

Press release: More legal aid support for victims of domestic violence

The current 5 year time limit on abuse evidence in the family courts will be scrapped, while the range of documents accepted as evidence of abuse will be widened to include statements from domestic violence support organisations and housing support officers. The changes will come into effect from January.

The move represents the latest step to protect and support victims of domestic abuse. Earlier this year the government announced a £17 million fund to support 41 projects across the country to tackle violence against women and girls.

Justice Minister Dominic Raab said:

We have listened to victims' groups and carefully reviewed the criteria for legal aid for victims of domestic abuse in family cases.

These changes make sure that vulnerable women and children get legal support, so their voice is properly heard in court.

Legal aid is available to people involved in private family disputes if they are victims, or are at risk of becoming victims, of domestic violence or child abuse. To qualify, applicants must provide objective evidence of the abuse while their case is also subject to means and merits tests.

The changes announced today follow a review of the evidence requirements set out in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) 2012. A Statutory Instrument amending the relevant regulations will be laid in Parliament in the coming days.

The government has also committed to bringing forward a landmark Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill which will ensure that no stone is left unturned in protecting and supporting victims and children.

Notes to editors

- Currently documentation is accepted as evidence of abuse from social services, law enforcement and medical professionals.
- Evidence provided by domestic violence support organisations or housing support officers as part of an application for legal aid in disputed family court cases will need to include:
 - a statement that in the letter writer's reasonable professional opinion, the applicant is a victim of domestic violence or at risk of being a victim;
 - the matters relied on in support of that opinion;
 - and a summary of the support the individual or organisation

provided following the determination.

- The SI will also amend the regulations to accept evidence of abuse against previous partners, to better evidence an applicant being 'at risk' of domestic violence.
 - The Legal Aid Agency has existing powers to withdraw funding in the event that evidence of domestic violence is proven to be false.
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[Speech: Nick Gibb: reading is the key to unlocking human potential](#)

Teaching children to read is the key to unlocking human potential. It is the cornerstone of education. Infinite worlds are laid at our feet; from Charles Dickens's portrayal of ambition and lost values in 19th century England in 'Great Expectations' to Ishiguro's subtle portrayal of repression in the dying days of Britain's great houses in 'The Remains of the Day'.

Reading emancipates us from the everyday. It liberates us to pursue our interests in non-fiction and it introduces us to the great heroes and anti-heroes of the ages. Through the canon, we are invited into the conversation of humankind.

From musing the plight of the human condition to learning about the majesty of space-science, reading is the foundation from which we build knowledge.

That is why improving literacy has been at the heart of the government's drive to improve standards in England's schools. One of the most controversial education reforms introduced by the Conservative-led Government in 2010 was our decision to require schools to use phonics to teach children to read.

In the years just before we came into government in 2010, we knew something was wrong with the way our primary schools taught reading; England was stagnating in the international league tables. The international data also showed a wider gap between top and bottom performers than in most other countries. England was well known for its 'long tail of underachievement'.

I vividly recall visiting classrooms around the country where pupils were being failed; too many were unable to read. Effectively, locked out of achieving their potential. This was not through lack of effort from them or their teachers, but because of a dogmatic romanticism that prevented the spread of evidence-based teaching practices.

Those who stood in the way of evidence-based phonics reaching England's classrooms are responsible for stifling human potential and negatively affecting the life chances of countless children.

We are the only OECD nation where literacy is no better amongst the 16-24 year olds than amongst the over 55s. What more stark statistic could there be to exemplify the damage dogmatists have inflicted on our education system?

Prior to our reforms, schools were using variations of a method called 'look and say' to teach reading, in which children encountered frequently used words over and over again until they were recognised automatically. Where schools were using phonics they were mixing and matching with these other methods, which significantly inhibited its effectiveness. Contextual clues encouraging children to guess at words – rather than sound them out – were widely encouraged, breaking the link between the alphabetic code and spoken language.

The theory was that this was an easier way to learn to read than learning the 44 sounds of the alphabet and how to blend them into words. In reality, there was no evidence to support the 'look and say' approach; it was simply in keeping with the philosophical opposition to formal instruction, which was so ubiquitous in teacher training colleges and education faculties.

