

Video-witnessed wills legalisation extended

- anyone isolating can continue to have wills witnessed virtually until January 2024
- research suggests up to 14 percent of legal professionals have already used video witnessing

Vulnerable people across England and Wales will continue to be able to have their wills witnessed via video-link up until 2024, under legislation laid today (11 January 2022) to extend measures brought in during the pandemic.

The change will extend until 2024 this ability for those who are forced to isolate either with covid or from another vulnerability. This will reassure all those who need to use this provision that their final wishes are legally-recognised as witnesses previously had to be physically present.

Law Society research has found that around 14 percent of legal professionals who had been involved in making a will since the change in 2020 had used software such as Zoom or FaceTime for witnessing wills.

To protect people against undue influence and fraud, two witnesses are still required and virtual witnessing is only recognised if the quality of the sound and video is sufficient to see and hear what is happening.

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

I want people to be able to use technology safely and securely to ensure they can record their final wishes no matter the circumstances.

This is a common-sense measure that will give vulnerable people peace of mind that their wills are recognised if they are forced to have them witnessed via video due to isolation.

The extension will last until 31 January 2024 while the Law Commission considers potential reforms to the law around wills, including whether to make these changes permanent.

The use of video technology should remain a last resort and people must continue to arrange physical witnessing of wills where it is safe to do so. Wills witnessed through windows are already considered legitimate in case law provided they have clear sight of the person signing it.

Professional organisations such as STEP, who represent legal professionals and others who help families plan for the future, have welcomed the extension.

Law Society of England and Wales president I. Stephanie Boyce said:

Solicitors have bent over backwards to ensure their clients have been able to make valid wills despite the restrictions during the pandemic.

Those who have used video witnessing have told the Law Society it has been a useful option to have: to help vulnerable people set their affairs in order when making a will in the physical presence of witnesses is not possible.

The Law Society continues to take the view that the most effective reform of the law would be to give judges powers to recognise the deceased's intentions even where their will may not have been witnessed, in line with the Wills Act.

We look forward to the forthcoming Law Commission report on wills reform which we hope will expand on this and other issues to improve will making in England and Wales.

Emily Deane, STEP Technical Counsel and Head of Government Relations said:

We welcome this announcement because it gives clarity to everyone involved in the process of witnessing wills. While we agree that video technology should remain a last resort, it is vital that anyone who is required to isolate can arrange their will and has peace of mind that it is legally valid.

Notes to editors

- The legislation amended the Wills Act 1837 to stipulate that where wills must be signed in the 'presence' of at least two witnesses, their presence can now be either physical or virtual.
- Wills still need to be signed by two witnesses who are not its beneficiaries and electronic signatures will not be permitted.
- In the longer term the Government will be considering wider reforms to the law on making wills and responding to a forthcoming Law Commission report. The Law Commission were consulted in the development of the Government's original response to this issue.
- Official guidance on [making wills using video-conferencing](#).

[CMA disqualifies pharma director](#)

Pritesh Sonpal – a former director of the pharmaceutical wholesaler Lexon –

will be disqualified from taking up any director role or being involved in the management of any company based in England, Scotland or Wales for 4 years.

This move follows the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) [decision in March 2020](#), which found that Lexon – along with the pharmaceutical companies King Pharmaceuticals and Alissa Healthcare Research – illegally shared commercially sensitive information about the antidepressant nortriptyline. As a result, Lexon was fined £1.2 million for breaking competition law.

Nortriptyline is an NHS prescribed drug used by thousands of patients to relieve the symptoms of depression. Between 2015 and 2017, when the cost of the drug was falling, the three suppliers exchanged information about prices, the volumes they were supplying and Alissa's plans to enter the market, in order to reduce competition.

Lexon subsequently appealed against the CMA's decision, but in [February 2021 the Competition Appeal Tribunal \(CAT\) upheld it in full](#).

In connection with Mr Sonpal's involvement in Lexon's illegal information sharing, the CMA applied to the court seeking his disqualification as a company director. Mr Sonpal has now accepted the CAT's findings that his actions caused Lexon to participate in the illegal exchange of sensitive commercial information.

Michael Grenfell, Executive Director of Enforcement at the CMA, said:

This should be a message to all directors – if your company breaches competition law, you risk personal disqualification.

While Mr Sonpal was a director, Lexon illegally shared commercially sensitive information with competitors, which typically reduces competition so that the NHS as customer – and ultimately UK taxpayers – could have been paying over the odds for an important drug.

These actions are unacceptable. We will continue to crack down on law-breaking companies and directors to protect vulnerable patients, the NHS and taxpayers.

The CMA has issued a range of guidance to help businesses and directors understand more about how to comply with competition law, including [compliance advice for company directors](#) on how to avoid director disqualification and the [competition law risk guide](#).

