

Northern Ireland Secretary signals plans to drive forward integration for a future-proofed NI

- Secretary of State for Northern Ireland opens Wilton Park conference on “a more confident and inclusive Northern Ireland”.
- Builds on the NIO’s work to build a future of prosperity, integration and opportunity for the young people of Northern Ireland,
- Secretary of State speaks about an upcoming programme from the UK Government to support greater integration through education.

Today (Wednesday 22 June), Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP will commit to stepping up his support for greater integration through education in Northern Ireland.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State will indicate that the UK Government is preparing a programme to support greater integration through education.

He will say:

“It is clear there is a demand for integrated education which is not being met by the current provision of education in NI.

“That is why I have been considering my options as Secretary of State, and can confirm today that the UK government will shortly set out a programme to support greater integration through education in Northern Ireland.

“This programme will help promote the benefits of integrated education to parents, teachers and pupils, and support schools considering the transformation process.

“The programme will reflect this Government’s belief that parents should have a genuine choice of schools, so that families can choose the right school for their children.”

Attendees at the conference will discuss how integrated education is a key driver of opportunity and empowerment for young people, an essential part of the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland, and a key tenet of the Government’s commitment to Levelling Up.

The conference, titled ‘A More Confident and Inclusive Northern Ireland’ is the first of its kind, delivered jointly by the Northern Ireland Office and Wilton Park. It will be attended by representatives of key sectors from the UK, Ireland and America who are the architects of policies that shape Northern Ireland and its future.

Discussion will centre on realising Northern Ireland’s potential and on questioning what needs to change in Northern Ireland over the coming years,

with a particular focus on the views of the next generation, their involvement in the peace building process, and the progress that can be made to empower young people through education and the provision of high-skilled jobs.

The Secretary of State will also reiterate the UK Government's commitment to the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, as it approaches its 25th anniversary. He will say:

"A quarter century on from that Agreement, the Northern Ireland of today is a symbol to the world of what can be achieved through cooperation and reconciliation. Yet all too often, Northern Ireland's remarkable journey is not shared widely or loudly enough with the rest of the world.

"So as we approach that landmark anniversary, now presents an opportunity for us to change that. To show the world how far Northern Ireland has come since 1998.

"Now must be our moment to sharpen our focus on that vision, to test ideas and embrace new thinking, be it in education, skills, community programmes and projects, or social innovation."

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Wilton Park was established as part of an initiative inspired by Winston Churchill to help re-establish peace and democracy in Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. Discussions on how to promote peace, reconciliation and understanding have been a core mandate of Wilton Park ever since.
- The conference will be operating under Chatham House rules.
- Find our more about the conference at:
<https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/event/a-more-confident-and-inclusive-north-ern-ireland/>

[Homes for Ukraine scheme to begin processing applications from](#)

unaccompanied children

- Children who have already applied for a Homes for Ukraine Scheme visa will be allowed to travel to the UK without a parent or legal guardian, subject to strict sponsor checks
- As part of robust safeguarding regime applicants must also have notarised parental consent, the sponsor should be personally known to the parents, except in exceptional circumstances

The [Homes for Ukraine scheme](#) will allow children and minors under the age of 18 who have already applied through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to come to the UK without a parent or guardian, the government announced today (22 June 2022).

After working closely with the Ukraine government, the changes will enable a child to apply for a visa if they have proof of parental consent. This must be certified by an authority approved by the Ukraine government, such as the Ukrainian consul abroad.

Extensive sponsor checks will also be carried out by local authorities ahead of any visa being granted, with councils able to veto any sponsor arrangements they deem unsuitable.

The sponsor should also, except in exceptional circumstances, be someone who is personally known to the parents.

This policy will initially apply to the 1,000 children who have already applied but are unable to travel as they are not travelling or reuniting with a parent or guardian.

Lord Harrington, Minister for Refugees, said:

“We have seen the demand for allowing children to travel on the Homes for Ukraine scheme with parental consent. We have seen many applications where families want their children to travel to safety in the UK but where parents cannot travel with them.”

“We understand families are having to make difficult decisions to separate from their children where it is in their best interest, which is why we have extended the Homes for Ukraine scheme to allow this.”

“It is important we took the time to get this right – we have worked across government and with the Ukrainian government to find a solution to ensure we can continue offering safety to as many Ukrainians as possible while also welcoming more children into the UK.”

In recognition of the need to give children greater security, sponsors will be asked to commit to hosting for up to 3 years, or until they are aged 18 and the sponsorship has lasted 6 months – in line with the existing commitment for sponsors of adults or parents with their children.

Further security checks will be introduced for this cohort to ensure the wellbeing and safety of minors. DBS checks must be completed on the sponsor and adults in the sponsor household, before any visa is issued by the Home Office.

In cases where a sponsor is not related to the child, an enhanced DBS with barred list check will be required in advance of issuing the visa.

