

Independent review into Criminal Legal Aid to launch in January

Press release

The long-term sustainability of the criminal legal aid market will be the focus of an independent review, it was confirmed today (21 December).



- Review will take a look at the whole criminal legal aid market
- Diversity, funding, and efficiency of the sector will be considered
- Part of ongoing work to reform and improve the criminal legal aid system

Launching in January, the review will be led by former judge Sir Christopher Bellamy. It aims to ensure the legal aid sector can adapt to the changing criminal justice system, while continuing to provide high-quality advice and representation.

Ministers are determined to make sure the criminal justice system is fully equipped to deal with any increase in the number of cases, now and in the future.

The far-reaching review will look at the criminal legal aid market in its entirety, specifically it seeks to ensure that it:

- continues to provide high-quality legal advice and representation
- is provided through a diverse set of practitioners
- is appropriately funded
- is responsive to defendant needs both now and in the future
- contributes to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System
- is transparent
- is resilient
- is delivered in a way that provides value for money to the taxpayer.

This is the latest step in the Criminal Legal Aid Review, which has already led to up to [£51m per year](#) in new payments for the sector that was announced in the summer. It forms part of wider work to ensure criminal defence remains

an enduringly attractive career for practitioners.

The Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

Criminal defence lawyers play a crucial role in upholding the law, representing clients and protecting their right to a fair trial.

This independent review will be wide-ranging and ambitious, ensuring the criminal legal aid market remains effective and sustainable, while reflecting the diverse society it serves.

I am grateful to the sector for its continued cooperation and look forward to this important work commencing in earnest in the new year.

Chair of the Review, Sir Christopher Bellamy, said:

The criminal legal aid sector is a vital pillar of the justice system.

I look forward to engaging with all stakeholders on this review, which aims to give the criminal legal aid sector long-term sustainability.

The review will begin in January and report back later in the year. It will include input from a wide range of criminal defence practitioners who have been providing valuable data and insight for the Criminal Legal Aid Review.

Published 21 December 2020

[November 2020 Transaction Data](#)



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Please note this data shows what HM Land Registry has been able to process during the time period covered and is not necessarily a reflection of market activity.

In November:

- HM Land Registry completed more than 1,710,230 applications to change or query the Land Register
- the South East topped the table of regional applications with 409,245

HM Land Registry completed 1,710,237 applications in November compared with 1,761,236 in October and 1,771,884 last November 2019, of which:

- 271,496 were applications for register updates compared with 267,115 in October
- 935,949 were applications for an official copy of a register compared with 981,945 in October
- 216,933 were search and hold queries (official searches) compared with 212,982 in October
- 15,850 were postal applications from non-account holders compared with 15,506 in October

Applications by region and country

Region/country	September applications	October applications	November applications
South East	405,032	422,216	409,245
Greater London	310,818	325,631	314,597
North West	192,764	196,957	191,689
South West	167,493	174,310	170,214
West Midlands	143,282	148,009	143,935
Yorkshire and the Humber	134,097	134,139	135,951
East Midlands	122,933	124,686	122,093
North	80,185	82,547	80,300

Region/country	September applications	October applications	November applications
East Anglia	72,439	75,586	72,154
Isles of Scilly	44	69	43
Wales	75,401	77,009	69,930
England and Wales (not assigned)	103	77	86
Total	1,704,591	1,761,236	1,710,237

Top 5 local authority areas

November applications

Local authority	November applications
Birmingham	24,481
City of Westminster	21,466
Leeds	20,003
Cornwall	17,912
Manchester	16,823

October applications

Local authority	October applications
Birmingham	25,670
City of Westminster	22,889
Leeds	20,087
Cornwall	18,551
Wandsworth	16,548

Top 5 customers

November applications

Top 5 Customers	November applications
Infotrack Limited	97,950
Enact	40,101
TM Group (UK) Ltd (Search Choice)	25,647
O'Neill Patient	23,826
Optima Legal Services	23,808

October applications

Top 5 Customers	October applications
Infotrack Limited	98,689
Enact	41,045
TM Group (UK) Ltd (Search Choice)	30,445
O'Neill Patient	25,566

Top 5 Customers
Optima Legal Services

October applications
21,799

[Access the full dataset on data.gov.uk](#)

Next publication

Transaction Data is published on the 15th working day of each month. The December data will be published at 11am on Friday 22 January 2021.

Published 21 December 2020

Last updated 21 December 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 21 December 2020

First published.

[Government announces refunds for rail and coach journeys booked for previous Christmas travel window](#)

News story

Refund guarantee for cancelled Christmas rail and coach trips.



- government is ensuring all domestic rail and coach passengers who have cancelled their travel plans in England between 23 to 27 December (2020) are refunded
- passengers will not be left out of pocket for complying with the new Christmas rules
- people are reminded to stay at home in tier 4, stay local elsewhere and carefully consider if they need to travel

The government will provide cash refunds for domestic rail and coach tickets for the previous Christmas travel window between 23 to 27 December, bought before the change in regulations and guidance that were [announced by the Prime Minister on Saturday 19 December](#).

This will apply to [journeys in England booked on or after 24 November, when the Christmas travel window was announced](#).

