

[RWM Annual Review 2020-2021](#)

RWM has made significant steps towards delivering a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) for the UK, with the first two Working Groups established to initiate local discussions, and continued research into engineering and technical features ahead of site-specific design activities.

The formation of the Working Groups in west Cumbria is one of the key achievements outlined in [RWM's Annual Review 2020-2021](#) and marks the start of a journey towards finding a willing community, together with a suitable site where a GDF could be safely constructed.

The opportunity remains open for individuals and organisations in England and Wales to engage in discussions with RWM, without any commitment required. We anticipate the additional Working Groups will be formed elsewhere in the country over the next year.

We know that developing a GDF is the right thing to do. Without action now, we would be leaving future generations with the ongoing environmental risk and costs of handling this waste above ground. A GDF will be one of the country's largest infrastructure projects, spanning many generations. The multi-billion project will bring a wide range of economic and development opportunities to its host community for more than 100 years.

The Review also highlights our ongoing evaluation of waste packages ready for future disposal and the establishment of RWM's Research Support Office (RSO) to harness UK research capabilities into geological disposal and develop scientific expertise for the future. The RSO was developed in collaboration with the universities of Manchester and Sheffield.

Looking ahead, the Review also sets out plans over the next few years when we will be starting early work on assessing sites within areas identified by communities and preparing for more thorough site investigations.

This requires major work with the supply chain, with local communities, regulators, and many other interest groups. It will represent a major uplift of the operational work we need to do, and for that we need to continue our organisational transformation and growth.

RWM is also joining with the Low Level Waste Repository Ltd to form a single waste division within the NDA Group, bringing together the waste expertise of both organisations.

Alongside the main Annual Review, a [summary version](#) has also been produced. Both documents are available in printed and online formats.

[Annual Review 2020-21](#) and [Annual Review 2020-21 Summary](#)

Read more about [geological disposal](#).

OSCE gender action plan: MenEngage statement

Thank you Chair. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the OSCE MenEngage Group.

We recognise the importance of the OSCE Gender Action Plan and progress across OSCE's executive structures, processes, in the autonomous institutions, and in the field missions. And we welcome those areas identified where progress has been made, as well as concern where there has been backsliding.

We support tangible efforts to promote and advance gender equality, undertake concrete actions on UNSCR 1325 within the OSCE, and create an inclusive culture, which values diversity of thought within the OSCE.

We agree that it is in all of our interests to create an inclusive working environment and culture. And we support efforts to put in place appropriate, effective internal governance systems and processes to protect staff from bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment, and to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. It is a matter of duty of care for the OSCE and we are very supportive of the Secretary General and other OSCE executive management endeavours to this end.

Part of creating an inclusive working culture and environment is challenging ourselves and educating ourselves about the language we use and the implicit bias we have. Not jumping to conclusions or solutions, but listening. We will endeavour to do the best we can individually and collectively in this regard.

An inclusive culture is important in OSCE's peacebuilding and conflict prevention forums and mechanisms. We acknowledge that peace processes are more sustainable when women are included in formats and substances of discussions from the onset, and then throughout. The facts speak for themselves. We support efforts to fully utilise the OSCE's toolkit on Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes and offer to work with the Conflict Prevention Centre, the OSCE Gender Unit, and others as a Group to help in implementation.

We acknowledge and reiterate the importance of gender balance across all panels in OSCE meetings in every dimension, and agree to use our positions – including where we Chair key OSCE committees – to achieve gender balance.

We acknowledge that women throughout the OSCE region have been and are disproportionately negatively affected by the pandemic, in light of their role as frontline providers in healthcare and education, and in providing childcare support. And express our deep concern at the horrifying surge in domestic violence during lockdowns, with women being the majority of victims

and men the majority of perpetrators.

Finally, we stand ready to assist in full and further implementation of the OSCE Gender Action Plan.

Thank you.