Councils will have the ability to veto a sponsor if they deem them unsuitable and will be asked to undertake regular checks on the child. Councils will be able to use existing statutory powers to protect the child's wellbeing where there are concerns.

Families hosting a child under the Homes for Ukraine scheme will receive £350 a month as a 'thank you' payment and all those arriving under the scheme will receive full access to education, healthcare and public services. Local authorities will receive £10,500 per child, as well as additional government funding to provide education and childcare services for children on a per pupil basis.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

"Schools and local authorities continue to make a herculean effort to support Ukrainian families fleeing from their home country, and I urge them to keep going."

"I am determined that children who have been forced from their homes by Russia's invasion of Ukraine do not have their life chances spoiled as a result and that is why we must do all we can to ensure they benefit from our incredible schools."

The government will be writing imminently to the person who has been named on the applications of under 18s with further detail on the eligibility and requirements, ahead of the scheme opening.

The government has established two new visa schemes to support those fleeing Putin's war. Already more than 77,400 Ukrainians have arrived safely in the UK since both schemes launched and 88,000 visas have been issued through Homes for Ukraine.

When the Homes for Ukraine scheme launched in March, children or minors under the age of 18 were not eligible unless they were applying with, or planning to reunite in the UK with, a parent or legal guardian.

Despite this around 1,000 under 18s applied for the scheme. These applications have been on hold with the Home Office while the government

carefully worked through the concerns around allowing children to apply for the Homes for Ukraine scheme without a parent or legal guardian.

Using the power of biology to solve challenges in defence

- DASA has launched a new Themed Competition: Engineering Biology for Defence and Security
- Funded by the Defence and Science Technology Laboratory
- Run in cooperation with the US Department of Defense
- Up to £1.5m funding available for engineering biology technologies

The [Defence and Security Accelerator](#) (DASA) is pleased to launch a new Themed Competition called [Engineering Biology for Defence and Security](#). Run on behalf of the [Defence and Science Technology Laboratory](#) (Dstl), this competition seeks proposals for innovative technologies that take synthetic biology concepts, and uses them to improve defence capability and address its challenges.

This competition will also involve the US Department of Defense (DoD). Both the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and DoD will have access to proposals submitted under this competition in order to jointly assess which proposals to fund.

This themed competition focuses on the following challenge areas:

- Challenge 1: Exploiting engineering biology for a step change in power and energy technologies
- Challenge 2: Materials for defence
- Challenge 3: Sensing

Key dates and funding

Up to £1.5m is available to fund multiple proposals for synthetic biology innovations.

The deadline to submit a proposal is midday 25 August 2022.

Do you have an innovation? [Read the full competition document and submit a proposal](#).

What is synthetic biology?

Synthetic biology is the design and fabrication of biological components and systems that do not exist in the natural world. It involves utilising synthetic biology concepts and turning them into real world solutions.

Engineering biology is a disruptive technology, identified as a key tool for achieving the sustainability targets set by the UK Government. The tools and technologies emerging from engineering biology have the potential to transform many parts of the UK industrial base, and Defence and Security in particular seeks to understand how new bio-enabled approaches can improve capability and also reduce its carbon footprint.

This competition seeks cutting edge, multidisciplinary research through the application of engineering biology tools and techniques, using novel research approaches and the discovery of new knowledge.

Engineering biology innovations for Defence and Security: Challenge areas

Submitted proposals should choose to target one or more of the below challenge areas.

Challenge 1: Exploiting engineering biology for a step change in power and energy technologies

This challenge area seeks concepts that can offer a step change in existing power source and energy storage solutions for military applications. For example:

- using engineered biology approaches to replace one or more components of a 'traditional' battery construction to improve energy, safety or other performance metrics
- using engineering biology to produce packaging or other materials that enhances a battery's safety or performance
- producing an entirely novel engineering biology solution to the production of useable electrical energy

Challenge 2: Materials for defence

This challenge area seeks materials for a range of uses in Defence and Security. This includes physical protection and materials capable of survival in extreme environments. For example:

- functionalised material e.g. self-disclosing for fatigue and corrosion, non-visible damage
- lightweight but strong structural materials, including composites
- novel camouflage solutions, including active or reactive colour change materials, variable emissivity surfaces and very high performance acoustic absorbers
- materials for eye protection, covering physical and laser protection

Challenge 3: Sensing

Sensing and sensor technologies are a fundamental enabler of Defence and Security activities. This challenge area seeks technology that moves beyond traditional analytical sensors. For example:

- novel sensing modalities delivered through engineering biology, i.e. mediated by a new component or a new combination of known components to sense new materials
- sensing modalities that are enabled by bioengineered components
- biomimetic or bioinspired sensing approaches

Want to learn more about these challenge areas? [Read the full competition document here](#).

Webinars and online events

Competition Webinar: 5 July 2022

This webinar will provide more information on the challenge areas and how to submit a proposal. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions in the Q&A.

