

News story: Mind the gap

When (some) women first won the right to vote on this day 100 years ago, the idea that they would also have a hand in drafting legislation was laughable.

That they could be responsible for creating laws to protect women against sex discrimination, as well as discrimination on the basis of other 'protected characteristics', such as disability and race, was beyond the realm of most people's imagination.

Yet lawyers from the Government Legal Department (GLD), who advise the Government Equalities Office (GEO), do exactly that.

An average day at the office for Anna Fairclough, a GLD lawyer who advises GEO, could involve briefing Ministers to respond to questions in the House of Commons, working with policy colleagues to make sure press lines are legally accurate, or drafting regulations to help close the gender pay gap.

Recently, Anna's team has also helped to draft guidance on dress codes for employers – something which, in the future, will help those asked to wear inappropriate clothes at work. The team was also closely involved in implementing the Secretary of State's 2017 commitment to provide free abortions in England for women from Northern Ireland.

"If you look at the recent controversies around equal pay at the BBC and the President's Club – it's obvious there's still quite a long way to go," says Anna, whose remit also includes issues relating to trans and non-binary people.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 gave certain women the right to vote: to qualify, you had to be aged over 30, a property owner, married to or a member of the Local Government Register, or a graduate voting in a University constituency. Eight and a half million women met these criteria – but that number still represented only 40% of the total population of women in the UK. The Act opened the door to full suffrage, which was achieved a decade later. In 1928, the Equal Franchise Act led to all women over 21 being able to vote with the same requirements and rights as men.

The Government Equalities Office works on a number of important programmes to address gender inequality and supports the Home Secretary in her role as Minister for Women and Equalities, supported by GLD lawyers.

One of the biggest projects last year dealt with by GLD lawyers advising GEO was drafting the Gender Pay Gap Regulations. The regulations ensure large employers are bound by law to publish data publicly on differences in average pay between men and women – guaranteeing that they can be held to account on this issue.

"That's a massively important step towards identifying the gender pay gap, and the drivers of that inequality, and making sure that this is front and centre of people's minds." Anna says. "It's great to work on something that's

so progressive – we’re the only country in the world to require such extensive public reporting of gender pay gaps.

“It’s brilliant working on things that are high-profile and interesting to talk about. They’re topical, exciting. And it’s great to be in a position to have a positive influence on the way society develops.”

GEO lawyers also assist in work with an international flavour, such as scrutinising the legislation and policy of British Overseas Territories to test compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, so as to extend the Convention to protect women in those territories.

In the future, Anna anticipates the team will be able to go even further in advancing equality for women: “I expect there will be further work to raise awareness of acceptable dress codes and treatment of women at work, as well as projects to increase women’s political participation at every level and to encourage women to return to work after career breaks. I’m keen to see how the first year of gender pay gap reporting plays out, and how employers start making positive changes to reduce the gap.

“The past few months have seen a sea change in attitudes to women, and hopefully we’ll be working on projects that aim to seize and build upon that mood.”

News story: Ten-year milestone for nuclear skills development

Almost £4 million has been invested by the NDA in NSAN since it was launched 10 years ago – a milestone it marked with a reception at the House of Lords, opened by Lord Hutton.

NSAN was established by nuclear employers and government to address key skills challenges facing the nuclear industry. It is now the sector’s leading collective skills forum.

It has played a key role in developing the skills and workforce required for the NDA to fulfil its mission to decommission and clean-up the existing UK nuclear legacy.

David Vineall, Human Resources Director at the NDA, said:

We are extremely proud of our 10 years of partnership with NSAN. It has delivered a portfolio of world-class skills development and training activities for the nuclear industry.

It is essential the industry develops and sustains a highly skilled workforce to support the delivery of our mission; safely, securely and in an environmentally responsible way.

Jo Tipa, Managing Director of NSAN, said:

The NDA, as founder members of NSAN, has been involved in all aspects of our operation since 2007 and has worked collaboratively with us and the sector to support the development and delivery of a number of key skills initiatives.

NSAN values the relationship with the NDA and we look forward to continuing our strong partnership going forwards.

To mark 10 years of collaborative working, the NDA was presented with an NSAN membership certificate of thanks during the event.

[Find out more about National Academy for Nuclear](#)

[News story: Independent review of foster care published](#)

An independent [review](#) of foster care in England has been published today, setting out recommendations to improve the fostering system for children and foster carers.

The independent review, commissioned by the Department for Education and conducted by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers, looked at the purpose of foster care and what it means to those closely involved in the system.

It makes 36 recommendations for government, local authorities and independent fostering agencies including:

- Ensuring foster carers are supported and included in decision-making;
- Improving foster placement commissioning, and matching;
- Greater stability and permanence for children and young people in foster care.

The review is part of the government's drive to ensure that children living in foster care have access to a stable and loving environment and foster carers get the support they need. This includes the [announcement](#) in December 2017 that the government will extend its 30-hour childcare offer to foster carers.

Nadhim Zahawi MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, said:

We welcome this thorough and insightful report into the fostering system, which first and foremost is about identifying and addressing the needs of children in foster care.