The trouble was that this method was letting down too many children, particularly the least able. Decades of evidence from around the world – including the influential longitudinal study from Clackmannanshire in Scotland – pointed to systematic phonics as the most effective way to teach children to read.

Phonics teaches children to sound out words sound by sound and then 'blend' these sounds together, unlocking the code of written English.

When we came into office in 2010, therefore, one of the first things we did was to strengthen the National Curriculum, explicitly requiring schools to teach reading using phonics. We funded training and phonics materials and books for schools. And, most controversial of all, we introduced a test for all six-year-olds, called the Phonics Screening Check.

This test consists of a list of 40 words that the child reads to their teacher. Half the words are ordinary words and the other half are made up 'pseudo-words', which are demarcated by a cartoon alien so that children are not confused by these unfamiliar words. The inclusion of these pseudo-words is important, as it is impossible to guess how to pronounce them, ensuring children have been taught to decode words using phonics rather than learning words by sight.

In 2012, the first year of the Phonics Check, just 58% of six-year-olds reached the pass mark of 32 out of the 40. This year, 81% of six year olds reached that standard, with 92% of children reaching that standard by the end of year 2.

Reading is the fundamental building block to a successful education. Securing the mechanical ability to translate the hieroglyphics of letters on the page into words is a necessary component to achieving fluency in reading; allowing children to build their speed of reading, their comprehension and to develop a joy and habit of reading for pleasure.

And this is not an un-evidenced assertion. This is a statement backed up by decades of research. Consider the conclusions from the longitudinal study carried out in Clackmannanshire:

- Improvements in word reading had grown from 7 months ahead of chronological age in Primary 1 to 3 and a half years in Primary 7;
- A similar gain was seen in spelling, with pupils increasing their advantage over the expected chronological age following the use of systematic synthetic phonics, bucking the trend for the effects of education interventions to 'wash out' over time; and
- Reading comprehension scores were still significantly above the expected standard for chronological age by the end of primary school.

Extraordinarily – despite all of the evidence in favour of phonics – we faced opposition from various lobby groups: those opposed to testing; those professors of education who had built a career on teaching teachers to use the 'look and say' approach; and the teaching unions.

We pressed on nonetheless, confident in the evidence base and encouraged by the thousands of teachers who had embraced and supported this method of teaching children to read and who could see the results in their classrooms.

Today, we received the first set of international evidence that confirms that our approach is working. The international study of 9-year-olds' reading ability in 50 countries showed that England has risen from joint 10th place in 2011 to joint 8th place in 2016, thanks to a statistically significant rise in our average score.

Perhaps most importantly of all, today's results show reading has improved for pupils from all backgrounds, but it is the low-performing pupils who are gaining most rapidly. The tide is rising, but it is rising fastest for those who need it most.

Slowly, but surely – thanks to the government's relentless focus on rigour – England is dealing with the 'long tail of underachievement.'

The pupils who took part in the international survey were the first cohort to have taken the Phonics Screening Check in 2012; the cohort to have been taught to read after we changed the law requiring schools to use phonics.

The details of these findings are particularly interesting; I hope they ring in the ears of opponents of phonics whose alternative proposals would do so much to damage reading instruction in this country and around the world.

For example, the data is clear on the role that the phonics reforms played in these results:

The characteristics that were most strongly predictive of PIRLS performance included prior achievement in the Year 1 Phonics Check, followed by resources at home, both in terms of educational resources (e.g. the number of books the pupil has in their home) and socioeconomic status (as determined by historical free-school-

meal eligibility).

Teaching children to decode is crucial to reading comprehension. And the detail of the relationship between pupil scores on the Phonics Screening Check and pupil scores in the PIRLS tests bring this to life:

Pupils who scored full marks in the phonics check were also the highest scoring group in PIRLS 2016, with an average overall PIRLS score of 617. In contrast, pupils who did not reach the 'expected standard' in the phonics check (score below 32) performed below England's overall average, with lower phonics check scores being associated with increasingly lower average PIRLS scores.