[Register now](#)

If you're interested in this technology area please also take a look at [Generation-after-next Wearable Technologies](#). Please note that you cannot submit the same proposal to both competitions. If you're interested in applying but unsure which competition your innovation would be best suited to, contact your [local innovation partner](#).

Submit a proposal

Do you have a solution or novel approach that may help our ability to utilise engineering biology concepts in defence and security? Submit an idea and help DASA, Dstl and DoD exploit synthetic biology to address key defence challenges.

[Read the full competition document to learn more and submit a proposal.](#)

[Alok Sharma joins the South African Government for a ministerial roundtable](#)

COP President Alok Sharma, visited South Africa from 19 to 21 June, on a visit to support momentum in the delivery of the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), a unique long-term collaboration between South Africa, the UK, France, Germany, the US and the EU to support South Africa's decarbonisation efforts.

The commitment to mobilise \$8.5 billion over 3-5 years was announced at COP26

in Glasgow last November, to support South Africa in reaching its ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution targets, whilst also promoting employment and livelihoods.

During his visit, the COP President met members of the South African Cabinet for a ministerial roundtable to discuss the Just Energy Transition Partnership. He also met the Head of the Presidential Climate Finance Task Team, Daniel Mminele, to build momentum ahead of COP27 in Egypt later this year.

Ahead of his arrival, the COP President announced that the UK is providing a further R29 million (£1.5 million) in UK technical assistance from the UK's Partnering for Accelerated Climate Transitions programme, to support the South African Government in developing the policy and tools to accelerate transition.

During his time in South Africa, the COP President also travelled to Mpumalanga province to visit Eskom's Komati power station in Middelburg. He also met members of coal mining communities, to hear more about the importance of a just transition.

COP President Alok Sharma said:

At COP26 I pushed for global ambition on climate response and greater levels of finance to support developing economies. The Just Energy Transition Partnership to support South Africa's decarbonisation shows how these two goals can be simultaneously met.

I am grateful to members of the South African Cabinet for our in-depth discussions this week, detailing how we will work together to deliver on South Africa's climate targets, support those affected by the transition and attract high-quality investment into South Africa's low carbon future.

Alongside accelerating the decarbonisation of South Africa's economy, it is critical that we are investing in the next generation of jobs – and providing the training to make these roles widely accessible. It was instructive to meet members of the coal mining communities and hear more about what a just energy transition means to them.

We are working together to build momentum towards a strong outcome ahead of COP27, as South Africa embarks on its transition to a low emission, climate resilient economy that benefits from the opportunities of green growth.

To coincide with the visit, the British High Commission in South Africa also released details of UK-South Africa partnerships to unlock the skills of the future.

The British High Commission has teamed up with the Department of Science and Innovation on a report on how to boost the country's skills base for a green hydrogen future. Hydrogen energy is a clean and sustainable alternative to coal. The report identifies the type of skills and training needed and how these can be delivered through South Africa's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college system.

The UK also announced new R3.7 million (£190,000) funding for new skills development across South Africa for jobs in the fast-growing electric vehicle sector. The new support will fund research to ensure South African students are developing the mostly highly sought-after skills in the electric vehicle sector, as well as new online training content and support for lecturers.

British High Commissioner to South Africa, Antony Phillipson, said:

The UK is proud to be working with South Africa, France, Germany, the US, and the EU to deliver this ground-breaking transition plan.

This partnership is about supporting South Africa to achieve its own targets for decarbonisation over time, supporting a just transition and unlocking the significant investment opportunities created in a rapidly emerging low carbon global economy.

The UK is a long-standing partner in supporting South Africa's climate ambitions, having invested over R4.8 billion (£250 million) in International Climate Finance in South Africa between 2011 and 2021. In recent years, UK firms have been responsible for 50% of investment in the fast growing renewable energy sector.

This week we were delighted to announce even more UK-South Africa partnerships with new support for electric vehicle training, and research into green hydrogen skills – to ensure that South African workers and young people are the major beneficiaries of the country's transition to a greener future.

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Maximising our relevance and impact in

a changing world

Introduction

It is a pleasure to be here today. And I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this audience following the announcement of my [appointment as the CMA's interim CEO](#) when Andrea steps down in July.

I'd like to start by thanking Andrea for his tremendous leadership of the CMA over the past 6 years. He has overseen a period of significant change and accomplishment, as the CMA has taken on important new functions and established itself internationally. Of course, the CMA must continue to evolve in the years ahead, adapting the way that we operate to ensure that we are best placed to tackle pressing issues and deliver real benefit to UK consumers and businesses. But the purpose of this speech is not to set out a long term vision for the future of the CMA. That is something I look forward to working on with our incoming new Chair once in post.

For today, I will concentrate on what the CMA needs to do in the coming months, focusing on 4 key areas for action:

- first, we must ensure the continued relevance of our work;
- second, we must maximise the impact of our work;
- third, we must be an open organisation, which proactively engages with external stakeholders to help shape our view of the world; and
- finally, we must ensure that the CMA is a fully representative body which reflects the diversity of the consumers we serve and is informed by the priorities and interests of communities right across the UK.