The government recognises that many people will have booked their coach and rail tickets in advance based on previous government advice. This announcement ensures that people are not penalised for following the new rules, protecting themselves and others from the virus.

Operators will be able to issue refunds immediately and passengers should check the website of their operator for how to claim. We urge people to be patient as rail and coach operators will be processing high volumes of refunds over the coming weeks.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

It is imperative that we all follow the new measures and play our part in tackling this virus, protecting others and safeguarding our NHS.

If you booked a coach or rail journey between 23 and 27 December, you are entitled to a cash refund. This ensures no one is left out of pocket for doing the right thing – staying home in tier 4, and elsewhere staying local and only meeting your Christmas bubble on Christmas day.

Published 21 December 2020

[**Guidance if you are visiting your local coastline this winter**](#)



[National lockdown rules apply in England](#). Stay at home.

Please take care and follow the rules remembering that you must not leave, or be outside of your home except where necessary.

If you are exercising at the coast with your household (or support bubble) or one other person, it should be limited to once per day, and you should not travel outside your local area.

See specific guidance for [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

We're in difficult times, but if you're in trouble at the coast, we're always here for you. In an emergency at sea or at the coast dial 999 and ask for the Coastguard.

Published 2 December 2020

Last updated 6 January 2021 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 6 January 2021

Guidance updated following national lockdown announced in England

2. 21 December 2020

Updated tiers listed to include tier 4

3. 2 December 2020

First published.

[Major step forward for RAF Lossiemouth upgrades as runway refurbishment](#)

finishes early

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) awarded a £75-million contract for the airfield operating surfaces project to VolkerFitzpatrick in August 2019. The project was expected to be completed in spring 2021 but fast work allowed the runway to be handed over to RAF Lossiemouth on 15 December 2020, following successful completion of pre-use checks.

Resurfacing works are one of many improvements being made at RAF Lossiemouth, future-proofing the Moray base for years to come. Other improvements include accommodation for personnel, a new Air Traffic Control Tower, upgrades to drainage and electrical supplies, and upgraded facilities for IX (Bomber) Squadron.

For most of the runway work, which started in earnest in January 2020, aircraft continued to operate from RAF Lossiemouth. This work required the RAF's new P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft being delivered to nearby Kinloss Barracks and operating from there during the majority of the runway works. A short period of relocation was also needed for Lossiemouth's Typhoon aircraft while the intersection between the Station's two runways was resurfaced; this started in August 2020 and saw the Typhoons also operating from Kinloss Barracks as well as Leuchars Station. The intersection resurfacing finished in October 2020, allowing the P-8As and Typhoons to return and operate from their home station.

The P-8A Poseidon is a submarine hunter which locates and tracks potentially hostile submarines. Home to four fast-jet squadrons flying the Typhoon, it has been some time since RAF Lossiemouth has regularly operated a larger aircraft such as the P-8A Poseidon. The P-8As represent a new era in operations from this station and a significant investment in Scotland which introduces a new UK Defence capability.

Russ Liddington, DIO's Project Manager for the resurfacing works, said:

The completion of the runway works months ahead of schedule is a testament to the hard work and collaborative attitude of everyone involved in the project, whether from DIO, VolkerFitzpatrick, RAF Lossiemouth or one of the subcontractors. The runway resurfacing and associated works, such as installing new drainage and airfield lighting, will see the runway life extended by up to 25 years. I'd also like to thank the local community for their support which is much appreciated by us all.

It is fantastic to see the works completed so quickly and a pleasure to see the RAF using much improved airfield facilities in support of defence.

Wing Commander Pete Beckett, Director of the Lossiemouth Development Programme, said:

The completion of the runway work here at RAF Lossiemouth represents the first major upgrade to be delivered by the Development Programme and to have such a complex project delivered some three months early in the challenging context of 2020 cannot be under-estimated. My congratulations must go to both DIO and VolkerFitzpatrick in achieving this milestone.

For the wider Programme though, this is just the start. We already have one major project in delivery and expect to start another five projects in the first half of 2021. While we have secured the Station's operational output through the new operating surfaces, we now turn more towards the people-focussed improvements where we are going to upgrade both working and living accommodation across the unit. The exciting times continue!

Representatives from DIO, VolkerFitzpatrick and RAF Lossiemouth mark the handover of the completed runway. DIO Crown Copyright, 2020.

Station Commander RAF Lossiemouth, Group Captain Chris Layden, said:

It's been a privilege to see our newly resurfaced runway so busy since its early completion.

We've already conducted joint training with F-35B Lightning aircraft from 207 Squadron and been joined by a large US Navy detachment. That is of course in addition to our usual 24/7 Typhoon and Poseidon operations. Lossiemouth now really is a next-generation maritime patrol and fighter station!

My thanks go to my team, and contractors VolkerFitzpatrick for their hard work in successfully delivering the main runway ahead of schedule.

Keith Maplethorpe, VolkerFitzpatrick development director, said:

Completing the works ahead of schedule has been a collaborative effort and is testament to the ongoing commitment of our teams to ensure that key projects can continue throughout this pandemic. We are looking forward to the next project at RAF Lossiemouth.

As a defence critical project, upgrade work at RAF Lossiemouth has continued despite the difficulties presented by coronavirus, with various safety measures taken to make the site COVID secure.