

News story: Government Chemist represented at 2017 Codex meeting in Budapest

The Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling held its 38th Session in Budapest, Hungary, from 8 to 12 May 2017. The Session was attended by 47 Member countries, 1 Member Organisation and Observers from 11 international organisations.

Under UK law, local authorities and food business operators can call upon the Government Chemist to arbitrate technical disputes on analytical or interpretation issues in food analysis. Incorrect sampling, analysis or interpretation can lead to disputes, and it is therefore important that the Government Chemist contributes to and keeps informed of international Codex developments.

Selvarani Elahi, representing the UK Government Chemist, attended as part of the UK delegation together with colleagues from the Food Standards Agency and the Association of Public Analysts.

The meeting considered methods of analysis for Codex standards and testing in relation to international food trade. Participants discussed analytical methods for safety issues, including allergens, mycotoxins and metals, and food quality. Sampling plans, measurement uncertainty, equivalency of methods, method performance criteria for multi-component methods, criteria for biological methods to detect chemicals of concern and Codex general guidelines for sampling were also discussed in order to reach a global consensus on the best approaches to use.

The [draft report](#) of the meeting is available from the Codex Alimentarius website.

News story: Consultation on solving online auction competition concerns

The CMA is consulting on ATG Media's proposal to change its practices to address concerns it unlawfully shut rivals out of the market.

ATG Media is the largest provider of live online bidding platforms in the UK. These platforms are used by auction houses to allow people to bid online, while an auction is ongoing, without having to be there in person.

Last November the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) opened an investigation into concerns that the company's practices may be anti-competitive. In particular, the concerns were that ATG Media may be excluding rivals from the market by:

- requiring exclusivity from its auction house customers (that is, stopping them from also using competing platforms)
- preventing its auction house customers from allowing bidders to use rival platforms at lower cost (a form of 'most favoured nation' or 'parity' provision)
- preventing auction houses from advertising and promoting the services of competitors to ATG Media

ATG Media has offered legally binding assurances (known as commitments) to remove all of these restrictions. The CMA considers that the proposed commitments address the competition concerns identified, but first invites comments from those who are likely to be affected. If accepted by the CMA, the commitments will bring the investigation to an end.

Further details about how to respond to this consultation are set out in the [notice](#) of the proposed commitments, which the CMA has issued today. Further details about the CMA's investigation can be found on the [case page](#). Comments on the proposed commitments should be received by no later than 19 June 2017.

Notes for editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority.
2. The Chapter I prohibition in the Competition Act 1998 (the Act) prohibits anti-competitive agreements and concerted practices between businesses which have as their object or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the UK. The Chapter II prohibition in the Act prohibits the abuse of a dominant position by one or more companies which may affect trade within the UK or a part of it. Articles 101 and 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) contain equivalent provisions applicable where there may be an effect on trade between EU Member States.
3. On 22 November 2016, the CMA launched an investigation into suspected breaches of competition law in respect of the supply of auction services in the UK. The investigation is under Chapters I and II of the Act, and Articles 101 and 102 TFEU. The investigation relates to suspected anti-competitive agreement(s) or concerted practice(s) and suspected abuse of dominance in the supply of auction services in the UK, in particular, suspected exclusionary and restrictive pricing practices, including most favoured nation provisions in respect of online sales.
4. Where the CMA has begun an investigation under section 25 of the Act, it may accept commitments to take such action as it considers appropriate for the purposes of addressing the competition concerns it has identified. If the CMA proposes to accept the commitments offered, the CMA will consult those who are likely to be affected by them and give them an opportunity to give the CMA their views. The CMA will take any such representations into account before making a final decision on whether to accept the commitments.

5. Formal acceptance of commitments would result in the CMA terminating its investigation and not proceeding to a decision on whether the Act or the TFEU has been infringed.
6. The CMA also received an application under section 35 of the Act for interim measures in connection with this case. Formal acceptance of commitments would make the giving of any interim measures directions superfluous.

News story: CMA opens Tesco/Booker merger investigation

The CMA has opened its investigation into Tesco's proposed acquisition of Booker.

The first phase of the investigation runs until 25 July 2017. During this period, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will assess whether the deal could reduce competition and choice for shoppers and other customers, such as stores currently supplied by Booker.

