

Hammersmith Bridge Taskforce meeting, 13 November 2020

News story

Joint statement on progress made by the taskforce at its meeting on 13 November 2020.



The seventh meeting of the Hammersmith Bridge Taskforce was held today, 13 November 2020.

It was chaired by Transport Minister, Baroness Vere. Attendees included the Project Director Dana Skelley plus representatives from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, the Greater London Authority, Transport for London (TfL), and the Port of London Authority.

Dana Skelley, speaking on behalf of the Hammersmith Bridge Taskforce, said:

The taskforce held another productive meeting today. Further to the extraordinary funding and financing package agreed between government and TfL, we're pleased to report that TfL will shortly be instructing contractors to carry out immediate mitigations work on the two western pedestals. This is being delivered as part of the overall bridge stabilisation work package.

The taskforce also held constructive discussions around the draft business case recently submitted by TfL following close working with the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The business case remains a work in progress. When finalised, it will set out not only the strategic case for repair, but also all the elements needed for successful project delivery, including procurement approach, governance arrangements, affordability, funding profile and contributions, and individuals' responsibilities.

The taskforce further noted the progress made by TfL in taking forward the temporary ferry service, following publication of the

Prior Information Notice (PIN) to interested parties on 5 November. We remain confident that the ferry will be operational by spring 2021.

Finally, the taskforce discussed the potential for further controlled river passages to enable the planned movement of vessels at pre-designated times, based on detailed risk assessments.

Planned dates are in discussion for later in November and early December and details on these will be publicised as soon as possible. Public safety remains the highest priority so further changes will only be made when the bridge owners determine it safe to do so in line with the advice of expert engineers – it remains unlikely that more regular river use will resume until stabilisation works on the bridge have taken place. We'll provide further updates on this as soon as we can.

The Hammersmith Bridge Taskforce was set up by the Department for Transport in September 2020 to work towards safely reopening the Hammersmith Bridge. The taskforce is chaired by Baroness Vere and includes representatives from TfL, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, Network Rail, the Greater London Authority and the Port of London Authority.

Published 13 November 2020

[Government plans for post-qualification university admissions](#)

Students in England could receive university offers only once they have obtained their final grades under proposals to change the current admissions system, the Education Secretary has announced today (13 November).

Outlining his intention to consider post-qualification university admissions, Gavin Williamson said the Government will consult on proposals to “remove the unfairness” that some groups currently face due to inaccurate predicted grades.

UCAS data for 2019 shows 79% of 18-year-olds in the UK accepted to university with at least 3 A levels had their grades over-predicted, whereas 8% were under-predicted.

The admissions system in England – whereby students choose universities, who then make offers based on predicted grades – can work against high achievers from disadvantaged backgrounds whose grades are more likely to be under-

predicted. Research from UCL's Institute of Education showed almost a quarter of high-ability applicants from lower-income households had their results under-predicted between 2013 and 2015.

Under this current admissions system a whole raft of damaging practices have also emerged, such as the widespread use of unconditional offers.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We should celebrate the fact that we are seeing record numbers of disadvantaged students going to university, but the current admissions system is letting down the brightest pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

By using predicted grades it is limiting the aspirations of students before they know what they can achieve.

We need to explore how to change a system which breeds low aspiration and unfairness. That is why we are exploring how best to transform the admission process to one which can propel young people into the most promising opportunities for them within higher education.

It has been a challenging time for the education sector, but Covid-19 will not stop this Government from levelling the playing field and empowering students to have the very best opportunities to succeed.

Disadvantaged students are more likely to 'under-match' and enter courses below their ability than their advantaged peers. Under-matched students are then more likely to drop out of university, get a lower-class degree and earn less in employment.

Moving to a system where offers are made after students have received their results could also put an end to the soaring use of unconditional offers, which sees students being encouraged to accept an offer which may not be in their best interest, and can leave them unprepared for university study.

A level students who accept an unconditional offer are 11.5% more likely to miss their predicted A levels by three grades or more and are more likely to drop out of their course.

Education sector groups, including UCAS and social mobility charities such as the Sutton Trust, have highlighted the benefits of moving to post-qualification admissions. A recent poll by the Sutton Trust found that two-thirds of young people think this would be fairer than the current system.

Clare Marchant, Chief Executive of UCAS, said:

We support the government taking a serious look at reforming the

admissions timetable, which we have been doing over the last few months with universities, colleges, students, and schools.

There are different approaches to reform, so it's right for any consultation to be open minded and have the aim of levelling up fairness for students. Importantly, the consultation will provide an opportunity to address any unintended consequences of such major change, as well as practicalities for higher education providers.

Professor Graham Virgo, Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), Cambridge University said:

The University of Cambridge welcomes the government's decision to consult on reforming the way students apply to university, particularly through the adoption of a post-qualification admissions system. The University will work with the government towards the shared goal of establishing a system that will better enable our brightest young people, regardless of their background, to access university places that match their ability.

Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) said:

CST supports the Secretary of State's decision to consult on post-qualification admissions. While there is much to consider in terms of the detail of these proposals, it is important that we pause to consider the impact of our current arrangements, particularly on students from the most disadvantaged communities.

The Government will look to set out proposals for consultation in the coming months, inviting views from schools, colleges, and universities to make this work in the best interests of students. This will be a collaborative process to explore how post-qualification admissions could work in the UK and whether this will improve social mobility and the experience of students. This will not affect university applications for 2021 and the Government will assess different options once the consultation is complete.

