

# Improving fish and eel passage on the Bristol Frome

Four weirs on the stretch of river running through Yate are being modified.

A small notch is being cut into 3 of the weirs, and eel tiles and baffles are being fixed to the fourth weir, making it easier for fish and eels to swim upstream and reach important spawning ground.

By improving the weirs, it is hoped this will help increase the number and variety of fish found locally. The work is a key part of fish passage in the catchment as it will allow easier access to 8.6 kilometres of upstream river.

The work on the weirs began last week and is due to be completed mid-May.

The 4 weirs are part of a flood defence scheme built in the 1960s. The scheme funnels high flows of water past Yate to reduce the risk of flooding. The river was significantly shortened and straightened when the flood scheme was built, and the weirs help prevent erosion of the riverbed.

The Frome is home to brown trout, stone loach, minnow, stickleback, and bullhead – and the endangered European eel.

European eels spawn in the Sargasso Sea in the North Atlantic Ocean, before floating in their larval form on ocean currents towards Europe. Once they reach the freshwater estuaries around the coast, like the Bristol Channel, they turn into elvers and swim up into rivers, including the Frome, where they spend up to 20 years living and feeding. Once they have grown and matured, they swim all the way back to the Sargasso Sea (nearly 5,000 kilometres) where they lay their eggs.

To help eels travel upstream eel tiles are being attached to the wall at the side of one of the weirs. The eel tile is a blank board on one side, but on the other side of the board facing the wall, are lots of little cones.

Because eels are long and thin, they are not very good swimmers, but they are very good at wriggling and crawling. Eels can use the gaps between the cones to wriggle through and this will help them to climb over the weir.

Baffles – long strips of recycled plastic attached to the front of the weir – help to concentrate flows of water by channelling the water through notches cut into the plastic. This increases the depth of water and reduces the speed so that fish can swim through the notches and over the weir.

Heather Barker, Bristol Frome project manager at the Environment Agency, said:

This work should see an increase in the number and variety of fish we find in the Frome, and generally make this a better place for

people and wildlife.

The work is part of a wider programme of projects through the Frome Reconnected Partnership to improve the River Frome. The weirs along this stretch of river are surrounded by public open space and alongside the Frome Valley Walkway. We hope the local community will appreciate the work we are doing to improve the local environment and value the river and its habitats.

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## Passport processing times and unprecedented levels of demand

News story

There has recently been considerable press coverage of people facing holiday cancellations or travel disruption due to waiting times for passports.



There is no backlog in passport processing as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. However, we are now seeing unprecedented demand as more than 5 million people delayed applying for passports during COVID-19 because of restrictions in international travel. Her Majesty's Passport Office (HMPO) anticipate 9.5 million British passport applications will be made this year and in March 2022 alone, HMPO processed more than one million new passport applications, the highest output on record.

In preparation for the demand for international travel returning, since April 2021 HMPO have been advising people to allow up to 10 weeks when applying for their British passport. This remains the case.

The vast majority of all passport applications are being dealt with well within 10 weeks. However, a passport can only be issued once all the checks have been completed satisfactorily and will take longer if applications are submitted with missing or incomplete information.

## **What is HMPO doing to meet this increased demand?**

HMPO have prepared extensively for this surge in demand and have increased capacity – people and systems – across all elements of the production process. The priority is to ensure we can continue to process as many passport applications as possible.

To do this:

- we have increased staff numbers by 500 since April 2021 and are in the process of recruiting another 700. In total, as of 1 April 2022 there are over 4,000 staff in passport production roles – this has helped us to handle more applications than ever before
- additional staff are being recruited to assist with customer queries on the Passport Adviceline which is currently run by Teleperformance
- we have onboarded more delivery companies to ensure passports and supporting documents are delivered on time to customers
- we have increased availability for fast-track appointments and extended working hours across the 7 HMPO public counters – new appointments are released daily, 3 weeks in advance

## **What can customers do to ensure there are no delays?**

We urge people who need a new passport to apply for one as soon as possible to ensure their passport arrives in time for the peak summer season. We do offer urgent services for applicants who need a passport more quickly. However, in busy periods these are booked quickly.

