

London seminar: Reducing and preventing childhood vulnerabilities and adverse childhood experiences

Thursday, 17 October, 2019

featuring

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and

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Please see attached flyer for details and how to book.

PDF, 339KB, 1 page

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Charity regulator concerned by quality of external scrutiny of charity accounts

A [new study](#) published today by the Charity Commission, has found that only around half of charity accounts reviewed met the regulator's [external scrutiny benchmark](#). This follows reviews of the quality of charity accounts which show that auditors and independent examiners are failing to identify significant failings in charity accounts.

A sample of 296 charities' accounts have been assessed against a new external scrutiny benchmark developed by the Commission to determine whether a minimum

standard of scrutiny by auditors and independent examiners has been met. Compliance with the benchmark does not amount to full compliance with the requirements of the Charities SORP; the benchmark is about ensuring that the basic requirements have been met, making today's findings particularly concerning.

Failings included incomplete reporting of related party transactions*; of 77 cases in which these were not properly disclosed, although in all likelihood an oversight, none were reported to the Commission by auditors or independent examiners. This raises additional concerns that the failure by trustees to manage conflicts of interest is also being under-reported.

Accounts reviewed by an auditor met the benchmark more frequently than those reviewed by an independent examiner. Although qualified examiners performed better, only 44% of accounts submitted by qualified examiners met the benchmark. Just 18% of unqualified examiners met the benchmark.

The regulator is working closely with ICAEW and ACCA to improve their members' awareness of charity reporting and accounting requirements. It has passed details of accounting practitioners that failed to meet the benchmark to their relevant professional bodies so that they can assist them. The Commission may also use non-compliance with the benchmark to raise formal complaints with professional bodies.

The Commission is making its [benchmark available on GOV.UK](#) and expects those scrutinising charity accounts to make use of it and trustees and those interested in charity accounts to be aware of it.

Nigel Davies, Head of Accountancy Services at the Charity Commission said:

We know from research we have carried out into public trust in charities that the public care deeply about transparency. It is therefore vital that charities are able to provide an accurate and clear picture of their finances.

External scrutiny is an essential part of the checks and balances process that charity accounts go through and so it is disappointing that so many independent examiners and auditors appear to lack the necessary understanding of the external scrutiny framework.

Those that are getting this right are playing an important role in upholding charities' accountability to us as regulator, and the public. Clearly others are letting the profession and charities down. We are working closely with the accounting profession to tackle shortcomings and raise standards; I am encouraged by the commitments to work with us that have already been made.

The benchmark will also support the Commission's regulatory casework, by identifying external scrutiny that failed the benchmark. The regulator has already contacted 135 charities that filed trustees' annual reports, external scrutiny reports and/or accounts that failed the benchmark, and provided

guidance to help them improve the quality of future trustees' reports and accounts.

Nigel Davies added:

I hope trustees will learn from this study, in terms of the expectations around reporting, and in ensuring they select an independent examiner that knows about and understands the requirements.

The Commission has updated its ['Independent examination of charity accounts: guidance for trustees \(CC31\)'](#), to make it more accessible to trustees. The guidance is aimed at helping trustees appoint an independent examiner with the right ability and practical experience to carry out a competent examination of the accounts, and allowing them to prepare appropriately.

The full [report of the study is available on GOV.UK](#).

Ends.

1. *Further detail on the reporting of related party transactions is available in [Accounts monitoring review: reporting of related party transactions in charity accounts](#), also published today.
2. Research published in July 2018 looked at the factors the public associate with a trustworthy charity. The findings are available on [GOV.UK](#).
3. Charities with incomes over £25,000 must arrange for either an audit or an independent examination of their charity's accounts and if the charity's income is more than £250,000 the examiner must be qualified. Charities with incomes over £1 million (and those with incomes over £250,000 and gross assets over £3.26 million) must have an audit. Most other charities can opt for an independent examination, unless an audit is required for another reason, such as by the charity's governing document.

[Prime Minister announces plans to bring forward new bold and ambitious legislative agenda](#)

The Prime Minister has briefed Cabinet colleagues that the government will bring forward an ambitious new legislative programme for MPs' approval, and that the current parliamentary session will be brought to an end.

The Prime Minister has spoken to Her Majesty The Queen to request an end to the current parliamentary session in the second sitting week in September. Following the conclusion of the traditional party conference season, the second session of this Parliament will commence with a Queen's Speech on Monday 14 October.

