

News story: Final report on GP partnerships published

The [final recommendations from the independent GP partnership review](#) have been published.

The review was led by Dr Nigel Watson.

Using his research and his personal experience as a GP partner, Dr Watson sets out recommendations for the government, NHS England and other representative bodies.

The recommendations include:

- reducing the personal risk and unlimited liability currently associated with GP partnerships
- the need for a wider range and capacity of healthcare professionals available for services in the community, embedded as part of general practice
- increased funding for GP training places and a more specialised focus in medical training on general practice as a positive career choice

The review, which began in May 2018, received written feedback from over 120 individuals and organisations.

As part of his research, Dr Watson visited over 25 GP practices around the country, ranging from those that were experiencing challenges with recruitment and retention, to those that had developed innovative solutions to issues they faced.

The government will respond to the recommendations.

Dr Nigel Watson said:

General practice remains the fundamental building block of the NHS and essential for the health and wellbeing of the rest of the NHS.

It is clear to me having talked to many GPs and others who work in general practice and also visited many parts of the country that there remains huge potential in terms of delivering high quality care based in the community delivered close to people's homes.

To unleash this potential, general practice needs to see a secure future which is associated with an expanded workforce, less personal financial risk and the working day being more manageable.

The recommendations today I hope will not only be accepted by government and supported by the profession but make a real difference with more resources going to the delivery of care on the

frontline.

[Press release: Colliery tips in South Wales to be inspected over next 5 years](#)

The work involves 315 inspections at 291 sites, including disused colliery tips, quarries and civil engineering structures.

Darren Bryant, Public Safety and Subsidence Principal Project Manager at the Coal Authority, said:

Regular inspection and monitoring of disused colliery tips and other historical mining features is important to monitor land stability, ensure public safety and for early identification of any environmental issues.

The Coal Authority has been providing tip and quarry inspection services for Natural Resources Wales since 2016, and in September 2018 we were successful in winning a 5 year contract to continue to provide these services.

As the government body responsible for managing the legacies associated with the historical coal mining industry of Britain, the Coal Authority has a vast amount of experience in the inspection, restoration and overall management of disused colliery spoil heaps and former mining structures.

We undertake a comprehensive inspection programme of our own portfolio that includes 40 disused colliery tips and approximately 800 other mining features. We do this by conducting on site assessments, utilising remote monitoring and telemetry equipment and by combining these with various ground movement and water level monitoring techniques to ensure our sites are managed safely.

Peter Cloke, South Wales Deputy Forest District Manager for Natural Resources

Wales, said: “South Wales is unique in the fact we have such large numbers of people living next to our forests and using them for daily recreation, but due to our coal and steel industrial past we have many legacy issues to manage to ensure we keep them safe.

“We look forward to working with the Coal Authority on this contract and gaining from their extensive experience of managing historic industrial liabilities.”

[News story: Changes to benefits for mixed age couples](#)

When single people reach [State Pension age](#), they move from working age benefits to pension age benefits.

Currently, couples can choose to make that transition when the older partner of the couple reaches State Pension age.

In 2012, Parliament voted to modernise the system and change the rule for couples so that the transition takes place when the younger partner reaches State Pension age. This will ensure the younger partner is in the same circumstances as other people of the same age, regardless of the age of their partner.

The government announced today that the change will be introduced from 15 May 2019.

Mixed age couples with a partner under State Pension age already in receipt of [Pension Credit](#) or pension-age [Housing Benefit](#) at the point of change will be unaffected while they remain entitled to either benefit.

If a mixed age couple claim working age benefits, the pensioner partner will not be subject to work-based conditionality. Any work-based conditionality for the younger partner will be tailored to meet their circumstances.

The government laid the commencement order today (14 January 2019) that brings this change into force from 15 May 2019. The commencement order also sets out who will be exempt from this change.

News story: Independent Monitor, Julia Wortley, discusses her new role

Striking a balance

Disclosing police information on DBS certificates requires the right balance to be struck between public protection, and the rights of individual applicants. Julia Wortley, our new Independent Monitor, explains where her role fits into ensuring this happens.