After this first phase, the merger will either be cleared or, if the CMA identifies a potential reduction in competition, it will be referred for an in-depth investigation lasting up to 24 weeks – unless the merging parties can offer proposals following the first phase of the investigation which address any concerns identified.

Having ensured it has all the necessary information from the companies before opening the investigation, the CMA is now seeking views on the merger from all interested parties.

Those interested are invited to submit their views by 13 June 2017. Further details will be available on the investigation [case page](#).

Press release: April 2017 Price Paid Data

HM Land Registry Price Paid Data tracks land and property sales in England and Wales submitted to us for registration.

This month's Price Paid Data includes details of more than 75,400 residential and commercial land and property sales in England and Wales lodged for registration in April 2017.

Of the 75,412 sales lodged for registration:

- 54,761 were freehold
- 9,165 were newly built
- 22,546 sales took place in April 2017
- 429 were residential sales in April 2017 in England and Wales for £1 million and over
- 247 were residential sales in April 2017 in London for £1 million and over.

Number of sales lodged for registration by property type

Property type	Number of properties
Detached	16,271
Semi-detached	18,504
Terraced	19,858
Flat/maisonette	15,042
Other	5,737
Total	75,412

The most expensive residential sale in April 2017 was of a flat in Knightsbridge, central London for £90m. The cheapest residential sales in April 2017 were of terraced properties in Ferryhill and Bishop Auckland, County Durham, each for £10,000.

The most expensive commercial sale in April 2017 was in the London Borough of Camden, for £98,446,300. The cheapest commercial sales in April 2017 were in Mitcham, London, each for £500.

[Access the full dataset](#)

Notes to editors

1. Price Paid Data (PPD) is published at 11am on the 20th working day of each month. The next dataset will be published on 28 June 2017.
2. [Price Paid Data](#) is property price data for all residential and

commercial property sales in England and Wales that are lodged with HM Land Registry for registration in that month, [subject to exclusions](#).

3. The following information is available for each property:
 - the full address
 - the price paid
 - the date of transfer
 - the property type
 - whether it is new build or not
 - whether it is freehold or leasehold
4. Price Paid Data can be downloaded in txt, csv format and in a machine readable format as [linked data](#) and is released under [Open Government Licence \(OGL\)](#). Under the OGL, HM Land Registry permits use of Price Paid Data for commercial or non-commercial purposes. However, the OGL does not cover the use of [third party rights](#), which HMLR is not authorised to license.
5. Price Paid Data includes Standard Price Paid Data (SPPD) for single residential property sales at full market value and Additional Price Paid Data (APPD) for transactions previously excluded from SPPD such as:
 - transfers to a non-private individual, for example a company, corporate body or business
 - transfers under a power of sale (repossessions)
 - buy-to-lets (where they can be identified by a mortgage). The information available for each property will indicate whether it is APPD or SPPD and the record's status – addition/change/deletion (A/C/D).
6. The [Price Paid Data report builder](#) allows users to build bespoke reports using the data. Reports can be based on location, estate type, price paid or property type over a defined period of time.
7. As a government department established in 1862, executive agency and trading fund responsible to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, HM Land Registry keeps and maintains the Land Register for England and Wales. The Land Register has been open to public inspection since 1990.
8. With the largest transactional database of its kind detailing over 24 million titles, HM Land Registry underpins the economy by safeguarding ownership of many billions of pounds worth of property.
9. For further information about HM Land Registry visit www.gov.uk/land-registry.
10. Follow us on:

News story: Customer enquiry service changes

How you contact UK Visas and Immigration is changing.

From 1 June, all customer enquiries will be handled by a new commercial partner Sitel UK.

The new contract will see a number of changes for customers. These changes help the government reduce costs and ensure those who benefit directly from the UK immigration system make an appropriate contribution.

The main changes for customers applying from outside the UK are:

- all phone numbers and opening hours will change
- the number of languages offered is reducing to 8 including English
- customers who contact UK Visas and Immigration by email will be charged £5.48

You will need to pay using a credit or debit card for contacting us by email. The charge includes the first email enquiry you send and any follow-up emails to and from the contact centre relating to the same enquiry.

The way you pay to use the telephone service will remain the same using a credit or debit card.

If you do not have access to a credit or debit card, you may choose to use a trusted 3rd party such as an agent or sponsor.

There are no changes to services if you are contacting us from inside the UK.