The report gives us an opportunity to celebrate foster care and to recognise the invaluable role foster parents play in the lives of vulnerable children. We are committed to supporting them in this role, and that's why we recently announced that we will extend our 30-hour childcare offer to foster children to provide extra help for foster parents.

We will carefully consider the review's recommendations, alongside those from the Education Select Committee, over the coming months to determine how they can help us to make sustainable improvements to the fostering system and to the outcomes for looked after children.

To conduct the review Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers drew on a wide range of information, including a public call for evidence as well as meetings with local authorities, independent fostering agencies, representative organisations, academics, foster carers and children and young people.

The Department published a [report](#) in July, which brought together existing evidence around the fostering system to provide an overview of current provision.

New statistics also published today provide additional analysis on looked-after children in foster care, which helped to inform the review.

The review also includes a survey of the views and experiences of children in foster care, conducted by the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield.

Reviewer Sir Martin Narey said:

Foster Carers make a remarkable contribution to the lives of children often damaged by neglect and that contribution needs to be recognised. But fostering can be made even more effective, and could make an even greater contribution to the welfare to some of the country's most disadvantaged children. Foster Carers must be allowed much greater authority in making decisions about the children in their care and they need to be liberated to offer the physical affection which is a vital and necessary part of most children's healthy upbringing.

We make 36 recommendations and if all were to be implemented, as I hope they will be, then local authorities will have foster carers who are better motivated and better appreciated. And they will be

offering greater permanency for children whose lives in care are too often disrupted. At the same time local authorities should make significant financial savings through obtaining better deals from most of the independent fostering providers, the commissioning of which is too often inadequate.

And his co-reviewer, Mark Owers said:

Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days of the year, foster carers help children in care to feel safe, loved and part of their family. We can be proud of fostering, local authorities and independent fostering agencies alike. But we can do better.

Foster carers must consistently get the support they need and the respect they deserve. More children need to enjoy placement stability and a genuine sense of permanence. Commissioning has to improve. We need to help more people, and with greater diversity, to become foster carers. We are confident that our recommendations will improve foster care in England.

The Government will respond to the report and the recommendations in Spring 2018, setting out the future programme of work for the fostering system.

[News story: Public Health England urges vigilance about spotting signs of scarlet fever](#)

Scarlet fever is a very contagious, seasonal bacterial illness that mainly affects children and is not uncommon for this time of year.

The latest [Health Protection Report](#) showed 6,225 cases of scarlet fever had been reported since mid-September 2017, compared to 3,764 for the same period last season. There were 719 cases reported for the most recent week (22 to 28 January 2018).

This increasing trend is in line with usual patterns although cases are currently higher than those reported at this point in the last 4 seasons. It is not possible at this point to determine what the final numbers will be for this season. Scarlet fever is a clinical diagnosis and not usually confirmed by laboratory testing so the activity we may be seeing may be due to increased awareness and reporting of scarlet fever, although the exact cause is still being investigated.

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness; PHE is advising parents to be on the lookout for scarlet fever symptoms, which include a sore throat, headache and fever with a characteristic fine, pinkish or red rash with a sandpapery feel. If signs of scarlet fever are suspected, it is important to contact your local GP or NHS 111. Early treatment with antibiotics is important and can help reduce the risk of complications such as pneumonia and the spread of the infection. Children or adults diagnosed with scarlet fever are advised to stay at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

Nick Phin, Deputy Director at Public Health England, said:

It's not uncommon to see a rise in cases of scarlet fever at this time of year. Scarlet fever is not usually a serious illness and can be treated with antibiotics to reduce the risk of complications and spread to others. We are monitoring the situation closely and remind parents to be aware of the symptoms of scarlet fever and to contact their GP for assessment if they think their child might have it.

Whilst there has been a notable increase in scarlet fever cases when compared to last season, greater awareness and improved reporting practices may have contributed to this increase.

Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, Chair of the Royal College of GPs, said:

Scarlet Fever is a bacterial infection that usually presents with a sore throat, fever, headaches, and a rosy rash that generally starts on a patient's chest.

It is very contagious disease and much more common in children under 10 than teenagers or adults, but it can be treated quickly and effectively with a full course of antibiotics and all GPs are trained to diagnose and treat it.

Scarlet fever used to be a lot more common than it is now, but GPs are noticing more cases than in previous years at the moment. If a patient thinks that they, or their child, might have symptoms, they should seek medical assistance.

PHE is also urging GPs, paediatricians, and other health practitioners to be mindful when assessing patients and promptly notify local health protection teams of cases and outbreaks.

For further information for on scarlet fever visit the [NHS Choices website](#).

Guidelines for the [management of scarlet fever](#) are also available from the PHE website.

[News story: Chris Grayling's response to Mark Carne stepping down](#)

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Mark has done an excellent job as Chief Executive of Network Rail, presiding over the biggest modernisation of our rail infrastructure since Victorian times. He has provided very strong industry leadership on safety and digital rail, and Network Rail has significantly improved the railway for its customers under his direction. His focus on devolving power to Network Rail's route businesses has built the foundations for a more efficient and passenger-focused organisation which supports the government's agenda to bring track and train closer together. Mark will of course continue to provide great leadership for Network Rail until he steps down in the summer; and I hope he will continue to play an important part in the transport sector in the future.