And of course, these actions are intrinsically interdependent. It is only by being an open and representative organisation that we can maximise the relevance and impact of our work.

Delivering in a changing and demanding environment

Before I explore these themes in more detail, it's helpful to put our current work in context.

It's a truism that we are operating in a changing and uncertain landscape. But the extent of change in the past 2 years really does feel unprecedented – at least in our professional lifetimes. We have seen a global pandemic, adjustments to life outside the European Union (EU), rapid evolution of digital markets, war in Ukraine and an alarming rise in the cost of living.

This has affected the CMA in substantial and wide-ranging ways; and I am proud of how the organisation has responded. We reoriented ourselves in response to the pandemic, continuing to deliver our existing functions and rapidly addressing urgent competition and consumer issues. We took on expanded and new powers and functions following our departure from the EU,

giving the CMA a more significant global role. We have stepped up to tackle issues arising in digital markets using the full range of our existing powers whilst advocating for a new regulatory regime. And we have adjusted to post-pandemic ways of working whilst continuing to expand our presence outside London.

Of most immediate concern now is the rising cost of living being felt across the UK. Increases in the cost of living, particularly for essential products and services, and the consequences for real disposable income, will limit the choices available to some consumers and leave them more exposed to less scrupulous traders. These effects will be toughest for the lowest income households and vulnerable consumers, who may be less able to afford higher prices and less able to go to a different shop, or to go online, to get a better deal.

And this will exacerbate concerns that the harmful effects of market power may fall disproportionately on the less well off, as findings in our [State of Competition Report](#) for 2022 suggest. This is because poorer households tend to spend a greater proportion of their income on essential goods or services and, as our findings illustrate, the markets for essential goods and services are the most concentrated. Indeed, we found that these markets are approximately 30% more concentrated than markets serving the richest households.

The decisions about how we prioritise which issues to focus on and where to take action will rightly come under particular scrutiny at a time when the pressures on the UK economy and the impact on consumers mean it is more important than ever that markets remain competitive.

And of course, we all know that the volatility of the external environment in which we operate is likely to throw up new and unpredictable challenges.

Against this backdrop of change, there is an important constant: the underlying purpose of the CMA remains unchanged. The CMA's mission, established in 2014, to 'make markets work well in the interests of consumers, businesses and the economy' set us on a course to deliver market outcomes that benefit UK consumers and businesses. That mission provides a unifying purpose across the work that we do and the teams who deliver it. And it is instrumental in our ability to respond to emerging new and unanticipated issues like the cost-of-living crisis or the impact of a global pandemic.

But in the face of further change and uncertainty, it is essential that we continue to evolve the way we deliver our work.

In the remainder of this speech, I will focus on the 4 key themes I highlighted at the outset: relevance, impact, openness and representation.

Maintaining relevance

To begin with relevance, and speaking today to an audience of competition law practitioners, we all know the benefits of competitive markets. And we know

this isn't just about direct benefits to consumers in the form of lower prices and better quality. Competition drives innovation, improves productivity and helps grow the economy. It ensures that the UK remains a great place to start and grow a business. And helps to build resilience in supply chains and competitive labour markets.

But as a competition authority with a cross-economy remit with limits to our resources and powers, we must make strategic choices about where to focus our efforts to unlock the benefits of competition.

Our strategic priorities

This requires us to keep under review our priorities and programme of work – both current and prospective – to ensure we are paying attention to the issues that are most relevant to helping businesses and consumers deal with the economic challenges of the day.

In our latest [annual plan](#), we set out 5 strategic priorities for the coming year:

- first: protecting consumers from unfair behaviour by businesses, during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic
- second: fostering competition to promote innovation, productivity and long-term growth right across the UK
- third: promoting effective competition in digital markets
- fourth: supporting the transition to low carbon growth, including through the development of healthy competitive markets in sustainable products and services
- fifth: delivering our new responsibilities and strengthening our position as a global competition and consumer protection authority

We shape our enforcement and advocacy agenda around these strategic priorities. That helps to keep our work relevant, focused on making a real difference in the economy and to the lives of all of us as consumers. These priorities reflect the knowledge of markets we have gathered in current and past cases; our external engagement; horizon scanning; and substantive reviews of competition in the economy such as our recent [State of Competition Report](#) for 2022.

Responding to the rising cost of living

But we also retain the flexibility to anticipate and respond to emerging issues, as was the case with COVID-19 and now in the face of substantial cost-of-living pressures. We listen to concerns raised by the public, consumer groups, businesses and governments across the UK.

When considering how best the CMA can act to mitigate cost-of-living pressures, our starting point is that promoting competition to drive down price is – and always has been – central to the CMA's mission. While the recent rise in inflation has mainly been driven by global factors, it is clear that vigorous and effective competition is an important tool in helping keep prices down. Now more than ever it is vital that markets work well to

ensure this competitive process is not impeded.

