

News story: Asylum Accommodation: Call for Evidence.

The ICIBI has begun work on an inspection of the provision of accommodation to asylum seekers as provided for by Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The evidence gathering process has started, and the ICIBI will be asking its established stakeholders for their input. However, the Independent Chief Inspector is also keen to receive written evidence from anyone with relevant knowledge, expertise or experience of the areas set out below.

The ICIBI is interested in evidence of good and bad practice, and in particular of any developments since the publication of the Home Affairs Committee report on asylum accommodation in January 2017.

Please email the Chief Inspector:

ICIBordersandImmigration@icinspector.gsi.gov.uk

or write to:

ICIBI
5th Floor
Globe House
89 Eccleston Square
London SW1V 1PN

Deadline for submissions: 4 March 2018

The areas the ICIBI plans to examine will include:

- Initial allocation of asylum accommodation
- Dispersal policy and practice
- Accommodation Standards
- Handling of asylum decisions

In order to assess how well the Home Office manages the needs of vulnerable individuals, the inspection will focus on the treatment of pregnant women and new mothers. However, the call for evidence extends to all groups.

The Independent Chief Inspector calls for evidence on the provision of asylum accommodation.

News story: 'Far too many serious pollution incidents' says Environment Agency water quality report

Environment Agency Chair, Emma Howard Boyd has called on water companies and farmers to cut the amount of pollution incidents harming England's waters and for penalties to be made tougher, as the EA publishes [The State of the Environment: Water Quality](#) report today.

Although the number of serious incidents has fallen by almost two thirds since 2001, the report reveals that 317 occurred in 2016. Agriculture is now the largest sector responsible for water pollution, while the number of serious incidents by water companies has remained at around 60 per year for the past decade – more than one a week.

The report shows that water quality has improved markedly over the last 30 years, following more than a century of poorly regulated industrial practices. England has the cleanest bathing waters since records began and rivers that were biologically dead are reviving. But there is more work to do to achieve the Environment Agency's ambition of a cleaner, healthier and better managed water environment

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

Water quality is better than at any time since the Industrial Revolution thanks to tougher regulation and years of hard work by the Environment Agency and others.

But there are still far too many serious pollution incidents which damage the local environment, threaten wildlife and, in the worst cases, put the public at risk.

I would like to see fines made proportionate to the turnover of the company and for the courts to apply these penalties consistently. Anything less is no deterrent.

The report reveals that the Environment Agency has taken more than 50 million samples to monitor water quality over the past 20 years. In 2016, 76% of the tests used to measure the health of rivers were rated good. However, only 14% of rivers reached good ecological status overall – this is because the failure of one test means the whole water body fails to obtain good or better status.

The most common reason for rivers not achieving good status was phosphorus, which produces algae and depletes oxygen. More than half of rivers have been found to have unacceptable levels of phosphorus, caused by sewage effluent and pollutants from farmland.

The report also states that groundwaters have been deteriorating in quality over the last 60 years with only 53% achieving good chemical status in 2016.

Defra's [25-year environment plan](#) sets out a challenge to improve at least three quarters of waters so that they are close to their natural state. The report identifies population growth, climate change and plastic pollution as some of the potential threats to water quality in future.

It calls on businesses and the public to do more to protect the environment by disposing of household chemicals responsibly, not putting fats and oils down the drain, and minimising use of single-use plastics.

[Read the State of the Environment: Water Quality report](#)

[News story: Prime Minister launches major review of post-18 education](#)

Driving up quality, increasing choice and ensuring value for money are at the heart of a major review of post-18 education, launched by the Prime Minister today (19 February).

The UK already has a globally recognised higher education system, with record rates of young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, going to university. Work is also underway to transform technical education post-16 by introducing new T levels – providing high quality technical qualifications to rival traditional academic options – and overhauling apprenticeships to help provide the skills our economy needs for the future.

Although significant progress has been made, it is clear that the current post-18 system is not working as well as it could be – for young people or for the country. The review will ensure that post-18 education is giving everyone a genuine choice between high quality technical, vocational and academic routes, students and taxpayers are getting value for money and employers can access the skilled workforce they need.

Speaking at Derby College, a further education college which offers apprenticeships and higher level learning, the Prime Minister warned against “outdated attitudes” that favour academic over technical qualifications and pledged to use the review to look at “the whole post-18 education sector in the round, breaking down false boundaries between further and higher education, to create a system which is truly joined up.”