Notes to Editors

1. Under the Company Directors Disqualification Act and the Company Directors Disqualification (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, the CMA has the power to apply to the court to disqualify a director from holding company directorships or performing certain roles in relation to a

company, for a specified period, if a company of which he or she is a director has breached competition law. The Act and the Order also allow the CMA to accept a disqualification undertaking from a director as an alternative to bringing proceedings and obtaining an order in Court; such an undertaking has the same legal effect as a disqualification order. These disqualifications were secured by such undertakings.

2. The register of disqualified directors is published on the Companies House website.
3. Mr Sonpal's disqualification will begin on 12 January 2022.
4. Media queries should be directed to: press@cma.gov.uk or 020 3738 6460.

[Ian Funnell appointed as new Chair of the National Nuclear Laboratory](#)

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has announced that Ian Funnell has been appointed as the organisation's new Chair, succeeding Sir Andrew Mathews, whose second term as Chair ends on 25 January 2022.

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Kwasi Kwarteng MP, said:

The National Nuclear Laboratory plays a key role in the UK's nuclear industry, as well as offering global leadership. It provides the technical knowledge and capability to ensure the country's civil nuclear energy programmes are delivered safely and in a cost-effective way.

I am delighted that Ian Funnell has been appointed to this vital role. Ian is ideally suited to provide the leadership to build the NNL's capabilities and deliver on its mission.

I would also like to thank Sir Andrew Mathews for his 8 years of service to NNL and all the work he has done during his tenure to transform NNL into the organisation it is today.

Ian Funnell said:

I am honoured to accept this role. I have been fortunate to work in some very innovative companies in the UK and internationally, in sectors such as energy, automation, engineering and digital.

I will use that experience to support NNL's work as it deals with some of the world's most complex challenges. It is an organisation

with a clear vision and strong strategy. I relish the chance to take its mission forward.

Sir Andrew Mathews said:

It has been both a great privilege and a joy to be the Chair of the NNL for the last 6 years and to have spent nearly 8 years on the board. I am delighted that I leave the business in such safe hands, and wish Ian well as he helps to take forward NNL's new and exciting strategy; harnessing Nuclear Science to Benefit Society with a focus on clean energy, medical and health, environmental restoration and security. I will miss working with such a strong team and a hugely talented group of people and wish them every success in the future.

Paul Howarth, NNL CEO, said:

I'm delighted that Ian is joining NNL as Chair. This is a really exciting time for the organisation and I believe that Ian's experience will be invaluable in helping NNL as it looks to fulfil its purpose. I'd also like to recognise Sir Andrew's contribution and thank him for the role he has played during his involvement with NNL over 8 years. I've very much enjoyed working with Sir Andrew. He's helped enormously to shape the organisation and support myself, and the whole of NNL, on this journey.

Ian Funnell is currently Chief Executive Officer for Hitachi Energy UK Limited, for the UK and Ireland businesses. Ian spent nearly 2 decades at ABB in a number of different roles, including 5 years as Chief Executive Officer of ABB UK Ltd.

Ian is also a mentor for the global high potential female talent programme and an Ambassador for the Women's Leadership Association – indicators of his demonstrably strong commitment to sponsoring diversity and inclusion.

He has extensive experience in a non-executive capacity, and is currently Chair, CBI North West Region; Commissioner, COVID Recovery Commission; Board Member, Energy Revolution Advisory Group, Innovate UK; and Board Member, Energy Futures Lab, Imperial College.

He is a Chartered Engineer, and a Fellow of the Institution of Engineering and Technology.

NNL is the UK's national laboratory responsible for nuclear fission R&D and occupies a unique position in the nuclear innovation environment, taking science from inactive laboratory-scale demonstration to prototype deployment with real nuclear materials. It is the custodian of unique world-leading nuclear skills, facilities and equipment vital to the UK and aims to support

policy and provide long term sustainable value for the UK in 4 Focus Areas:

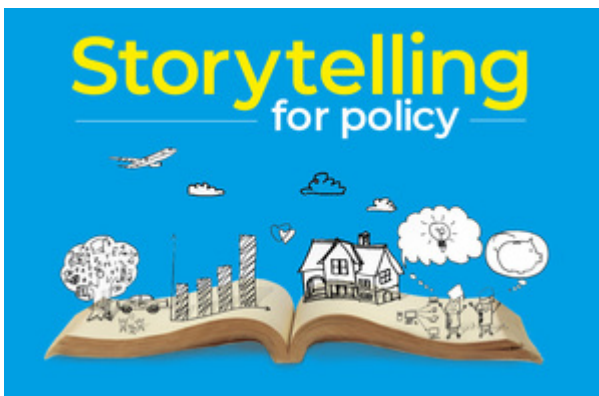
- Clean Energy
- Environmental Restoration
- Health and Nuclear Medicine
- Nuclear Security and Non-Proliferation

Ian Funnell's term is 26 January 2022 to 25 January 2025.

