

SMC responds to the publication of 'Inclusive Britain'

News story

A statement from the Social Mobility Commission on the publication of 'Inclusive Britain: government response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities'



Responding to the publication of [Inclusive Britain, government's response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities](#), SMC Chair Katharine Birbalsingh and Deputy Chair Alun Francis said:

We welcome the Government's response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities' report.

Racism is a blight on our society and we must continue to work to eradicate it. While this is a matter for everybody, public policy has an important contribution to make, by building an evidence base to improve our understanding of disparities, strengthen our analysis of the sources of racism and identify effective solutions.

We commend the commitment to addressing these disparities in the context of building trust and fairness, and supporting opportunity, agency and inclusion for all disadvantaged individuals and groups.

There are a number of recommendations which overlap with areas of Social Mobility Commission interest, particularly the labour market value of different higher education qualifications, and we will strive to progress this as part of our wider work.

Ultimately a focus on taking action on social mobility is welcome, and we will continue to advise on the best actions to ensure all individuals and communities reach their potential and live a successful, fulfilling life.

[UK and Turkey agree clean transport deal worth £1.7 billion in boost to British rail industry](#)

- UK Export Finance guarantee a EUR2.1 billion loan to fund construction of 503km high speed electric railway
- Huge nine-figure contracts set to be awarded to UK rail suppliers as a condition of UK support
- Deal announced at UK-Türkiye Green Finance Conference designed to help Turkey finance major climate-friendly projects and meet its COP26 commitments

UK government's biggest ever sustainable, civil infrastructure deal will help finance a new high speed electric railway line in Turkey to decarbonise travel, with major contracts awarded to British and Turkish businesses.

The EUR2.1 billion green financing will be guaranteed by UK Export Finance (UKEF), through its Buyer Credit Scheme, with Credit Suisse and Standard Chartered structuring and coordinating banks arranging the transaction.

This is the first UK-supported rail transaction in Turkey for over 160 years, and forms part of Turkey's plan to transform high speed rail in the country.

The new 503km electric-powered railway line will connect Ankara, Turkey's capital, to the huge port-side city of Izmir. When complete, the new line will provide a faster, lower carbon alternative to current air and road routes between the two cities, helping to fulfil Turkey's climate change commitments made at COP26.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

Turkey is a vital trading partner for the UK. Our shared global outlook on free trade and the environment is the driving force behind economic growth in our two nations.

It is fitting that UK Export Finance's biggest ever civil infrastructure deal is strongly sustainable. This is a proud moment for the UK railway industry, using its industrial roots to reduce emissions in heavily polluted cities.

Treasury and Finance Minister for Türkiye Dr. Nureddin Nebati, said:

Referring to the Bilateral Cooperation Agreement signed between the UK and Türkiye in 1999; we have successfully achieved the closing of the landmark financing of Ankara İzmir High Speed Railway Project under the green loan structure.

We have given utmost importance to the environmental and social procedures during this project and as the Ministry of Treasury and Finance we are closely following the improvements of such issues. We also desire to be among the active and important players of the rapidly growing green finance market.

We are very glad for the cooperation and strong longstanding relations with UK government and we hope to further strengthen our collaboration.

Turkey is one of the UK's most important independent trading partners. The bilateral trading relationship was worth £17.5 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2021, increasing by £1.4 billion from the same period in 2020.

The deal will secure major contracts for UK companies of all sizes to supply to the project, with several nine-figure deals for UK companies close to being agreed. Engineering and construction giants ERG International Group is using its close ties with the UK supply chain to support the project. UK companies are expected to supply British-made railway lines, turnouts, point machines, fasteners, material and equipment for signaling, telecommunication and electrification systems, as well as vital insurance and freight services.

The financing was led by Credit Suisse and Standard Chartered Bank with support from UK Export Finance and meets internationally recognised sustainability standards and is aligned with the Green Loan Principles. Reinsurance is also being provided by international export credit agencies such as SACE in Italy, SERV in Switzerland and OeKB in Austria, reducing the risk to the UK taxpayer.

Yoshi Ichikawa, Head of Structured Export Finance for Europe, Standard Chartered Bank said:

We're proud to further strengthen our relationship with the Turkish government, providing a loan structured with a clear focus on international social and environmental standards, and working closely with Credit Suisse and UKEF. This support is another in the line of Standard Chartered's financing in Türkiye to help the government deliver its railway infrastructure plan.

Murat Dedeoglu, ERG International UK, Group CEO said:

ERG is honored with the achievement and its historic milestone. ERG look forward strengthening ties with UKEF and the Turkish Government in the construction sector and adding value to the economies by making advance engineering and technological solutions available. Like in all our previous projects over the last 50 years, ERG is committed to create sustainable economic added value.

