

[Assay Offices re-open](#)

News story

All 4 offices have now reopened and are providing assay services.



Following the temporary closures due to COVID-19, all 4 UK Assay Offices have now reopened to provide assay services.

Opening hours and arrangements are being managed carefully in line with government advice to ensure the welfare of staff and the public.

Please check the website for the relevant Assay Office for details of opening hours and arrangements:

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[First meeting of the UK-EU Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights](#)

News story

Joint Statement following the meeting of the Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights between the UK Government and European Commission via videoconference.



The first meeting of the UK-EU Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights was held today, co-chaired by officials from the UK Government and European Commission. The Committee was established by the Withdrawal Agreement to monitor the implementation and application of the Citizens' Rights part of the Withdrawal Agreement for EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU.

The UK and EU exchanged updates on the implementation of the citizens' rights provisions in the Withdrawal Agreement. We share the objective of ensuring the timely and correct implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement to provide certainty to UK nationals in the EU and EU citizens in the UK.

The UK and the EU reaffirmed their commitment to complying with the legal obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement that protect citizens' rights.

The co-chairs agreed that the Committee will meet regularly to follow the progress of implementation.

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[UK Government publishes its approach to the Northern Ireland Protocol](#)

- The paper sets out how the UK will meet its obligations under the Northern Ireland Protocol – upholding Northern Ireland's place in the UK and respecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement
- Businesses in Northern Ireland will have unfettered access to the rest of the UK market
- There will be no tariffs on goods remaining within the UK customs territory, and no new customs infrastructure
- Northern Ireland businesses will be able to benefit from the new free trade agreements that the UK will strike with countries around the world

The Government has today (Wednesday 20 May) published its [approach to](#)

[implementing the Northern Ireland Protocol](#), as part of meeting in full its obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement with the European Union.

The command paper outlines how the protocol can be implemented in a pragmatic, proportionate way: one that protects the interests of the people and economy of Northern Ireland, recognises Northern Ireland's integral place in the United Kingdom and its internal market, provides appropriate protection for the EU Single Market, and respects the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland.

It makes clear that the UK Government's priority will remain strengthening Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom, and above all, preserving the huge gains from the peace process and the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

The paper also sets out four key commitments that will underpin the UK Government's approach to implementing the Protocol:

- There will be unfettered access for Northern Ireland's producers to the whole of the UK market and this will be delivered through legislation by the end of the year.
- No tariffs will be paid on goods that move and remain within the UK customs territory
- Implementation of the Protocol will not involve new customs infrastructure – with any processes on goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland kept to an absolute minimum so that the integrity and smooth functioning of the UK internal market is protected.
- Northern Ireland's businesses will benefit from the lower tariffs delivered through our new Free Trade Agreements with countries like the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan – ensuring Northern Ireland firms will be able to enjoy the full benefits of the unique access they have to the GB and EU markets.

As set out in the paper, the Protocol will only remain in force as long as the people of Northern Ireland want it to. Democratically elected institutions in Northern Ireland will decide whether to extend or end the arrangements in a consent vote that can take place every four years, with the first vote taking place in 2024.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove said:

At the heart of our proposals is a consensual, pragmatic approach that will protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and the huge gains from the peace process.

Implementing the protocol in this way will ensure we can support businesses and citizens, and protect Northern Ireland's place in the UK's customs territory while upholding our commitments to the EU's Single Market. Northern Ireland will benefit fully from its access to the UK and EU markets.

The whole of the United Kingdom will be able to capitalise on the opportunities that will come from forging our own path and striking

new free trade agreements with countries around the world.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP, said:

The UK Government's top priority is to protect the huge gains of the Northern Ireland peace process and as a new chapter opens in the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union, we are committed to ensuring prosperity and opportunity for all communities in Northern Ireland.

These proposals will implement the Protocol in a flexible, proportionate and sensitive way – while protecting the interests of both the whole of the UK and the EU. Our approach represents a practical way of implementing the Protocol while making sure that businesses in Northern Ireland can take full advantage of the opportunities presented as the United Kingdom begins to forge new trade links across the globe.

Today's publication also sets out plans to establish a new business engagement forum, which will meet regularly to allow Northern Ireland's businesses to put forward proposals and provide feedback on how to maximise the free flow of trade. The Northern Ireland Executive will be invited to join the forum.