Annual progress report on the OSCE gender action plan: UK statement

Thank you Secretary General for presenting the Annual Progress Report today. As you mentioned, the last year has indeed been difficult. It's also shown how quickly hard won progress on gender equality can come undone.

In this respect, we welcome the efforts that the OSCE Executive Structures have taken to ensure that gender equality remained high on the OSCE's agenda, including through webinars, conferences, staff training and practical assistance to participating States. We also thank Albania for their focus as Chair on gender equality in 2020, as well as Sweden for their efforts this year.

Whilst your Report highlights some progress on gender mainstreaming, we are concerned by the slight regression in mainstreaming gender in programmatic activities in the politico-military dimension, as well as the limited nature of this in the second dimension. However, we appreciate that gender balance in panels has improved and this is an important step and visible signal of commitment. This has also been an integral part of the UK's approach to Security Committee meetings, and it helps to improve the quality and inclusivity of our discussions.

I will focus on three areas in your Report – the impact of the pandemic on gender equality; the OSCE's working culture, including a zero tolerance approach to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; and the importance of fully implementing the Women Peace Security agenda, including in conflict mediation processes.

Firstly – the backsliding that we've seen on gender equality during COVID-19 is a cause for great concern. It is incumbent on all of us to address this, and to build back better and more inclusively from the pandemic. We know that women have been disproportionately affected as frontline workers in the fight against COVID-19, globally accounting for around 70% of health workers, and placing themselves at increased risk of contracting COVID.

At the same time, we saw a shocking surge in domestic violence during periods of lockdown, with women being the majority of victims. We commend the OSCE for their rapid response to help address domestic violence, including through

the provision of practical assistance to victims, with at least 8,000 women benefiting. It is essential that we take an inclusive lens to gender equality. Intersecting factors, such as disability, can substantially increase the likelihood of experiencing gender-based violence. We encourage a greater focus on intersecting factors in the coming year.

Secondly – we welcome your focus on ethics and ensuring a positive and inclusive working culture at the OSCE. It is the responsibility of all organisations to put in place appropriate, effective internal governance systems and processes. These must protect staff from bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment, and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. The consequences of failing to do so are grave, both for the victims and for the reputation of the organisation.

We are very supportive of the Secretary General and the Secretariat's endeavours in this regard. It is the responsibility of us as participating States to assist these efforts and to ensure that necessary resources are in place to support the OSCE's zero tolerance approach to any such incident. We look forward to seeing this reflected in the next Unified Budget, and to the updated Code of Conduct and Staff instruction 21 later in the year.

Thirdly – the OSCE has a key role to play in implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda. We appreciate the ongoing work of the Executive Structures to support participating States in its implementation. We also recall the [Joint Statement on UNSCR 1325 at Tirana](#), to which 52 participating States signed up, which includes potential actions for furthering the WPS agenda.

We encourage a strong focus on implementing these actions. We appreciate the ongoing work to ensure that a gender perspective is included in conflict mediation, and in the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes at all levels of decision-making. Your report specifically highlights an internal strategy for the Geneva International Discussions on inclusivity aspects. Such an approach is essential to the sustainability of peace. The OSCE's toolkit: ["Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes"](#) is a valuable resource for conflict mediation in all OSCE conflicts, and we continue to encourage full use of this tool.

In concluding, we would like to thank all those who have contributed to advancing gender equality at the OSCE. It is essential that gender is fully integrated into the organisation's work. Your recommendations provide a helpful framework for achieving this. We look forward to building on the positive developments of this year, while preventing backsliding, and to ensuring that, as we emerge from the pandemic, we learn the lessons and build a more inclusive future in the OSCE region.

Review of National policy statement for national networks

In 2019, our roads handled 88% of all passenger travel by distance, the vast majority of it by car or van. Even doubling rail use across the country would only reduce this proportion to 75%, assuming that overall demand did not rise. The roads also carry more than three-quarters of freight traffic, and of course nearly all pedestrian, cycling, bus and coach journeys.

