

News story: New Chief Executive appointed to lead Valuation Office Agency

Melissa Tatton has been appointed on promotion to head up the Valuation Office Agency.

The Valuation Office Agency, an executive agency of HM Revenue and Customs, is responsible for providing the government with the valuations and property advice needed to support taxation and benefits.

This follows the appointment of current Chief Executive, Penny Ciniewicz, as new Director General for Customer Compliance at HMRC.

HMRC Chief Executive, Jon Thompson said:

I'd like to congratulate Melissa on this important appointment. The Valuation Office Agency plays a vital role in providing the valuations and property advice required to support taxation and benefits. I look forward to Melissa joining the Executive Committee, and to becoming a valued member of the leadership team".

Melissa Tatton said:

I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to lead the Valuation Office Agency as it continues to invest in and improve its services, and to be joining HMRC's Executive Committee. It's vital that VOA customers continue to have confidence in its valuations and advice, and I'm honoured to build on the excellent work that Penny Ciniewicz has led over the past eight years.

Melissa will take up her new role from 4 September.

Melissa joined the Inland Revenue as a graduate tax inspector and has forged a successful career as a tax leader across a wide range of roles. Melissa was appointed to her current post as Director for Individuals and Small Business Compliance in 2014. Before that she held the following posts:

- Director, Large Business Service (LBS), HMRC (2011-14)
- Deputy Director, Business International, HMRC (2009-11)
- Melissa was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in June 2016

Press release: Call for more industry action to stop recruitment fraud

Recruitment companies must do more to help stamp out the rapidly growing issue of job scams, Employment Minister Damian Hinds has said.

Recruitment fraud is a serious, yet lesser-known crime which often goes unreported by jobseekers. However research shows that 1 in 10 jobseekers have been a victim of a job scam.

Victims are typically on low income and are duped into applying for a fake job. They are asked to pay up-front costs for items like security checks, with these victims losing on average up to £500.

The Employment Minister wants more organisations to do their part to highlight this serious issue, and is challenging big players and jobs boards to take action by signing up to the SAFERjobs campaign.

Employment Minister, Damian Hinds, said:

It's unacceptable that jobseekers, typically ordinary people on low income, are being targeted by fraudsters. Looking for work can be tough enough and even the smallest setback can derail the most promising careers.

Many of the people affected are just looking to provide for their families, and instead face financial hardship at no fault of their own. I want more of these fraudsters caught and to feel the full extent of the law.

That's why I'm calling on more recruitment companies and job boards to take their responsibilities seriously, and follow our lead by promoting the excellent work of SAFERjobs.

The rallying call follows the success of DWP in promoting the non-profit, joint industry and law enforcement organisation SAFERjobs through the government's job site Universal Jobmatch. This has increased the number of people accessing information on job scams six-fold.

The chairman of SAFERjobs, Keith Rosser:

Recruitment fraud is varied and affects people in different ways. It can be a fake job offer advising that the individual needs to pay for security checks, online training, visas or insurance, or a work-from-home scam conning people into money laundering.

Unfortunately, job scams are on the rise and in the last 2 years we have witnessed a 300% rise in recruitment related fraud and misconduct.

SAFERjobs offers free advice to jobseekers and agency workers to ensure people do not fall foul of scams or illegal practice. Look for recruiters who partner with SAFERjobs for a safer job search.

One person affected is Chloe, who was asked to provide money up front for DBS checks to work in childcare. In total she was scammed out of £125.

Everything about the role looked great, and I was advised it would take between 6 to 8 weeks for the checks to be completed. However, once I paid the money red flags started to appear when I didn't hear anything back from the company.

This is not how to treat people. This has caused me so much stress over the past couple of months, right when my income is low and I'm trying to find work.

I would like to get my money back and have opened up a fraud investigation with the support of SAFERjobs – I want to stop this agency from doing this to other people.

Top tips

Jobseekers should always be careful to protect themselves and below are some basic tips on being safe when looking for work.