[Inspection report published: An inspection of Administrative Reviews \(May – December 2019\)](#)

I understand that in responding to my reports the Home Office will always want to accentuate the positives. But, this can give the appearance of selective hearing.

It is true that the Home Office's handling of Administrative Reviews (ARs) has improved since I inspected it first in 2015 (when it was poor) and again in 2017 (when it was better but still required work). My latest report shows that ARs are now generally effective at identifying and correcting "objective" factual or process errors, albeit too slow to put things right in some cases.

However, the report also points to several areas where ARs are not working, including where the decision to refuse involved an assessment of the

applicant's credibility, and at the border where individuals are being asked to waive their rights to an AR without appropriate oversight.

I have argued that, after almost five years, the Home Office should be thinking beyond merely tweaking its processes and should be asking whether the Administrative Review system has delivered the benefits, including for applicants, that it claimed it would during the passage of the Immigration Bill 2014, when the proposed removal of appeal rights was the subject of considerable concern in Parliament and elsewhere. If the answer is "no", or "not yet", it needs to take a more fundamental look at the scope of ARs and at what it is seeking to achieve through them.

The Home Office has said that it is conducting an evaluation, which it aims to complete by the "end of summer 2020". This needs to be comprehensive and transparent if it is to convince the department's doubters that it is willing to listen and learn; though the test goes much wider than ARs. However, some of its responses to this latest report suggest only a qualified acceptance of the need to be more open and more adaptable.

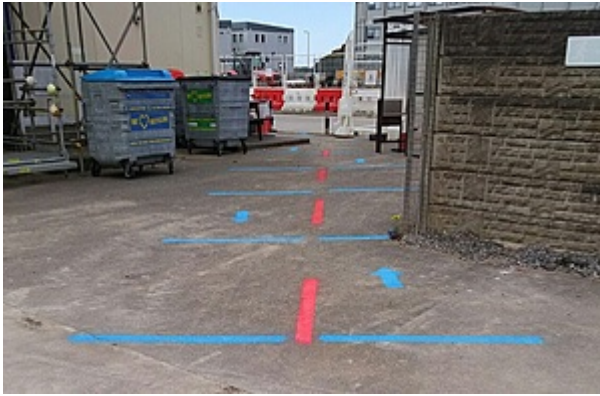
Before starting this inspection, I inspected the Home Office's handling of complaints. My report was sent to the Home Secretary on 4 July 2019 but remains unpublished, although I am aware that work is going on in the department on this subject. The two systems are distinct, but there are obvious cross-overs. To be of value, each has to be efficient and effective at providing remedies and redress, including an apology, where the Home Office is at fault. Both are opportunities for the Home Office to show its "human face", as it has tried to do in its handling of ARs in respect of EU Settlement Scheme decisions.

I hope that when it responds to my complaints handling report the Home Office is able to demonstrate clearly that it recognises the importance of these systems to the rebuilding of trust in its intentions and its competence. In my view, the AR response does not quite manage this.

[Second construction site set to return to work](#)

News story

Our Sellafield Project and Residue Store Retreatment Plant will bring around 20 people back to its construction site this week.



Safety measures in place for the re-start of the project

The Sellafield Project and Residue Store Retreatment Plant (SRP) is the second of our sites to restart work after our pause on construction, which started at the end of March when lockdown restrictions hit.

Its importance to our overall mission was highlighted when it was named as one of 11 vital pieces of work picked to head our restart plans. It follows the successful restart of our Box Encapsulation Plant Project Store Direct Import Facility and has put similar measures in place to maintain workplace distancing.

The project is delivered through our Programme and Project Partners (PPP) model and is the first within PPP to restart, with our partners working closely with us to enable a successful transition back to work.

The first work to be restarted on the project will be the steel fixings for the concrete slab, work which can be effectively done whilst keeping distances of at least 2 metres.

All arrangements will be monitored so learning can be shared with other projects coming back on-line and to strengthen those at SRP if necessary.

When built it will be a vital part of the safe and secure management of our stockpile of special nuclear materials.

The plant is needed to retreat, repack and consolidate this material in a form suitable for long term storage in modern facilities until circa 2120.

SRP is of national importance as it is crucial to delivery of the special nuclear materials strategy and to manage one of the sites highest hazards.

Maintaining the delivery schedule of the plant is important due to the condition of the material it is required to process.

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