ERG's Turkish and UK based Environmental & Social teams will bring many years of international experience to this important project, in order to ensure that IFC, Equator Principles, and national standards are at all times met. We would like to thank all our partners and stakeholders in the UK, Europe and Turkey to make this dream project come true, which will positively change and enhance the lives of millions of travellers and people living along the alignment.

Contact

[LSER issued with £23.5 million penalty over breach of contract](#)

- following a breach of its franchise agreement, London & South Eastern Railway Limited (LSER) has been issued with a £23.5 million penalty notice by the government
- this is on top of the £64 million owed to the taxpayer being recovered by the Department for Transport (DfT), after deciding not to renew LSER's contract in October 2021

The government has announced that a [£23.5 million penalty notice has been issued to LSER](#) following a serious breach of the company's franchise agreement.

In September 2021, the Transport Secretary announced that, following the breach of trust, the [franchise would not be renewed with LSER](#) and would be run by the Operator of Last Resort (OLR).

That announcement came after work conducted by DfT identified evidence showing that, between October 2014 and March 2020, LSER had deliberately concealed over £25 million of historic taxpayer funding relating to HS1, which should have been returned to the taxpayer.

The review also identified evidence of similar behaviour by LSER during its previous franchise agreement that ran from April 2006 to October 2014.

Today's confirmation of the penalty reflects the seriousness of the misconduct over a substantial period and the action taken sends a clear signal to all rail operators that breaches of public trust will not be tolerated.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

I took decisive action and did not renew the contract with Southeastern following this appalling breach of trust.

Our rapid and firm action protected taxpayers and passengers – ensuring much-needed services continued to run.

LSER's behaviour was simply unacceptable and this penalty sends a clear message that the government, and taxpayers, will not stand for it.

In total (including amounts already recovered), DfT is recovering £64 million from LSER in relation to the franchise agreement contraventions outlined in the penalty notice, other balances identified, adjustments to profit share payments and interest owed. The penalty notice issued today (17 March 2021) comes on top of this recovery.

OLR maintains the continuity of passenger rail services if a passenger rail franchise terminates and is not immediately replaced. Since OLR took over Southeastern, services have continued as normal and further passenger benefits, including the rollout of Citybeam trains, has continued at pace.

[Evusheld approved to prevent COVID-19 in people whose immune response is poor](#)

A new medicine, Evusheld (tixagevimab/cilgavimab), has today been authorised for COVID-19 prevention by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) after meeting the UK regulatory standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

The decision to grant approval for this treatment was endorsed by the government's independent expert scientific advisory body, the Commission on Human Medicines, after carefully reviewing the evidence.

Developed by AstraZeneca, Evusheld is a combination of two long-acting antibodies that works by binding to the spike protein on the outside of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the virus that causes COVID-19. This in turn prevents the virus from attaching to and entering human cells.

Evusheld is authorised to be used before being exposed to the risk of COVID-19 infection in order to prevent disease (known as 'pre-exposure prophylaxis').

For most people, the best way to prevent infection is vaccination. Evusheld has been approved for use in adults who are unlikely to mount an immune response from COVID-19 vaccination or for whom vaccination is not recommended.

Recipients should not be currently infected with or had recent known exposure to a person infected with the COVID-19 virus.

A single dose of the two medicines, tixagevimab and cilgavimab, should be given as two injections into a muscle by a healthcare professional.

In a clinical trial in adults, Evusheld was found to reduce the risk of developing symptomatic COVID-19 by 77%, with protection from the virus continuing for at least 6 months following a single dose.

There is not yet enough data to know how effective Evusheld is against Omicron or the duration of its effect against this variant, and the MHRA will work with the company to establish this.

Dr June Raine, MHRA Chief Executive said:

"After a careful review of the data, I am pleased to confirm that we have authorised another medicine to help protect against the effects of COVID-19.

"Evusheld is a "pre-exposure prophylaxis" treatment, meaning it is taken to prevent COVID-19 before the risk of acquiring infection. One dose has been found to provide long-lasting protection against this disease for up to 6 months.

"While the COVID-19 vaccines continue to be the first-line defence against COVID-19, we know that some people may not respond adequately to these vaccines and for a small number of individuals COVID-19 vaccines may not be recommended for other reasons, such as a previous allergic reaction to one of the vaccine ingredients.

"For these people, Evusheld could provide effective protection against COVID-19."

Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed, Chair of the Commission on Human Medicines, said:

"The Commission on Human Medicines and its COVID-19 Therapeutics Expert Working Group has independently reviewed the data and endorses the MHRA's

regulatory approval of Evusheld.

“We have carefully reviewed data on the medicine’s safety, quality and effectiveness and are satisfied it meets the expected standards.

“The recommended dosage is 300 mg of Evusheld but a higher dose of 600 mg may be more appropriate for some COVID-19 variants. All this is outlined in the Summary of Product Characteristics.

“Pre-exposure prophylaxis with Evusheld is not a substitute for vaccination in individuals for whom COVID-19 vaccination is recommended.”

Notes to Editors

1. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK, by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the benefits justify any risks.
2. The MHRA is an executive agency of [the Department of Health and Social Care](#).
3. [The Commission on Human Medicines \(CHM\)](#) advises ministers and the MHRA on the safety, efficacy and quality of medicinal products. The CHM is an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care.

[Government clampdown on the abuse of British courts to protect free speech](#)

The Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab will today set out proposals that take aim at so-called Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). These range from strengthening legislation to introducing new court checks to curb this type of activity.

These lawsuits typically involve wealthy people or large businesses using the threat of endless legal action and associated costs to pressure their opponents under defamation and privacy laws. This tactic is increasingly being used to intimidate journalists, authors and campaigners to stifle legitimate criticism and prevent the publication of critical stories and books.

The government is now seeking views on a range of proposals which will be introduced as soon as possible. These could include amending the Defamation Act 2013 to strengthen the ‘public interest defence’ which protects people who publish private information from being sued if it was done for the public good.

Ministers are also considering capping the costs that claimants can recover with the aim of stopping the super-rich, such as Russian oligarchs, from 'weaponising' the high cost of litigation to stifle free speech. Changes could also introduce a specific requirement for claimants to prove 'Actual Malice' by a defendant in libel cases in order to deter spurious claims.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The ability of a free press to hold the powerful to account is fundamental to our democracy and as a former journalist I am determined we must never allow criticism to be silenced. For the oligarchs and super-rich who can afford these sky-high costs the threat of legal action has become a new kind of lawfare. We must put a stop to its chilling effect.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The Government will not tolerate Russian oligarchs and other corrupt elites abusing British courts to muzzle those who shine a light on their wrongdoing.

We're taking action to put an end to this bullying and protect our free press.

Other measures would enable courts to throw out claims using these tactics earlier in proceedings and impose Civil Restraint Orders to prevent people from bringing repeated legal challenges.

Meanwhile, the Solicitors Regulation Authority has already issued new guidance on conduct in disputes, identifying SLAPPs as an example of 'pursuing litigation for improper purposes' and reminding solicitors of their duty to report misconduct.

These moves come as the High Court this month dismissed a libel claim against the British journalist, Tom Burgis, brought by a Kazakh-owned mining firm for his book 'Kleptopia: How Dirty Money is Conquering the world', but often the purpose of SLAPPs is to suppress publications without a case ever coming to court and being reported. As a result, Ministers will be assessing the evidence to understand how widespread the problem is before deciding the best course of action.

Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) said:

The NUJ warmly welcomes the commitment by the government to tackle the scourge that is the deployment of SLAPPs and other forms of lawfare cynically designed to stymie journalistic investigations

and reporting by the rich and thin-skinned.

We have long campaigned for low-cost arbitration solutions to settle genuine disputes and would welcome any moves to level the playing field and ensure journalists and media outlets no longer have to face prohibitive costs and deliberate intimidation by wealthy litigants with the deepest of pockets. For too long the super-rich have got away with abusing the law to bully journalists and undermine media freedom.

The NUJ will consider the detail of these plans, and looks forward to participating in the government's consultation on its package of measures.

Dawn Alford, Executive Director of the Society of Editors said:

At a time when the vital role of journalists in holding power to account and exposing wrong-doing and corruption have never been more important, the Society welcomes the Government's consultation on measures to tackle the use of SLAPPs.

Deployed by powerful individuals and companies in an effort to silence and intimidate critics and deter legitimate public interest journalism, SLAPPs not only have a chilling effect on the public's right to know but they pose a grave threat to media freedom. It is essential that laws are strengthened and practical deterrents are put in place to ensure that journalists – as well as campaigners, academics and authors – are able to fulfil their role in keeping the public informed without fear of intimidation or harassment.

Today's announcement follows the recently passed Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act which includes strengthened powers to crack down on corrupt elites and ramp up pressure on Putin's regime. The Deputy Prime Minister visited the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague this week to offer extra practical support from the UK to help prosecute Russian war crimes.

Notes to Editors