Never part with money – employers should pay employees, not the other way round. Someone should be suspicious if asked to pay for any fees upfront for security checks, visas or training.

Never phone the company for an interview – premium rate phone scams are common. This is where an individual calls a pay-for number thinking it's an interview, when actually they are paying for every minute they stay on hold.

Never provide personal details – bank account details, National Insurance number, date of birth, driving licence or utility bill information that are not relevant to an application process. Such information should also not be included in a CV.

Never do everything online – whilst technology is a great enabler to help people find work, at some point a job discussion should lead to telephone or face to face an interview. Hiring agents who keep the relationship solely to email must be treated extremely cautiously.

Do some research – find out about the company that the job is with. Check landline telephone numbers to confirm the job is real, and use social media and similar sources to dig deeper into the organisations to see their

reputation.

Anyone in doubt about a job advert should check in with [SAFERjobs](#) for free advice.

More information

SAFERjobs is a non-profit, joint industry and law enforcement organisation designed to support job seekers, agency staff, and contractors with any suspected fraud, malpractice, breach of legislation, or poor experience they may encounter. SAFERjobs is supported by:

- DWP
- BEIS
- Metropolitan Police
- and other government and industry organisations

Typical cost of an average scam is £4,000, according to figures from Action Fraud.

DWP formed a partnership with SAFERjobs in 2015 and since then have shared good practices and intelligence. The department wrote to a number of employers who used Universal Jobmatch encouraging them to register with SAFERjobs last year.

DWP agreed with SAFERjobs in June 2015 to put their website link on the Universal Jobmatch site to raise awareness and protect jobseekers. Following this, traffic to the site increased from around 740 to more than 70,000 hits the next month. Average monthly hits to the site are now around 50,000. Eighteen of the top 25 job boards in the UK now promote SAFERjobs.

A study of 10,000 job seekers by CV Library in conjunction with SAFERjobs in September 2016 found that 10% had been a victim of a job scam. Of those that have been targeted, almost half (46.7%) suffered financial loss and a third (33.7%) of students feel vulnerable when job hunting. In the last 12 months more than 444,400 people have sought advice on staying safe in their job search and other labour market issues from SAFERjobs. The year before that they had 322,700 queries (June 2016 to June 2017), the year before that just 19,000 (June 2015 to June 2016).

Reports to SAFERjobs have increased by 300% in the past year alone (between September 2015 and September 2016).

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News story: US-UK Trade Working Group lays groundwork for potential future free trade agreement

The International Trade Secretary, The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP, and the US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, jointly chaired the plenary session of the first meeting of UK-US Trade and Investment Working Group on Monday 24 July.

The first meeting of the Trade Working Group, made up of representatives from several US and UK government agencies and delegations from the UK and US, will focus on providing commercial continuity for US and UK businesses as the UK leaves the EU and exploring ways to strengthen trade and investment ties ahead of the exit.

The Working Group will also begin to lay the groundwork for a potential, future free trade agreement once the UK has left the EU, and explore where we can collaborate to promote open markets around the world.

International Trade Secretary, The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP said:

It is a testament to the political will in both countries that this Working Group is meeting just a month after Ambassador Lighthizer and I discussed it in June. This will be our forum to strengthen the bilateral trade and investment relationship and deepen the already extensive economic ties between the UK and US.

The immediate priority is to give businesses on both sides of the Atlantic certainty and confidence. Early discussions will focus on providing commercial continuity for US and UK businesses as the UK leaves the EU.

The working group will also start to lay the ground work for potential negotiations on an ambitious free trade agreement. The US is our single largest trading partner therefore we have a strong foundation on which to build.

US Trade Representative, Ambassador Robert Lighthizer said:

I warmly welcome Dr Fox and his team back to Washington to kick off the first meeting of the US-UK Trade and Investment Working Group.

We expect this Working Group to be a key mechanism to deepen our

already strong bilateral trade and investment relationship, and to lay the groundwork for our future trade relationship once the UK has left the EU.