Storytelling for researchers

News story

An update on our 'Storytelling for researchers' training package



As well as our project work for civil servants, we also offer training to researchers and academics to help them work more effectively with government. We hope this will improve the interaction between evidence and policy across government overall.

We've recently been developing a new training offer on storytelling. One of the things we find in our work with academics is that they often struggle to explain their research to non-experts. Where they have years or even decades of in-depth knowledge in a particular subject area, their policy-maker counterpart is likely to have spent far less time in their role.

Research by [Paul Cairney](#), Professor of Politics and Public Policy at the University of Stirling, discusses the limitations policy-makers act under, and how storytelling techniques can be an effective way of communicating evidence.

Using this research, our own experience of writing for policymakers, and drawing on expertise from journalism we have developed a storytelling training offer of 3 one hour modules for up to 20 participants. In these sessions we explore various storytelling techniques in a policy context, such

as story arcs and symbols. We also look at how to tell a relevant story at the right time, helping academics to consider the incentives and interests of policymakers and what they might find most useful.

Early feedback from these sessions has been very positive, and we hope to continue to develop and deliver the training to more academics. We are also considering offering a version of this training internally to other civil servants.

As these sessions are run for groups rather than individuals we suggest that people organising training sessions for their teams or departments get in touch in the first instance.

If you are interested in discussing our training offer please email enquiries@openinnovation.gov.uk.

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Protecting and enhancing the environment to be at the heart of new housing and infrastructure developments

Plans to ensure wildlife can be better protected and enhanced in developments have been set out in a consultation launched today by Environment Minister Rebecca Pow.

The proposals set out in the Biodiversity Net Gain consultation will help communities, planners, developers and Local Planning Authorities ensure new developments are “nature positive” – which means putting nature and biodiversity gain at the heart of all decision-making and design.

Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before – protecting existing habitats and ensuring that any impacts on biodiversity are compensated for with natural habitat and ecological features over and above what is affected.

Developments will have to be delivered in a way which helps to reduce and restore any biodiversity loss during the building phase, and crucially also deliver a 10% boost to the area’s biodiversity. It will help deliver thriving natural spaces for local communities and is a key plank of the Government’s plans to build back better from the pandemic and to help level up all parts of the country.

The Government has also announced a new funding pot of over £4 million to help Local Planning Authorities and other local authorities with planning oversight, to prepare for Biodiversity Net Gain which will become mandatory two years after Royal Assent of the Environment Act.

The funding will help Local Planning Authorities expand ecologist resource and upskill ecologist teams, increasing their capacity to work with developers and communities to provide biodiversity gains by helping restore wildlife, plants and landscapes after building work has taken place. This can take place on the site, elsewhere in the local area or, if this is not possible, by purchasing credits for nature restoration elsewhere in England.

Environment Minister, Rebecca Pow, said:

The pandemic has reinforced how much our homes, communities and outdoor spaces mean to us. Our commitment to protecting and enhancing our natural world can and must go hand in hand with our ambition to build more high quality homes.

Our plans to make sure new developments better protect and enhance wildlife and nature will create better places for people to live and work, and it will ensure we leave our environment in a better state for future generations.

The consultation and associated documents being announced today have been developed with advice from the government's statutory nature body, Natural England.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

Investing in Nature's recovery is a vital national priority and biodiversity net gain is an ambitious and innovative mechanism to help do it. It has the potential to bring real-life benefits, including funding for Nature's recovery, in the process ensuring we leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was before.

It is important to remember, however, that the starting point is to avoid harm in the first place, moving to net gain arrangements only in cases where developments meet all other planning requirements. I'm delighted that Natural England's technical expertise was able to shape this policy and look forward to using it to secure better outcomes for Nature, while streamlining the planning process.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP said:

By focussing on wildlife and nature in planning and development we can make sure that we protect and improve our cherished natural

environment for future generations, as well as delivering the homes this country needs.

This is all part of our plan to level up the country and transform our communities into places people want to live and work. I encourage all those in the housing industry to share their views in this important consultation.

The mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement will help to achieve better outcomes for nature and people by making sure developers play their part in reducing habitat loss and investing in mitigations to protect the environment.

The consultation is asking developers, planning authorities, environmental professionals, landowners and other interested parties for their views on the details of how biodiversity net gain should be delivered when building new housing or commercial development.

While some developers, planning authorities and practitioners have already been following a Biodiversity Net Gain approach voluntarily, or in line with local planning policy, the proposed standardised, mandatory approach would give them clarity and certainty on the Biodiversity Net Gain requirement and how to help enhance the environment through development.

The consultation closes on 5 April 2022 and can be found [here](#).

Today's announcement is part of the Government's commitments aimed at tackling threats to biodiversity and climate change backed up by the Environment Act.

The [Environment Act](#) will deliver the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth and drive forward action to protect nature and improve biodiversity, including through a target to halt species decline by 2030.