The wide-ranging review will be informed by independent advice from an expert panel from across post 18 education, business and academia chaired by Philip Augar, a leading author and former non-executive director of the Department for Education. It will focus on the following four areas:

- Choice: identifying ways to help people make more effective choices between the different options available after 18, so they can make more informed decisions about their futures. This could include more information about the earning potential of different jobs and what different qualifications are needed to get them, as well as ensuring they have access to a genuine range of high quality academic, technical or vocational routes.
- Value for money: looking at how students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies, to ensure funding arrangements across post-18 education in the future are transparent and do not stop people from accessing higher education or training.
- Access: enabling people from all backgrounds to progress and succeed in post-18 education, while also examining how disadvantaged students receive additional financial support from the government, universities and colleges.
- Skills provision: future-proofing the economy by making sure we have a post-18 education system that is providing the skills that employers need. This is crucial in boosting the UK economy and delivering on the government's Industrial Strategy.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Our post-18 education system has many strengths. It has a fantastic global reputation, we have record rates of disadvantaged students going to university and we are transforming technical education so employers have access to the skills they need.

However, with a system where almost all institutions are charging the same price for courses – when some clearly cost more than others and some have higher returns to the student than others – it is right that we ask questions about choice and value for money. We also need to look at the balance between academic study and technical education to ensure there is genuine choice for young people and that we are giving employers access to a highly skilled workforce.

Chair of the post -18 education review panel Philip Augar said:

I am delighted to chair this crucial review and to work alongside an excellent panel experienced in many different parts of the tertiary education sector. A world class post-18 education system has never been more important to business, society and the economy. We will be focused on ensuring that the system meets those needs by

driving up access, quality, choice and value for money for students of all kinds and taxpayers.

I look forward to engaging widely with students, business, and providers across the post-18 education landscape. This is a wide open and far reaching review. We begin with no preconceptions and our first priority will be a serious examination of the evidence and hearing from a broad range of stakeholders who like us are committed to ensuring the system works for everyone.

Philp Augar will be supported by five panel members from across the post-18 education landscape. They are:

- Bev Robinson – Principal of Blackpool and The Fylde College. She has over 20 years' experience in Further and Higher education colleges in England and has been Awarded an OBE for her services to FE.
- Edward Peck – Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University since August 2014. Previously, Professor Peck worked at the University of Birmingham as Director of the Health Services Management Centre and subsequently became Head of the School of Public Policy in 2006.
- Alison Wolf – (Baroness Wolf of Dulwich) a cross-bench peer in the House of Lords, and author of the influential Wolf Review of Vocational Education, published in 2011. She has advised the House of Commons select committee on education and skills as well as the OECD, the Ministries of Education of New Zealand, France and South Africa, and the European Commission among others.
- Sir Ivor Martin Crewe – Master of University College, Oxford and President of the Academy of Social Sciences. He is the former Chair of the 1994 Group and President of Universities UK.
- Jacqueline De Rojas – President of techUK and the chair of the Digital Leaders board. She also serves on the government's Digital Economy Council and was awarded a CBE for Services to International Trade in Technology in the Queen's New Year Honours list 2018.

The government's reforms to the higher education system, implemented through the new Office for Students, are going further than ever before to deliver for young people. This includes holding universities to account for the teaching and outcomes they deliver and shining a light on institutions that need to do more to widen access from disadvantaged groups.

In October last year, the Prime Minister announced that the government would freeze tuition fees for 2018/19 and increase the amount graduates can earn to

£25,000 before they start repaying their fees, putting money back into the pockets of graduates.

Neil Carberry, CBI Managing Director for People and Infrastructure, said:

Businesses will be looking to the review to build on the strengths of our world-leading university sector and on the role further education plays in supporting the industrial strategy.

Maintaining a strong independent funding stream to universities through fees will be key, but there are important issues to address. These include the drop in part-time study, maintenance support for the most disadvantaged students and improving the provision of higher technical education. We look forward to working with the review team.

David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges said:

I am very pleased that the Review is looking at the whole system of post-18 education funding. The growth in higher education numbers and the widened access has almost exclusively been for young people taking traditional 3 year undergraduate degrees. That is good news for our economy and for society, and must not be damaged going forward.

However, that very growth has been at the expense of adequate and fair investment in the 50% of young people who leave education at 18 and who want to study to higher levels later. Their opportunities have been hampered because of the lack of attention, leading to fewer chances, less funding and a lack of support for them to learn whilst working.