I look forward to building on our already strong economic relationship and furthering our mutual goal of achieving free and fair trade and investment to create good-paying jobs on both sides of the Atlantic.

Trade between the two countries is already worth about £150 billion a year.

The US is the single biggest source of inward investment into the UK, and, according to US statistics, the UK and US have around \$1 trillion invested in each other's economies.

News story: Lifeboat charities to receive £1 million grant boost

Local rescue services will benefit from £1 million in funding to help ensure the safety of water users across the UK.

The money, made available by the 'Inshore and inland rescue boat grant scheme', can be used to purchase lifesaving equipment, such as boats, life jackets and safety gear.

Maritime Minister John Hayes said:

We value and support the lifesaving work that goes on every day by our dedicated local waterway rescue services. Their commitment and skills keep our rivers, lakes and inshore areas safe.

The additional funds provided by the scheme will ensure that these tireless volunteers and charities can get the boats, equipment and other resources they need to provide round-the-clock lifesaving services.

Since its launch in 2014, the scheme has made a real difference to local rescue services, having helped over 80 charities in their role to assist those in danger on and around our waterways.

Earlier this year, Portsmouth and Southsea Voluntary Lifeguards used a lifeboat funded by the grant scheme to save the lives of those on board 2

different vessels off the coast of Portsmouth.

View a [map of charities](#) that have benefited from over £2.6 million of government funding over the last 3 years.

Charities have until 6 September to submit their bids to the Department for Transport, which is running the scheme with advice from the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Royal Yachting Association and devolved administrations.

Read about [how to apply under the 2017 to 2018 scheme and eligibility requirements](#).

[Press release: Crackdown on unfair leasehold practices](#)

Radical new proposals to cut out unfair abuses of leasehold have been announced by the government today (25 July 2017) in a major move that will deliver a fairer, more transparent system for homebuyers.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has set out plans to ban new build houses being sold as leasehold as well as restricting ground rents to as low as zero. This can often expose homebuyers to unreasonable and long-term financial abuse.

Leasehold generally applies to flats with shared spaces, but developers – particularly in the north west – have been increasingly selling houses on these terms.

With 1.2 million leasehold houses currently recorded in England and the number of leasehold sales rapidly growing, the government is taking crucial action to make future leases fairer.

Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid said:

It's clear that far too many new houses are being built and sold as leaseholds, exploiting home buyers with unfair agreements and spiraling ground rents. Enough is enough. These practices are unjust, unnecessary and need to stop.

Our proposed changes will help make sure leasehold works in the best interests of homebuyers now and in the future.

Other measures, which are now subject to an [8-week consultation](#), include:

- setting ground rents to zero levels – in recent years these have increased significantly, in some cases doubling every 10 years
- closing legal loopholes to protect consumers – such as leaving some leaseholders vulnerable to possession orders
- changing the rules on Help to Buy equity loans so that the scheme can only be used to support new build houses on acceptable terms

The terms of some leases are becoming increasingly onerous to those purchasing leasehold flat or house, who often find they need to pay thousands of pounds to their freeholder to make simple changes to their homes. Recent cases include:

- a homeowner being charged £1,500 by the company to make a small alteration to their home
- a family house that is now unsaleable because the ground rent is expected to hit £10,000 a year by 2060
- a homeowner who was told buying the lease would cost £2,000 but the bill came to £40,000

Ground rents are charged on all residential leasehold properties but evidence shows that they are becoming increasingly expensive. Under government plans they could be reduced so that they relate to real costs incurred, and are fair and transparent to the consumer.

The proposed prohibiting of future houses being sold as leasehold will apply to all houses apart from a few exceptional circumstances where leasehold is still needed – such as houses that have shared services or built on land with specific restrictions.

The [consultation](#) will last for 8 weeks from Tuesday 25 July 2017.

These proposals relate to England only.

Department for Communities and Local Government [statistics](#) estimate there were 4 million residential leasehold dwellings in England in the private sector in 2014 to 2015 and of these 1.2 million were leasehold houses.