once it passes through Parliament, at which point businesses will have six months to comply.

In August 2017, the Secretary of State [launched a consultation](#) on the plans to deliver a manifesto commitment for CCTV to be required in every slaughterhouse in England in all areas where live animals are present, with unrestricted access to footage for Official Veterinarians – reassuring consumers that high welfare standards are being effectively enforced.

A [summary of responses](#) published in November showed that of almost 4,000 respondents, more than 99% were supportive of the plans.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

We have some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world and want to cement our status as a global leader by continuing to raise the bar.

Introducing compulsory CCTV cameras in slaughterhouses is a further demonstration to consumers around the world that as we leave the EU, we continue to produce our food to the very highest standards.

The previous reaction to the consultation highlighted the strength of feeling among the public that all animals should be treated with the utmost respect at all stages of life and be subject to the highest possible welfare standards.

The proposals will also give the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) Official Veterinarians (OVs) unfettered access to the last 90 days of footage to help them monitor and enforce animal welfare standards.

The FSA has strict processes in place for the approval of slaughterhouses, and specially trained vets carry out checks to make sure the welfare of animals is protected throughout their time in the slaughterhouse. If breaches are found, a slaughterhouse can be given a welfare enforcement notice, have its staff's licences suspended or revoked, or be referred for a criminal investigation.

Heather Hancock, Chairman of the Food Standards Agency, said:

I welcome this new legislation being introduced. It will help businesses to improve animal welfare and hygiene standards across the industry.

We look forward to working with the industry as CCTV plans are implemented, and to seeing public confidence rise as a result.

Businesses will have six months to comply with this legislation once it has passed through Parliament. The penalty for failing to comply will be an enforcement notice to the business or prosecution.

1. Read the [‘Mandatory Closed Circuit Television \(CCTV\) recording in slaughterhouses: Summary of responses and Government response’](#)
2. For more information on this story, contact the Defra press office on 020 8225 7318.

Speech: Chloe Smith writes about votes for life for British expats

Today (Friday 23 February) we'll be debating the Overseas Electors Bill, introduced by Conservative Glyn Davies MP. I hope it will command cross-party support, alongside the firm support of the government.

The Bill sets out to end the current 15-year time limit on British expats voting back at home in the UK. At the moment, British citizens who live overseas find themselves abruptly disenfranchised after they have lived abroad for 15 years, even where they still feel closely connected to our country and want to take part in elections that can affect them like any other citizen. To many, this has been a terrible injustice.

As well as removing the time limit on the right to vote for UK citizens living abroad, we intend to enfranchise any British expats who were previously resident or registered to vote in the UK. Currently, only British citizens who were registered to vote before leaving the UK may apply to become overseas electors. The bill is seeking to change this. These changes are part of the Government's wider ambition to strengthen the foundation of democracy and continually increase voter registration by ensuring every voter's voice is heard.

British expats – under existing laws – are estimated to have among the lowest level of voter registration of any group, with only around 20% of eligible expats registered to vote for the June 2017 general election.

We think it's right to encourage everyone to register to vote, and that's why, last December, the government launched the first ever Democratic Engagement Plan to tackle democratic exclusion and outline how it will increase participation among under-registered groups. The Plan set out how we are launching National Democracy Week to promote democratic engagement and identifying the barriers faced by specific groups that are currently under-represented on the electoral register.

In 2014, we introduced online electoral registration which has already made it much easier for overseas electors to register to vote – and they have done so in ever increasing numbers. The latest figures from June 2017 showed that the highest ever total of overseas citizens registered to vote but potentially around one million have not registered. So I am proud this government is doing more to enfranchise our fellow citizens overseas and make it easier for them to take part in our elections.

Participation in our democracy is a fundamental part of being British, no matter how far you have travelled from the UK. Expats retain strong links with the United Kingdom: they may have family here, and indeed they may plan to return here in the future. Modern technology and cheaper air travel has transformed the ability of expats to keep in touch with their home country. Crucially, decisions taken by the UK government still affect them, such as pensions policy or foreign affairs choices. These are our fellow citizens and they have every right to be involved in our country and its choice of government.