Some past and current examples of our action to stimulate vigorous and fair competition between firms and to help ensure that consumers get the best deal possible include:

- protecting people when they are making expensive purchases like holidays, for example by improving transparency on online hotel booking sites or helping ensure refunds were paid when holidays were cancelled due to COVID-19
- blocking the merger between Sainsbury's and Asda and, more recently, securing undertakings from CD&R in its acquisition of Morrisons, to help maintain quality and keep prices low for shoppers and motorists
- Competition Act investigations into cartel activities in the construction sector, taking robust action to fine those who agree to fix prices and share markets and to disqualify responsible directors
- our investigation into loyalty penalty charges and our action in sectors like anti-virus software and online console video gaming to tackle concerns about people finding themselves locked into paying for services they no longer want to use
- our investigation into the funeral services market, where we imposed a set of measures to help consumers compare prices at a time when they are particularly vulnerable

These examples provide a snapshot of the work we have done, and continue to do, to mitigate cost-of-living pressures and to drive costs down for UK consumers. And we will continue use all our powers to the fullest extent to ensure prices remain as low as possible.

Looking to the future

But in maintaining our relevance, it is equally important that we look to the longer term, anticipating future issues and areas for action. Two good examples of this are our work to support sustainability and our digital horizon scanning activities.

First, let's take sustainability. Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy has been, and will continue to be, an important strategic priority for the CMA. It has been the focus of a number of our projects in recent years, from our work on misleading green claims to electric vehicles charging points. Last year's commission from the Secretary of State for Business, to look at how the competition and consumer regimes could better support the UK's 'net zero' and wider sustainability goals, gave us the opportunity to pull all of our thinking together in one place. Our advice signalled the actions the CMA will be taking to help continue to contribute to the UK's sustainability objectives, including our establishing a Taskforce that will act as a focal point for sustainability issues across the CMA and will be responsible for leading the CMA's strategic thinking on this issue, where our ambition is to be one of the lead authorities internationally, helping drive the debate forward.

We have also developed our horizon-scanning capability, particularly on

digital markets. We have been working closely with our partner regulators within the Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum to share knowledge and expertise and provide a coherent view of new and emerging digital markets and technologies. In May this year, we held a public event on the metaverse focused on the opportunities and challenges it may present to consumers and competitive markets. And just last week we hosted an event focused on new and evolving challenges in the tech industry and digital markets, and how competition and consumer agencies are developing technical capabilities and expertise to tackle these challenges.

In the coming months we will continue to challenge ourselves to deliver outcomes that really matter for consumers and businesses, now and in the future. And of course, an important measure of that relevance is also the impact of those outcomes.

Maximising impact

At the CMA we will always pursue the work we think will have the greatest impact on behalf of consumers. But as with any organisation, given resource constraints, we are required to make trade-offs – there are tough choices about what work we do and how we do it. In making these choices we are informed by the [CMA's Prioritisation Principles](#).

One way we can maximise impact, as I've already highlighted, is to ensure that we focus on the issues that are more relevant to helping businesses and consumers deal with the challenges they face.

And we must ensure that our outcomes are robust – not only to avoid legal challenge but also to drive real change, both to behaviours in the case or market in question but also more broadly. This requires, for example, that penalties imposed in Competition Act cases are high enough to deliver effective deterrence. And that our merger interventions, as well as preventing anti-competitive outcomes in particular cases, also send a clear signal that informs wider M&A activity. Of course, in return, the CMA must be clear about what those signals are – and I will return to that later in my discussion of openness and engagement.

In measuring our impact, we must also reflect on the way that we work as well as the work that we do.

Pace

In that context, I'd like to say a word about the speed of our investigations and use of our investigative powers. I've already mentioned the pressures we face to prioritise cases and investigations. It is clearly contrary to the interests of UK consumers, law-abiding businesses and the economy as a whole, if there are important cases where we cannot take action. Equally, when we do intervene, we should do so as quickly and decisively as possible. That means decisions that are robust, but not gold-plated. And it means acting quickly, to maximise impact and use our resources – our people – efficiently.

This is why we keep a constant focus on moving cases forward, using formal

powers as necessary, to reach final outcomes as quickly as possible. Sometimes this is harder because we face considerable opposition from parties and their advisors. Of course, we understand the importance for parties of exercising their rights of defence. And for this audience in particular, let me say clearly: we recognise and value the contribution that the competition bar brings to our processes, by ensuring clients are well-advised and put their points clearly and well. But we expect all stakeholders to recognise that they are accountable for the approach they bring to that process. I believe we have a common interest in ensuring that the regime as a whole delivers the best outcome for UK consumers. And I urge all of us to play a part in achieving this objective.

Agility

Maximising impact with limited resources also requires that we are agile in the way we work.