Continued high investment in our roads is, therefore, and will remain, as necessary as ever to ensure the functioning of the nation and to reduce the congestion which is a major source of carbon. Almost half of our [£27 billion programme for England's strategic roads](#), though often described as for road-building or capacity expansion is, in fact, for renewing, maintaining and operating the existing network or for funds to improve safety and biodiversity, deliver active travel schemes and tackle noise or pollution.

In the coming years, our ambitious and accelerating plans to decarbonise all road traffic will transform roads' impact on greenhouse gas emissions. We have always said, however, that we must ensure the road network meets today's demands, not those of the past.

In the last 18 months, fundamental changes have occurred in commuting, shopping and business travel which, before the pandemic, made up 30% of all road journeys by distance and a much higher proportion at the times and places of greatest pressure.

Trends already underway in homeworking, online shopping and videoconferencing, all of which had reduced trip rates even before the pandemic, have dramatically increased and seem unlikely to be fully reversed. Against that, though, must be set the effects on road demand of the hopefully temporary move away from public transport during the crisis; of increases in delivery traffic; and potentially of increases in driving when electric and autonomous vehicles become common.

The current [National policy statement \(NPS\) on national networks](#), the government's statement of strategic planning policy for major road and rail schemes, was written in 2014 – before the government's legal commitment to net zero, the [10 point plan for a green industrial revolution](#), the new [sixth carbon budget](#) and most directly the new, more ambitious policies outlined in the [transport decarbonisation plan](#).

While the NPS continues to remain in force, it is right that we review it in the light of these developments and update forecasts on which it is based to reflect more recent, post-pandemic conditions, once they are known.

The aim is to begin the review later this year and for it to be completed no later than spring 2023. This review will include a thorough examination of the modelling and forecasts that support the statement of need for

development and the environmental, safety, resilience and local community considerations that planning decisions must take into account.

Reviewing the NPS will ensure that it remains fit for purpose in supporting the government's commitments for appropriate development of infrastructure for road, rail, and strategic rail freight interchanges.

While the review is undertaken, the NPS remains relevant government policy and has effect for the purposes of the [Planning Act 2008](#). The NPS will, therefore, continue to provide a proper basis on which the Planning Inspectorate can examine, and the Secretary of State for Transport can make decisions on, applications for development consent.

[National Apprenticeship Week 2022 date announced](#)

News story

National Apprenticeship Week aims to highlight the exceptional work being done by employers and apprentices across the country.



- National Apprenticeship Week 2022 will take place from 7 to 13 February 2022
- It provides an excellent opportunity to celebrate apprenticeships and bring the whole apprenticeship community together
- The Week will shine a light on the positive differences that apprenticeships can make to individuals, employers and to the wider economy

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has announced today that the 15th annual National Apprenticeship Week will take place from 7 to 13 February 2022.

The annual week-long celebration of apprenticeships, which takes place across

England, will showcase how apprenticeships have helped employers of all sizes and sectors, and people of all ages and backgrounds.

We are encouraging employers to promote the outstanding work their apprentices have been involved in over the past year. We also want to highlight the many benefits apprenticeships bring to businesses of all sizes.

National Apprenticeship Week brings together Apprenticeship Ambassadors, MPs, training providers, apprentices, parents and employers to celebrate the work being done across the whole apprenticeship community, promoting apprenticeships and their impact.

National Apprenticeship Week 2021 was a hugely successful week. Highlights included:

- over 1,200 virtual stakeholder, employer, provider and schools events
- the launch video was seen over 126,000 times across social media channels
- the Prime Minister shared a launch video which was viewed over 150 million times
- stakeholder toolkits and assets were downloaded over 17,000 times.

The theme of National Apprenticeship Week 2022 will be announced later in the autumn.

More information on National Apprenticeship Week 2022 will be announced on GOV.UK and on social media channels, @Apprenticeships on Twitter and National Apprenticeship Service on LinkedIn.

To find out more about apprenticeships visit the [apprenticeships website](#).

Published 22 July 2021