These results are stark. They stand in defiance to those who still choose to ignore the evidence.

But the argument of those opposing the use of phonics has always relied more heavily on emotion than evidence. For years, proponents of evidence-based approaches to reading have been wrongly accused of making children 'bark at text', ignoring the importance of reading for meaning and damaging pupil confidence and love of reading.

Whilst the evidence from the PIRLS data demonstrates that phonics has improved reading comprehension levels, there is also data that dispels their other tawdry myths about pupil confidence:

A higher percentage of pupils in England were categorised as being 'very confident' readers (53%) compared to the international average (45%). Pupil confidence in reading was strongly associated with average performance in PIRLS, with the most confident readers in England scoring over 100-points more than those who reported the lowest levels of confidence.

These results are a vindication of the government's boldness in pursuing the evidence in the face of ideological criticism. They are a tribute to the hard work and dedication of primary teachers who have quietly revolutionised the way children are taught to read in this country. And they promise even more in the future.

The 5000 nine-year-olds in England who took part in this international study in 2016, all took the Phonics Check in 2012 when just 58% passed nationally. Future international studies will be of children taught even more effectively as the proportion passing the Phonics Check has risen steadily year on year.

This year, thanks to the government's continued drive for phonics, 154,000 more 6 year olds were on track to be fluent readers than in 2012. Last year, 147,000 more 6 year olds were on track than in 2012. In 2015, that figure was 120,000. These numbers show the trend, but every single one of them is an

individual child given a better start to their education.

They show that the government is building a Britain fit for the future, where every child is afforded the best start in life.

And they are a reminder of the damage that can be caused when dogma flies in the face of the evidence.

Slowly but surely, the education sector and the teaching profession are embracing evidence and raising academic standards for all.

Thank you.

Speech: Tracey Crouch speech at LGA Sport and Physical Activity conference

Thank you for inviting me here today and giving me the opportunity to speak on an issue that I know many of you here share my passion for – sport and physical activity and how we can all collectively work together to tackle inactivity and the associated problems.

I want to start by paying tribute to the work of local authorities in delivering sports and leisure services.

I recognise that this is a difficult time for Local Authorities and that tough decisions are having to be made in terms of services delivered due to challenging financial circumstances.

The vast majority of sporting activity in this country is delivered at a local level and it is extremely important that this support continues.

But I also know that many of you will argue on a regular basis with your finance directors as to why investment in sport and leisure is needed at a time when every other directorate may have what seems like a stronger hand.

The truth is that investment in leisure not only can reduce the burden on more expensive budgets but it also builds and bonds communities, and helps tackle social problems, hidden or otherwise, that can quietly eat away at the core of society until it is too late.

It is for this reason that when I looked at rewriting the Sports Strategy we looked to local government and DCLG first to get initial thoughts. How you deliver what we wanted for the next ten years was going to be key. When I did media straight after one of the recurring questions was but government has cut local authority budgets...but my answer was always good local authorities get it. They get why this is important. And yes of course it may be delivered differently across the country, that is what local government is about, but

not tackling inactivity by not providing sport and leisure services in an accessible and affordable way only stores up more expensive problems for councils down the road.

Your agenda today deals with much of this so I won't repeat what they will say and instead outline some of the key points from the Sports Strategy, two years old next week.

The Sports Strategy was not about getting the active more active. Instead it stressed the importance of getting the inactive, active, and set out a new vision for a successful and active sporting nation.

It marked a big shift in the way we think about promoting, supporting and investing in sport and physical activity. It emphasised that we as a government, and a country, need to think more broadly about the benefits that getting active can bring.

We set out 5 key outcomes that we want to strive towards and that we want to see delivered in return for government support and investment. These were: * physical wellbeing; * mental wellbeing; * individual development; * social and community development; and * economic development.

I'm committed to making sure that these outcomes drive everything we do, and I'm pleased with how government and the sport and physical activity sector has responded to the challenge so far.

So what have we achieved?

On physical wellbeing Sport England has committed to spending at least a quarter of its total budget on tackling inactivity.

Sport England will be devoting much of its focus to supporting those groups who have been traditionally underrepresented to get more active.