In that context, we must make use of the full range of our powers and functions. We are greater than the sum of our parts and we should harness the breadth of our toolkit and exploit the complementarities between our markets, mergers, competition enforcement and consumer work, as we have done on numerous occasions. Take digital markets, for example. Whilst we welcome the UK Government's commitment to bring forward legislation to establish an ex ante regulatory regime, we are still pushing ahead with cases using our existing tools where we identify potential concerns.

Our recent publication, less than 2 weeks ago, of our mobile ecosystems market study report is a case in point. The study into Apple and Google's mobile ecosystems found that the companies have an effective duopoly that allows them to exercise a stranglehold over these markets. But rather than wait for the new digital markets regime to commence, the CMA has identified where it can take immediate targeted action to tackle these problems using our current powers. As a result, the CMA is now consulting on making a market investigation reference into mobile browsers and access to cloud gaming on mobile devices.

We are also taking action to address concerns in digital markets using our competition and consumer enforcement powers. For example, our Competition Act investigations into Google's 'Privacy Sandbox' browser changes – in respect of which Google has now agreed commitments – and into whether Meta might be abusing a dominant position through its collection and use of advertising data. In the consumer protection space, we are taking action for example against Amazon and Google relating to fake online reviews on their sites. Digital markets also feature prominently in a number of our merger investigations such as Meta's acquisition of Giphy.

Further, to maximise our impact, we must not confine ourselves to formal investigations. Instead, we must use the full range of our toolkit, including:

- Advocating the importance of pro-competitive measures and providing advice to government, regulators and other public bodies. For example,

in 2021 we advised the Government on measures it could take to improve outcomes for consumers in the PCR testing market. And as I speak, we are responding to the Business Secretary's call on the CMA to conduct an urgent review of fuel pricing.

- Providing advice and analysis to shape the debate on issues that may be negatively impacting on consumers, such as publishing research into the experiences of vulnerable consumers in markets.
- Providing advice and support to consumers, such as our Online Rip Off Tip Off campaign which aims to raise consumer awareness of misleading online practices, as well as warning businesses not to engage in anti-competitive practices, as with our 2020 "Cheating or competing?" cartels awareness campaign.

The CMA also reaches out to business communities to help them understand their obligations under competition and consumer law. While your clients are clearly well served, for many businesses and particularly small businesses, their legal advice may not come from competition law experts and we have been working with the Law Society to engage with less specialist firms to share some of those key messages.

Whilst these are often perceived as 'softer' tools, in many cases they are also underpinned by statutory provisions and can be an equally important means to deliver impactful outcomes, often in a shorter time frame and with potentially wider impact than a single formal investigation.

To deliver maximum impact in an agile way, we also need to continue to invest in talent and develop new skills and expertise. Nowhere is this more evident than the development of our DaTA Unit (as showcased in the excellent conference organised by Stefan Hunt and a cross-office team last week). The DaTA unit brings a range of new skill sets to the CMA, such as data scientists and engineers, who work across the range of our tools, informing our understanding of markets and radically improving our own technology practices to drive maximum impact in the work that we do.

Reform

The need for the CMA to be able to work efficiently and effectively to meet the challenges of a changing landscape also highlights the importance of the competition and consumer reform agenda. Although we are doing all that we can within our existing powers and will continue to do so, we believe that legislative reform is needed to safeguard the interests of consumers and improve public confidence in markets by creating stronger, swifter and more flexible competition and consumer protection regimes.

We are therefore delighted that, in response to its consultation on 'Reforming competition and consumer policy' published last July, the UK Government in April this year reiterated its commitment to further enhancing the powers of the CMA to support our efforts to act robustly to promote competition and protect consumers. A raft of reform measures is being proposed to provide stronger investigative and enforcement powers to deliver more consistent, efficient and effective investigative procedures across the CMA's tools. These include:

- moving to an 'administrative model' for consumer law enforcement, which will allow the CMA to decide for itself where consumer law has been breached and give the CMA power to impose penalties for infringements, mirroring the approach under competition law enforcement
- the introduction of a statutory duty of expedition, making clear that the CMA is under a duty to act swiftly in relation to its competition and consumer law functions
- changing the standard of review of appeals against interim measures from full merits to judicial review
- changes to the markets regime, including greater opportunity for binding undertakings to be accepted during market studies and market investigations
- strengthening the CMA's evidence gathering powers, for example by broadening the power to interview individuals as part of CA98 investigations (so it aligns with existing powers in the Enterprise Act) and giving the CMA powers to 'seize-and-sift' evidence when it inspects a domestic premises under a warrant
- introducing turnover-based penalties for businesses that fail to comply with a CMA information request, or where they conceal, falsify or destroy evidence or provide the CMA with false or misleading information

And this is just a flavour of the package of reforms that has been put forward by the UK Government to enhance the CMA's powers to step in and enforce competition and consumer law efficiently and effectively on consumers' behalf.

As a result of these reforms, we will be able to act more quickly and decisively to protect consumer interests.

Collaboration

Finally, I would note that, in looking to maximise our impact, we must work intelligently and collaboratively with partner agencies both domestically, for example through the DRCF, and internationally, especially given the global reach of so much of our work.