A central feature of the legislative programme will be the Government's number one legislative priority – if a new deal is forthcoming at European Council – to introduce a Withdrawal Agreement Bill and move at pace to secure its passage before 31 October.

The decision to end the current parliamentary session – the longest in close to 400 years and in recent months one of the least active – will enable the Prime Minister to put a fresh domestic programme in front of MPs for debate and scrutiny while also ensuring that there is good time before and after the European Council for Parliament to further consider Brexit issues. Votes on the Queen's Speech are likely to fall on Monday 21 and Tuesday 22 October.

Through a Queen's Speech, the government will seek to strengthen public services, improve infrastructure and connectivity across the country, tackle crime and enhance the integrity of the criminal justice system, while protecting our natural environment for the long-term.

The Prime Minister said:

We must focus on crucial public priorities – helping the NHS, fighting violent crime, investing in infrastructure and science and cutting the cost of living.

We have made an important start – funding for 20,000 extra police officers and new investment in our NHS – but to deliver on the public's priorities we require a new session and a Queen's Speech.

I believe it is vital that Parliament is sitting both before and after European Council and if, as I hope, a deal with the EU is forthcoming, Parliament will then have the opportunity to pass the Withdrawal Agreement Bill required for ratification ahead of 31 October.

[Unrecorded mine shaft found under road in East Lothian, Scotland](#)



The site of the unrecorded mine shaft in East Lothian, Scotland

Enabling works will commence during the week beginning 4 November 2019 so a shaft under the B1361 road and adjacent footpath can be stabilised.

The existing traffic management system will continue throughout the works which will avoid the need for a full road closure, with the project scheduled to take 6 weeks to complete.

Coal Authority engineers have designed a permanent solution to remediate the mine shaft after various challenging factors were encountered at the site.

The site of the unrecorded mine shaft in East Lothian, Scotland

Michael Owens, from the Coal Authority's Public Safety and Subsidence Team, said:

This is an unrecorded coal mine shaft, meaning we hold no records of the depth, location or any specific information regarding the previous treatment method.

The mine shaft is located under a road which has live services beneath, including a medium pressure gas main that will need to be isolated and supported during works.

This coupled with the close proximity to a Category B listed wall and protected trees, meant we've had to coordinate our efforts alongside various stakeholders to design a suitable solution.

The permanent safety solution is to excavate and cast a reinforced concrete cap over the position of the suspected unrecorded, rectangular coal mine shaft.

The reinforced concrete cap will be constructed to withstand all traffic, with East Lothian Council responsible for overseeing the reinstatement of the road.

It is inevitable that when an unrecorded mine shaft is discovered,

the local community will be inconvenienced. The Coal Authority sincerely apologises for this disruption and would like to thank the local community for their continued patience while the works are being carried out.

East Lothian Council's Service Manager for Roads, Alan Stubbs, said: "This has been a challenging situation however our priority is to ensure the safety of all road users. We continue to work with the Coal Authority to ensure all required consents are granted to achieve a timely completion."

Published 28 August 2019

Last updated 15 October 2019 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 15 October 2019 Added the start date, the week beginning 4 November, for when the works will commence
2. 28 August 2019 First published.

[Improving data access for service sector: apply for funding](#)

The service sector accounts for 80% of the UK economy. Financial and professional services alone are worth £190 billion to the economy and employ 2.2 million.

New technologies, such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, have the potential to transform these industries.

Services such as legal, accounting and insurance need to develop a new generation of services to improve what they do for their customers and to remain globally competitive.

UK Research and Innovation has up to £3.5 million to support projects developing new accountancy, insurance and legal services based on artificial intelligence and data technologies.

The funding is from the UK government's £20 million Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund Next Generation Services Challenge, which aims to explore how new technologies could transform these services.

Projects should aim to improve access to data

The competition aims to speed up responsible development and adoption of artificial intelligence and data technologies in accountancy, insurance and legal services through better access to data.

Applications are sought from multi-disciplinary teams including the social

sciences and science and engineering and from teams that include regulators, users, service providers, and technology providers.

Projects must:

- have participated in the innovation lab taking place between 14 and 16 October 2019
- identify and develop a data access method to allow an artificial intelligence application for one or more of the 3 sectors
- address incentives, opportunities and ongoing business models for sustainable data access
- consider broader, non-technical issues around data access, including ethics, bias and privacy

Competition information

- the competition opens on 14 October 2019, and the deadline for applications is midday 20 November 2019
- businesses of any size may apply
- we expect projects to attract a maximum grant of £1.15 million and contribute at least equal funding