The consultation will also provide an opportunity to look at wider improvements to admissions. This includes reviewing the use of personal statements, when those from state schools are less likely to have support writing their statement and relevant work experience to include, and ensuring students can make more informed choices about further and higher education.

Lee Elliot Major OBE, Professor of Social Mobility, University of Exeter, said:

Applying to university with actual A-level grades is a reform that

would enhance social mobility as it would sweep away the barriers, from poor advice to low expectations, that for too long have stymied the prospects of poorer students.

[Statement on media freedom in Egypt](#)

Press release

Statement on media freedom in Egypt from the undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition's Executive Group



The undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition's Executive Group express concern at the continued restrictions on media freedom in Egypt, including the recent arrest and intimidation of individuals associated with journalist Khaled el-Balshy, editor-in-chief of the news website Darb. In particular, the Coalition is concerned by the arrest of Kamal el-Balshy, brother of Khaled, on September 20, 2020. The Coalition urges authorities to allow journalists in Egypt to practice their profession without fear of arrest or reprisal.

Canada, Germany, Latvia, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom

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CMA considers next steps in JD Sports/Footasylum merger

News story

The CMA is considering its next steps following today's Competition Appeal Tribunal judgment in the JD Sports/Footasylum case.



JD Sports had appealed the Competition and Market Authority's (CMA) final decision to block its takeover of Footasylum, arguing that the assessment of the effects of the merger on competition was too broad and that the CMA had failed to gather enough information regarding the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the retail sector.

Today's judgment has supported the way in which the CMA assessed the effects of the merger on consumers but found that it did not go far enough in its information gathering about the impact of the coronavirus.

The CMA welcomes the Tribunal's endorsement of the CMA's analytical framework for assessing the effects of the merger on consumers. The judgment supports the CMA's analysis of the evidence which led the CMA to conclude that JD Sports and Footasylum are close competitors and that the merger would lead to a substantial lessening of competition to the detriment of consumers. The judgment states that the CMA had "very substantial evidence" on which to base its decision and provided "substantial reasons for its assessment".

Coronavirus hit the UK heavily including with the first lockdown in the final weeks of the CMA's inquiry. This meant that the CMA's assessment of the impact of the pandemic on its decision about the likely future effects of the merger was undertaken in the context of great uncertainty about the longer term impact of the coronavirus on the retail sector. The CMA therefore decided in early April that asking suppliers, and Footasylum's bank, for updated forecasts would not be fruitful because it would have been speculative and unreliable evidence on how the coronavirus would affect the retail sector over the longer term.

CMA Chief Executive Andrea Coscelli said:

The CMA welcomes the Tribunal's strong endorsement of its approach to making sure that mergers don't leave UK shoppers worse off. Today's judgment reinforces the way in which we analyse and assess the evidence we receive in these cases, and the decisions we make to protect consumers.

However, we are disappointed that the Tribunal disagreed with the CMA's approach to information gathering about the specific impact of coronavirus on the sector given the circumstances at that time. We will now take stock of today's judgment and carefully consider our next steps, including whether to appeal.

For more information, visit the [JD Sports / Footasylum merger inquiry case page](#).

For media queries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.

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[CMA welcomes Tribunal judgment in Facebook and Giphy case](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is currently investigating Facebook's purchase of Giphy, which completed on 15 May 2020.

On 9 June, the CMA imposed an initial enforcement order (IEO) on both companies, which prevents Facebook and Giphy from further integrating their businesses while the CMA's investigation is ongoing.

After the CMA issues an IEO, merging companies can request a 'derogation'. This is a reprieve from part of the IEO and gives the business consent to do certain things that would have been banned as part of the IEO. This can often involve sharing information or appointing personnel.

Facebook requested a derogation asking for a large part of Facebook's business to be released from the IEO. The CMA was unable to grant this request because it believed it did not have the necessary information from Facebook to reach a decision. This led to Facebook applying for a review of the CMA's position.

Today's judgment from the Competition Appeal Tribunal dismissed all of Facebook's grounds of appeal, and endorses the CMA's cautious approach to assessing derogation requests at an early stage in its investigation, and stresses the importance for merging companies to engage with the CMA when

seeking a derogation.

The judgment importantly confirms that “The corollary of the voluntary regime is that the CMA is given wide powers to suspend the integration of merging companies and it is for merging parties to satisfy the CMA that the relaxation of any interim measures imposed by the CMA is justified. It is therefore incumbent upon merging parties to co-operate with the CMA, particularly when making derogation requests”.

CMA Chief Executive Andrea Coscelli said:

This is an important judgment from the Competition Appeal Tribunal and sends a clear message – initial enforcement orders are an essential part of the CMA’s merger toolkit, enabling it to protect both market competition and consumers as it undertakes merger reviews.

Companies seeking a reprieve from an IEO must provide sufficient information to the CMA before a decision can be made to release them from parts of it – it is therefore vital that they engage with the CMA as early as possible.

We look forward to engaging further with Facebook in our ongoing review of this case.

For more information, visit the [Facebook, Inc / Giphy, Inc merger inquiry page](#).

Media queries should be directed to press@cma.gov.uk or 020 3738 6460.