Being open and engaged

My third theme – openness – is essential to the CMA achieving its objectives and plays an integral part in each of the other themes we are exploring today.

We have reflected a great deal at the CMA on what it means to be an 'open' organisation and I take the view that openness operates in 2 directions. On the one hand, it's about our transparency as an organisation – what we tell the world about the choices we make, our plans, the benefits of our work, and so on. On the other, it is about being willing to get out and engage with external stakeholders and to listen and be informed by what they have to say.

Getting closer to consumers

This theme of openness resonates with our CMA 2020s agenda launched shortly

before the pandemic by our CEO, Andrea Coscelli, and former Chairman, Lord Tyrie, which set out our plan to bring the CMA closer to consumers and their needs. This included action to:

- listen more effectively to consumers and other stakeholders so that we can better understand how markets are changing and consumers' experiences of them
- do more to explain the choices we make and how those choices will benefit consumers, including by being committed to regular external engagement with stakeholders

Inevitably, the impact of the pandemic limited our opportunities for direct outreach over the last 2 years but it is important that we take this agenda forward now and it will be an immediate priority of mine as interim CEO.

We want to take every opportunity to explain how consumers benefit from competition and well-functioning markets, making better use of media tools – like social media – to reach consumers we don't often hear from and to identify potentially problematic conduct. We also want to provide explanations for our plans, priorities and the criteria we use for choosing our work.

When it comes to better understanding the changing needs of consumers and how they experience markets, we have been engaging – and will continue to engage – with a wider and more diverse range of stakeholders than ever before.

For example, we established our Getting Closer to the Third Sector programme to deepen our links with third sector organisations across the UK, engaging with them on a long-term basis and harnessing the intelligence gained from these interactions to help inform our prioritisation decisions and our work. We have met with over 50 third sector organisations to date and this engagement has already helped identify several markets that may benefit from CMA enforcement action or advocacy. As part of this programme, we worked with Citizens Advice to design a series of CMA visits to Citizens Advice centres to enable our staff to gain a greater insight into the issues consumers are facing, and how they are affected by markets in which the CMA might have an interest.

Dialogue with business

Alongside consumer engagement, it is also important to develop the CMA's dialogue with businesses and investors. It is clear that effective competition enforcement is pro-business and pro-growth. The economic evidence is overwhelming that competitive markets – not monopolies – provide the best environment in which to encourage investment, innovation and productivity.

But the CMA's work in pursuit of that objective will be most effective when businesses and investors have as clear as possible an understanding of how we will carry out our activities. This is particularly important now that the CMA has taken on a bigger role globally and in the UK economy, following departure from the EU. I don't expect every business to agree with every decision that the CMA takes, but I want to make sure that our approach is as

transparent and predictable as it can be, to help inform the investment decisions that businesses make. Of course, it's possible to engage with people online or through the media, and I am enormously proud of how the CMA has used social and other media to get our message across. But for some messages, and for some audiences, there is real value in face-to-face engagement. Naturally, this was heavily restricted over the past 2 years because of the pandemic. But that position is now changing and greater engagement with business is a priority focus for my new role.

Across the nations and regions

It is also critical that our external engagement is not London-centric but rather it is focused on hearing from consumers and businesses across all our nations and regions, so that our decisions are informed by the full range of experiences and perspectives concerning markets across the UK. Over the last 18 months in particular, the CMA has been focused on speaking and listening to businesses across the north of England, not only in anticipation of our new office openings but to make sure that the CMA's understanding captures businesses large and small across sectors.

Recently our Board met in Edinburgh and as part of this programme, we hosted 2 roundtables for senior Scottish stakeholders on the cost-of-living challenges and on Scotland's 'net zero' ambitions. We met with consumer groups, business organisations, public bodies and other stakeholders. The roundtables were a chance for us to hear directly about the challenges and opportunities consumers and businesses in Scotland are facing. We are already using this information to inform our work. And I intend to engage in similar events in other parts of the UK in the coming months.

A fully representative body

Finally, in thinking about how best we achieve our objectives, it's also important to think about who we are as an organisation.

As the UK's competition and consumer authority, our work makes a difference to millions of people across the UK. To deliver effectively – maximising the relevance and impact of our work – we need people from diverse backgrounds to ensure that we are a fully representative body and that the decisions we make reflect the breadth of different perspectives and experiences within our society.

This is especially relevant at the decision-making level of the CMA. As I mentioned earlier, we face a balancing exercise as we prioritise our work. As part of this exercise, we must consider where action will have the greatest impact, where help is most needed, which groups of people we should engage with and so on. If decisions on these matters are taken by a homogenous group, lacking diversity of perspective and experience, we cannot expect our work to reflect and respond to the diverse and changing society we serve and we risk making the wrong choices about where we allocate our resources.

In this way we can see that diversity and inclusion at the CMA plays an essential role in promoting equality within the wider economy, so we must

work hard to ensure that the CMA is an organisation which reflects the diversity of our society.