Julia says:

This is without doubt a challenging position, but one I am delighted to take on. I know the work of the DBS is vital in terms of helping people make safer recruitment decisions, and ultimately protects some of society's most vulnerable people.

In her role as Independent Monitor, Julia provides a fully independent element to the disclosure of police information for enhanced disclosure checks. Julia, who came into post in October, recently visited us at DBS to gain a greater insight into the work carried out.

It was lovely to come and visit the team – everyone was really welcoming. I am mindful that the disclosure process is a huge team effort involving hundreds of colleagues scattered across the UK, each fulfilling their respective roles in the different parts of the process.

Getting out and about

In addition to visiting DBS disclosure staff, Julia also visited Barring staff in November, and has been out and about spending time with various police Disclosure Units.

When working with a complicated and complex process, such as the disclosure regime, shared among different teams in different geographic locations, it is essential that we always keep effective two-way communication channels open.

Julia then added:

It is also really important that each party recognises and respects the role that others have to play in ensuring that the disclosure process is efficient, effective and accountable.

Explaining the process

Julia considers one of the significant challenges in disclosing information, is that it's often seen as a mysterious and complicated process.

In cases where an individual believes that information included by the police force is not relevant to the workforce applied for, or ought not to be disclosed, they should first contact the DBS in line with the [DBS disputes procedure](#).

The DBS will then work with the police to make a decision regarding the dispute.

If the police do not agree there is a mistake, the dispute will be referred to the Independent Monitor to carry out a review of the case.

Julia explains:

We are trying to apply a process consistently to every case, but each outcome will be different according to its own unique set of factors. Some time ago I was asked to consider "what makes a difficult decision." After careful thought, I concluded that the most difficult decisions all contain three of the following elements.

1. There will be, or could be, a significant impact on someone that flows directly from the decision
2. Not everyone will agree with you that you took the right decision
3. You don't necessarily have all the information or the quality of information you would like available to inform the decision

Julia believes that making decisions about what is included on an enhanced disclosure check, contains all three of the above elements. For this reason, the decisions are always difficult and challenging. She also understands that there is often a tension between quality and speed with which any task can be achieved.

Dedication and enthusiasm

When asked what she has taken from her first contact with the departments involved in delivering disclosure information, Julia says:

What has impressed me, in all the conversations I have had, is the huge dedication and enthusiasm of everyone involved in this invaluable work.

Julia is someone who describes her lifelong core objectives as upholding fairness, and protecting vulnerable people from harm. She believes her role as Independent Monitor fits perfectly with her deep-rooted commitment to

both.

When considering what she wants to achieve in the future, Julia concludes:

It is my ambition to continue to work closely with the DBS, the police and wider Home Office to ensure that the enhanced disclosure process is as efficient, effective and compassionate as it possibly can be.

More information about the Independent Monitor and the post's statutory duties can be found here: [Role of the Independent Monitor](#) (PDF, 115KB, 1 page)

Press release: Sir Alan Duncan statement on Guatemala and the CICIG

The Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP, Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office said:

The UK is extremely disappointed by the announcement of the Guatemalan Government on Monday 7 January unilaterally terminating their agreement with the UN on the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a decision which has since been suspended by the Constitutional Court. CICIG has made a valuable contribution to the fight against corruption and impunity in Guatemala, strengthening the national institutions of Guatemala in the process.

The UK, along with the EU and other international partners, has been a strong supporter of CICIG and we value their work and close cooperation with the Office of the Public Prosecutor of Guatemala.

The UK supports the statement made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations rejecting the Guatemalan government's decision to unilaterally terminate the agreement establishing CICIG and calling for the Guatemalan Government to allow CICIG to continue its important work until the completion of its mandate in September this year.

The UK supports the statements made by the G13 donor group and the EU, and calls on the Government of Guatemala to respect the rule of law and the importance of strong, independent institutions, which are vital for ensuring security and prosperity.