For example, their Active Ageing Fund will invest up to £10 million into projects that help inactive older people get active.

Their Tackling Inactivity and Economic Disadvantage Fund is investing £3 million to support inactive people from lower socio-economic groups.

And their Tackling Inactivity in Colleges programme will invest £5 million in 49 colleges across England to help students be more active.

We've sought to tackle what people often feel is an artificial distinction between sport and physical activity. Not everyone likes the idea of playing sport. It provides an automatic barrier to many either because they think it is about getting sweaty or muddy or uber competitive. Or maybe people think they are too old for sport. Or not interested in team activities. But physical activity is different. Take what many of you already invest in – the health walks. I went on one locally and not a single person thought they were doing sport but through their hour long walk they were certainly doing something active and their physical well being was vastly improved as a consequence.

What matters is that people are getting active in a way that suits them and that makes them more likely to continue being active in future.

Mental wellbeing, the second outcome we are aiming to achieve with our strategy, is just as important as physical wellbeing.

And funding is already going to organisations that show they can best deliver this outcome, for example Sport England have invested a significant amount of government and National Lottery funding in mental health projects such as Mind's Get Set to Go programme.

Get Set to Go has supported over 3,500 people to become active in local communities, and trained over 300 coaches and leaders in mental health awareness for sport and physical activity.

We encourage sports and mental health organisations to continue to work together to drive work in this area, improving mental health through sport and physical activity and changing lives for the better.

In terms of the third and fourth outcomes of our strategy, the impact sport and physical activity can have on individual and community development is significant.

We know there is a great deal of excellent work going on locally to demonstrate the impact of sport and physical activity.

I have seen the results first hand visiting a number of projects across the country which are using physical activity and sport to bring communities together and engage those who are less likely to be active.

For example I recently visited a project in Milton Keynes called MK SNAP, which is using sport and physical activity to help those with learning difficulties. Activities like yoga are really making a difference to improve the quality of the participants' lives.

I have visited Active Norfolk's Mobile Me project focusing on over 65s. It is designed to address barriers to participation identified by this age group, and take physical activity interventions into sheltered housing and residential care homes.

I've also been to Crawley Old Girls, a female football development group organised by the Crawley Town Community Foundation and the Football League Trust Female Football Development Programme.

Weekly sessions are held for women aged 40 and over, who have an interest and passion for football and who may not have had the opportunity to participate before.

And in Worcester I met Disability Sport Worcester, who specialise in creating and running sporting events, clubs and activities for children and adults with disabilities.

Of course, sport is also a significant contributor to the UK economy – and

economic impact is the fifth of our key outcomes I referred to earlier. I see you have an agenda item later today about how sport can boost the visitor economy. I can't stay for the session but I can give you a little nationwide taster...

In the UK, sport was valued at £35 billion in terms of Gross Value Added in 2015.

And as well as major events, grassroots sport contributes hugely too. People who follow sporting trends and buy the latest gear or purchase gym memberships also play their part.

It is important that we continue to build and capitalise on the economic growth of the sector.

However, there is still plenty of work to do in order to fully implement all of the actions set out in Sporting Future and the role for Local Authorities in delivering sport provision will continue to be crucial.

Local Authorities are the biggest public sector investor in sport and physical activity, spending over £1bn a year.

Your understanding and knowledge of communities is vital in targeting opportunities to encourage participation and designing services to suit.

You also have responsibilities that span wider policy areas which can have a significant impact on the physical activity of the local population, including management of rights of way, parks and other green spaces.

With increasingly devolved funding and opportunities for place based working we are keen to see innovative ways of engaging communities in sport and physical activity.

We must make sure that all investment into sporting and leisure facilities is well considered and provides an offer that is demand-based and led by the needs of the customer. We are working closely with Sport England and ukactive on their proposal to co-locate community services with sport and leisure facilities to encourage more people to participate in sport and physical activity.

I am keen that we continue to drive the development of local solutions to inactivity, with ideas like this.

With this in mind, it is my great pleasure to announce that 12 areas have now been confirmed as the Sport England Local Delivery Pilots. The full list is being published this morning but includes Bradford, Essex, Doncaster and Withernsea.