But there is another reason why we should strive for a fully representative CMA, one which promotes and exhibits equality, diversity and inclusion in all that it does. And that is because it is simply the right thing to do. At the CMA, we want to nurture an inclusive culture in which every individual is valued and respected and is able, regardless of their background or personal characteristics, to climb as high as their talents and ambition will take them. This is important to me personally, and to our organisation as a whole.

We are especially mindful of the difficulties faced by colleagues from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. At the CMA, we have taken important steps to address this challenge – although there is still more to be done.

Taking action on diversity

I'd like to speak now about some of the steps we are taking to face down these inequalities and the barriers that exist to ensure that members of staff from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds have every opportunity they deserve to succeed at the CMA and that we have diversity across our employee base, with those with protected characteristics represented at all levels of the organisation.

In the past 2 years, we have implemented a number of initiatives to embed our commitment to diversity and to make the CMA an even more inclusive workplace. An immediate priority for 2020 and 2021 was to deliver an ambitious programme focused on initiatives to support and champion our ethnic minority colleagues and to improve ethnic and cultural diversity at the senior leadership level. To mention just some of the initiatives we have introduced within this period:

- Two talent schemes – Aspire and Accelerate – designed and developed to support individuals from under-represented and minority groups navigate the next stages of their career. Accelerate is our sponsorship programme for more senior black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues with aspirations to reach the Senior Civil Service. It provides direct support from and exposure to senior leaders within the CMA and delivers a package of targeted opportunities including shadowing, stretch projects, coaching, external networking and academic study.
- We have committed to publishing our ethnicity pay gap data, alongside our gender pay gap reporting, publishing the ethnicity gap figures for the first time in 2021. This is not a legal requirement, but we see the internal and external publication of this data as a vital step in committing to and reporting accountability for change. It doesn't always make for easy reading, since the data tells us in some areas we have quite a way to go, but it is important to do.
- Similarly, on recruitment, we are using our data to inform our progress in attracting diverse talent and to devise strategies to engage with hard-to-reach groups which are not well-represented in our staff population, especially at senior leadership levels.
- In 2021 we also launched the CMA Advisory Committee, AdCo, a diverse

team of individuals from groups and backgrounds under-represented at the senior levels of the CMA, which provides insights and advice to inform, support and constructively challenge senior decision-making. AdCo advises on key strategic matters including the development of the CMA's annual plan, our outreach and recruitment work, and the selection and prioritisation of cases and projects. Our ambition is for AdCo both to improve diversity of thought and to enable greater diversity at the senior levels of the CMA. So far, the signs are very encouraging.

- The Getting Closer to the Third Sector project, which I have mentioned already, goes some way in ensuring that the voices and concerns of socio-economically marginalised groups and vulnerable consumers are heard and taken into account when we are taking decisions about prioritisation and our work.

I am proud to share that we are already seeing tangible results from these initiatives. AdCo is broadening the range of perspectives around the top table and helping provide a pipeline of diverse talent within the CMA. Pay gap reporting is shining a light on the work that still needs to be done across the organisation. Our talent schemes and recruiting efforts are playing a key role in securing progression for staff from under-represented backgrounds.

But our efforts do not stop here, and nor are they focused only on racial equality. We are committed to diversity in all its forms and to inclusion of all members of staff, including those with other protected characteristics that I've not mentioned today. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for 2020 to 2024 and the Action Plans we publish under it will keep us focused on building and supporting a diverse workforce. And I am personally committed to ensure that this remains an organisational priority under my leadership.

Being represented across the UK

Another key element of the CMA being a representative body is ensuring that we have a real presence and impact in the UK nations and English regions.

As you know, the CMA is a UK-wide body and is committed to delivering for consumers and businesses wherever they are in the UK. Part of this commitment is about understanding the challenges consumers and businesses face, and one way to do this is to have staff across the UK, working in the communities where they live. We now have offices in each of the nations – in Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff – and are looking to expand our footprint further. Take Edinburgh for example. In 2018, we had 3 people working there, now we have almost 60 staff – performing UK-wide roles – and are looking to grow this presence further. We are also in the process of setting up offices in Manchester and Darlington.

More than this, we have a dedicated resource in the CMA – the Advocacy, Nations and External Relations Team – with team members based in each of the nations whose role is to represent the CMA in the nations, and equally importantly, to represent the nations in the CMA. And increasingly, across the range of CMA functions, we have colleagues who have direct and

longstanding experience of working with the devolved administrations or past experience of working in them.

This all means that we are better placed than ever before to understand and respond to changing markets in a way that is relevant to all communities across the UK.

In conclusion, the CMA's work – and our underlying mission, to 'make markets work well in the interests of consumers, businesses and the economy' – has never been more important. The CMA has delivered immense benefits over the last 8 years but to ensure we continue on this successful path we must redouble our efforts to remain relevant, impactful, open and representative of the society we serve.

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