Of course, following the British people's decision to leave the EU, we need to strengthen ties with countries around the world and show the UK is an outward-facing nation. Our expat community has an important role to play in helping Britain expand international trade, especially given two-thirds of expats live outside the EU.

I am grateful to the many campaigners over the years who have asked for this rule to be changed, with dignity and passion. The Government pledged in our manifesto to make this change and I'm proud to deliver it. But it should be an aim we all share across parties. I will work closely with Mr Davies and everyone in Parliament, of any party, who wants to help every citizen of this country to register to vote and use their voice.

[News story: Government commits £1.8 million to fund innovation in aviation security](#)

Cutting-edge security technology could mean passengers see shorter queues and faster, more effective airport screening processes.

Eight projects have been awarded £1.8 million in government funding to develop innovative technology, which has the potential to bolster airport security while also speeding up the screening process for passengers.

The projects all apply novel approaches to aviation security which have the potential to improve threat detection capabilities. In addition to improving security, some of the projects have the potential to reduce the length of time passengers spend undergoing security checks.

One of the successful recipients of the funding is a small team based in Derbyshire, Security Screening Technologies, whose project uses sophisticated imaging to scan shoes for explosive materials.

The step-on shoe scanner being developed by the company can rapidly form high-contrast images of footwear which can then be analysed by computers that have been 'taught' to recognise threats. Any shoes which are flagged as having areas of concern could then undergo secondary screening.

The project could ultimately mean that passengers would no longer need to remove their shoes before going through airport central search, leading to reduced queuing times and a more customer-friendly experience.

Aviation Minister Baroness Sugg said:

This latest £1.8 million of funding invests in innovative projects that will ensure we are continuing to capitalise on pioneering research. The aim is to have a safer and smoother travel experience for air passengers.

The safety of people travelling on all modes of transport is our top priority and the Future Aviation Security Solutions programme is just one example of the huge importance we place on the security of passengers.

We have a proud history of the early adoption and use of cutting edge technology and this programme is helping to ensure we continue to lead the way in airport security.

The funding is part of the 5-year [Future Aviation Security Solutions \(FASS\)](#) programme, a multi-million pound initiative which seeks new solutions to strengthen aviation security.

It will go towards supporting a range of projects with pioneering ideas to reduce security threats in airports. These include the use of electromagnetic imaging to detect items of concern in luggage, filtering samples of gas taken from cargo containers to test for explosives, and using machine learning techniques to identify threats on people and in bags.

A joint Department for Transport and Home Office programme, FASS works closely with industry to fund research and encourage innovation.

Security Minister, Ben Wallace said:

We are determined to harness the power of innovation and this ambitious programme will help us continue to use the best technologies as part of our aviation security.

Our work in this area is just one example of how the government is supporting industry, academia and small enterprises to improve our resilience and strengthen our defences against terrorism.

Another of the successful recipients of the funding is a team based in Wales called Sequestim who have designed an alternative walk-through people screening system. State of the art technology within the device could reduce the need for manual checks and mean passengers do not have to remove outer clothing.

The project could also benefit passengers by speeding up the screening process and reducing the risk of false alarms which can cause disruption to passengers and screening processes.

As passengers move past a highly-sensitive camera, the natural radiation from their bodies is measured and turned in to an image. Computer learning can be applied to detect the presence of any threat the passenger may be carrying.

Each project team will have 12 months to develop their technology into a fully functioning prototype that could be trialled at airports.

News story: Work under way on Phase One of HS2 a year on from Royal Assent

- on the first anniversary of Royal Assent for Phase One of HS2 (23 February 2018), work is under way between London and the West Midlands to build Britain's future railway
- £70 million of funding has begun to be distributed to those affected by the railway construction
- over £13 million of homeowner payments remain unclaimed and are still available for those living near the Phase One route in rural areas

Just one year after Her Majesty the Queen granted Royal Assent for Phase One of HS2, significant work is under way in preparation for Britain's new high speed railway line, with over £13 million of homeowner payments still available for those living along the route.