The aim of these pilots is to trial new and innovative ways of increasing participation in sport and physical activity at the local level and to make sure that this increase is sustained over time.

It's about whole system change involving all local agencies, including small

third sector organisations that work in the heart of these often disadvantaged communities we need to reach.

Sport England will be investing up to 100 million pounds over the next four years across these 12 areas to support this ambition. They will also be investing staff resource in working with the pilot areas.

This is going to be a huge challenge. We know that too often, investment in a particular project or place can yield a short term result but that as soon as the money stops, the gains can fade.

We want these pilots to be different.

We must make sure that we learn from the pilots, that we scale up what works in other areas and that we learn from what does not work so well.

The areas chosen as pilots include a good mix of urban, rural and coastal areas and a good geographic spread. This is deliberate, and will help the sharing and scaling up of learning across different areas.

This is a long term programme and Sport England will be working closely with these areas over the next four years.

We are not going to see results overnight, however this is a very important step in the right direction and Sport England will be monitoring progress carefully, as will I.

So in conclusion I would like to again take this opportunity to thank all of you for the huge part you already play in getting the nation active and I look forward to working with you to ensure Sporting Future is fully implemented and embedded in every community across the country. It is not going to all work overnight but with the right strategic direction in place and the will and enthusiasm of people like you I genuinely believe we can deliver the outcome of creating a fitter healthier nation for years to come.

[News story: Romanian people smuggler jailed](#)

Romanian national Claudiu Pricope was stopped by Border Force officers at the UK inward tourist controls at the Channel Tunnel in Coquelles on 4 November. When asked what he was carrying in his Seat Alhambra, Pricope was vague, saying that it was clothing, but that he did not know where it was from, where it was going or who it was for.

Unsatisfied with his responses, Border Force officers subjected the vehicle to further examination.

Paul Morgan, Director of Border Force South East and Europe, said:

The car appeared to be full of bags of clothes, however when officers opened a rear side door and began removing the bags they found a 2 person tent, fully erected in the void where the rear passenger seats should have been. Inside the tent were crammed 5 people.

The temperature inside the tent was intense. All 5 of the teenagers were drenched in sweat, but people smugglers care little about the conditions in which they transport their human cargo, often putting the lives of others at risk.

The Vietnamese nationals, 2 males and 3 females, were passed to the French Police Aux Frontières and Pricope, 29, of no fixed UK address, was arrested. The investigation was passed to Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation officers and Pricope was subsequently charged with assisting unlawful immigration into the UK.

Pricope pleaded guilty yesterday (4 December) at a pre-trial hearing at Canterbury Crown Court and was sentenced there immediately.

Assistant Director David Fairclough, from the Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation team, said:

This was not an opportunistic offence, but a carefully planned attempt to circumvent the UK's immigration rules. Pricope misguidedly believed that zipping the people into a tent would defeat Border Force, but all it achieved was to subject them to uncomfortable conditions.

We work closely with Border Force colleagues to rigorously investigate allegations of immigration related criminality and this case should serve as a warning to anyone tempted to get involved with this kind of offending. We will catch you, and put you before the courts.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit <http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org>.

[News story: CMA accepts NHBC](#)

undertakings on structural warranties

The CMA has accepted new undertakings from the NHBC on structural warranties, an insurance that protects against potential defects in new buildings.

These replace previous legally binding assurances (known as 'undertakings') that were originally given by the National House Building Council (NHBC) in 1995.

As part of a recent review, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) found that although competition in the market has grown and house builders are now purchasing some of their structural warranties from a range of suppliers, the NHBC has retained a very high market share compared to its competitors.

These revisions will bring the undertakings up to date and protect, and encourage, growing competition in the structural warranties market. They oblige the NHBC to display clearly on its website that builders who are members can source structural warranties from both the NHBC and other providers, or from another provider alone.

Given regulatory developments, these changes also remove any requirement on the NHBC to oversee warranties provided by its competitors.

The new undertakings replace the previous undertakings and will remain in force for 15 years. They can be viewed on the [case page](#).