The panel's report will be published at an interim stage and the review will conclude in early 2019.

Read the Prime Minister's speech in full [here](#).

The full terms of reference are available [here](#).

Philip Augar – Panel Chair Biography:

- Financial services expert and author.
- Had twenty-year career in the City as an equities broker (1970s-2000): led NatWest's global equity and fixed income division and was most recently Group Managing Director at Schroders with responsibility for the securities business.

- He was a non-executive board member at the Department for Education from 2004-2010 and at the Home Office from 2010-2014, where he was also Chairman of UK Border Agency in the months leading to its break up in 2013.
- He was a member of the cross-party Future of Banking Commission chaired by David Davis MP in 2010 and the same year advised the Scottish Parliament's inquiry into the banking crisis.
- He was an independent non-executive at KPMG and was a board member of the retail bank TSB plc.
- He holds a doctorate in History and is a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Historical Research.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary calls for international effort to tackle wildlife crime](#)

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson visited the Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit (WCU) facility in London today (Monday 19 February) to see illegally traded wildlife products seized by the Met Police before they could be sold on the black market in the UK.

Many of the cases the WCU deals with involve cross-border smuggling and require police collaboration with international agencies, underlining the need for greater international cooperation to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.

The Foreign Secretary saw items seized in successful WCU operations. This includes the recent Abbas Allawi case, where Met Police raided a Watford property using trained search dogs and found wildlife goods with a street value of over £1 million stashed in his attic.

The Foreign Secretary was shown items including seven rhino horns weighing over 16kg, and dozens of raw ivory tusks and carved ivory specimens as well as animal trophies including a stuffed lion's head and tiger skins. He heard how there is online demand for primates, including severed monkey hands turned into trinkets and monkey skulls.

During the visit the Foreign Secretary said:

When we think of the illegal wildlife trade, the slaughter of elephants, rhinos and other species teetering on the brink of extinction, we think of Africa, Asia and distant countries where some think this acceptable. We rarely associate this crime with our own shores. To say I was angry to see the haul of ivory, rhino horns, animal furs and other items in the gross menagerie of seized illegal animal products in London is an understatement.

This is not just a crime taking place overseas. Criminal lowlifes operate right here in the UK and the Met Police and other forces are working to stop them in their tracks. Criminal gangs trafficking wildlife across UK borders will not be permitted to operate with impunity, but this requires a global effort, tackling both the supply and demand of this odious trade.

We will not let up our efforts to ensure that future generations can share our planet with rhinos and elephants and that the criminals who seek to harm them face justice.

The Foreign Secretary also learned about a new technique for taking fingerprints from ivory. The technique was tested on ivory from the WCU facility from previous seizures, and it increases the chances of building a legal case against perpetrators.

This follows on from the Foreign Secretary's recent visit to Asia where he viewed illegally trafficked ivory and pangolin scales seized by Thai customs.

In October the UK will host an international conference on the illegal wildlife trade, bringing together global leaders to work to end wildlife crime.

Further information

[News story: Non-executive Director of NS&I has contract extended](#)

The government has extended James Furse's contract as a Non-executive Director on the board of NS&I for a further year, up to 31 December 2018. James is a Non-executive Director of Ageas UK Insurance and prior to joining the NS&I board in January 2012, he was Managing Director of John Lewis Partnership financial services. Non-executive members of NS&I's board ensure a sound strategy is in place to meet the organisation's remit of raising cost-effective debt financing for the government. They also act as an external source of advice, with oversight of risk control and ensuring NS&I's links with its outsourcing partner, Atos, remain open and transparent. NS&I

is one of the largest savings organisations in the UK, offering a range of savings and investments to 25 million customers. All products offer 100% capital security because NS&I is backed by HM Treasury.

Further information

The current NS&I board members are:

- Ed Anderson – Non-executive Director and Chairman of the board
- Ian Ackerley – Chief Executive
- Peter Cornish – Director, Risk
- Dax Harkins – Director, B2B
- Jill Waters – Acting Director, Retail
- Rodney Norman – Director, Finance
- Mark Keene – Acting Director, Partnership
- Sarah Tebbutt – Director, People and Strategy
- James Furse – Non-executive Director
- Sharmila Nebhrajani OBE – Non-executive Director
- Christopher Fisher – Non-executive Director
- Mario Pisani – HM Treasury representative