The government is encouraging eligible homeowners in rural areas to [apply for](#)

[a payment under the Homeowner Payment \(HOP\) scheme](#) which launched on February 23 last year – the same day that Parliament approved the [High Speed Rail \(London – West Midlands\) Hybrid Bill](#).

The scheme was set up as a way of sharing the future economic benefits of the railway with local people. Over £7 million of payments have already been made under the HOP scheme, with more than £13 million still to be claimed.

Nusrat Ghani, HS2 Minister, said:

HS2 will be the backbone of our national rail network – improving vital links between some of our biggest cities, driving forward economic growth and regeneration and helping us build a Britain fit for the future.

One year on from Royal Assent we are making real progress, with significant contracts boosting jobs and prosperity whilst we ensure the new railway is not limited to providing faster, better journeys for passengers, but leaves a lasting legacy of improvements along the route for generations to come.

Over £7million has already been paid to homeowners living near Phase One of the route under the HOP scheme. I urge those who are eligible to take full advantage of the £13 million still available under the scheme to ensure the future economic benefits of the railway are shared with rural communities affected by the line.

Construction has already begun along the Phase One route, which will run from London to the West Midlands and is due to be mostly completed by 2025. The first train services are expected to run on the line from 2026.

Enabling work has already begun, contracts for the main civil engineering works including bridges, tunnels, embankments, viaducts and station designs have been awarded, and procurement of the Euston master development partner and London stations, rolling stock and rail systems contracts are under way.

In addition, £70 million of funding has begun to be distributed to those affected by the railway construction, with more funding available for communities and businesses.

Mark Thurston, Chief Executive of HS2 Ltd said:

Since Royal Assent there has been significant progress at HS2 in developing our capability to deliver Europe's largest infrastructure project, and our focus is on designing and preparing the way for the new railway.

Over the last year HS2 has awarded major contracts that will support 14,000 jobs, the National College for High Speed Rail opened its doors to train the future members of our industry, all

alongside a major programme of early works.

As construction work continues to ramp up, we remain acutely aware of our responsibilities to those communities that we impact. Minimising disruption is at the heart of our design, while we retain our aim of creating a 'green corridor' consisting of new woodland, wildlife habitats and new amenity facilities to leave a lasting legacy of high quality green spaces all along the route, including the planting of 7 million trees.

Since Royal Assent:

- enabling works are under way in various locations along the line of route – these include archaeological work uncovering the hidden history of Britain, extensive environmental works to mitigate the impact of the railway on the countryside, site clearance and essential utility works
- first recipients of the £40 million [Community and Environment Fund \(CEF\)](#) and [Business and Local Economy Fund \(BLEF\)](#) have been awarded funding for projects along the Phase One line of route, with a further £5 million made available for communities along the HS2 Phase 2a route from the West Midlands to Crewe
- allocations for local authorities under the £30 million Road Safety Fund have been announced, delivering high quality road and cycle safety projects to ensure that England's roads remain among the safest in the world
- the £5 million [Woodland Fund](#) has opened for applications, helping local landowners create new native, broadleaf woodlands and enhance existing woodland sites
- main works civils contracts worth an estimated £6.6 billion awarded to construct the bridges, tunnels, embankments and viaducts needed to drive economic growth and provide seamless journeys
- station design contracts have been awarded, appointing leading creative firms to ensure passengers on our world-class railway will experience modern and accessible stations
- procurement processes are under way for the Euston master development partner, London stations construction contracts, rolling stock contract and rail systems contracts
- land assembly programme is under way
- first temporary track closures necessary for the on-network works have taken place
- Old Oak Common depot decommissioning is under way

HS2 will create around 25,000 jobs during construction as well as 2,000 apprenticeships. It will also support growth in the wider economy, worth an additional 100,000 jobs.