Customers can also help to ensure there are no delays with their application, such as using a high quality photo with a digital code, applying online and applying for a new passport more than 10 weeks before they are due to travel.

And it is important to stress, you should not book travel until you have a valid passport – your new passport will not have the same passport number as your old one.

## **Are HMPO staff working from home and is this affecting output?**

Our dedicated staff are working tirelessly to deal with this unprecedented demand. Working from home has no impact on HMPO's capacity to process passport applications.

## **Where you can go for more help?**

**We advise customers to call the Passport Adviceline on 0300 222**

0000 if they have a query relating to their specific passport application.

Photo guidance: [Get a passport photo: Digital photos](#)

General guidance: [Apply online for a UK passport](#)

Customers can track the progress of their passport application online at: [Track your passport application](#)

[Further details about our urgent services, available from all of HMP0's 7 public counters across the UK](#)

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## [Northern Ireland Prison Service 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 pay award](#)

Published 13 April 2022

Last updated 29 April 2022 [+ show all updates](#)

### 1. 29 April 2022

The Northern Ireland Prison Service pay award for 2021 document – page 4, third table. The third table relating to Custody Prison Officer pay for 2021 has been updated due to a typographical error. Line four of the table, final column previously read £34,512. The updated document corrects this figure to £33,975. All other data in this table is correct.

### 2. 13 April 2022

First published.

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## [Data sharing framework for the GRADE](#)

# project published

[Guidance for researchers wishing to access the GRADE \(Grading and Admissions Data for England\) data set](#), which covers the years 2017 to 2020, is now available.

The data sharing framework sets out the application and review process to access the data. It clarifies the requirements that accredited external researchers must meet before gaining access to the data set to conduct research on the educational, assessment and admissions systems in England.

The GRADE project is a [joint open data initiative by Ofqual, Ofsted, the Department for Education \(DfE\) and UCAS](#), launched in 2021. It is designed to encourage independent research that will enhance the quality of the qualification system. The linked data from Ofqual, the DfE and UCAS is a rich resource that will enable external researchers to make independent, high-quality evaluations of the judgements reached in awarding grades. It includes detailed information on the qualifications taken, such as subject, awarding organisation and tier of entry, for GCSEs and A levels. It also has information about pupils, such as age, gender, socio-economic background and prior levels of attainment, including teacher assessments and test results for Key Stages 1 and 2, and information about university applications, offers and acceptances.

Between 2017 to 2019, grades and marks achieved by students are made available. For 2020, when exams were cancelled, it includes details of the centre assessment grades and calculated grades for each student.

Ofqual Executive Director for Standards, Research and Analysis, Cath Jadhav, said:

The GRADE project is a ground-breaking initiative that demonstrates Ofqual's commitment to openness and transparency by allowing independent researchers access to a wealth of information to gain valuable insights about the assessment process.

For the first time accredited researchers will have access to cross-referenced data shared by Ofqual, the Department for Education and UCAS. Their research will inform future policy about education, assessment and university applications.

Ofqual is committed to putting the interests of students first and I am pleased that the Office for Statistics Regulation has commended the GRADE project.

There are 2 top requirements researchers must meet:

1. Become an accredited researcher with the Office for National Statistics. [Full guidance on how to apply](#) is available on the UK Statistics

Authority website.

2. Gain approval for their specific research project from the Office for National Statistics Secure Research Service and from data owners by submitting details of their research project and how it will benefit the public good, via an application for project accreditation in the [Research Accreditation Service](#).

Data can only be accessed for valuable and ethical research that delivers clear public benefits. Commercial and operational uses of the data will not be allowed.

Strict security controls are in place to ensure the privacy and security of the data, given the wealth of information contained in the dataset about students. Data is de-identified and pseudo-anonymised and access to it will only be provided in safe settings.

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## In name only

Press release

In a recent case in the West Midlands, Terry Northwood had his Standard national licence revoked for effectively not having a transport manager for 15 years.



The commissioner heard that the nominal transport manager, Alan Austin, never had a contract with the operator, and had not received any payment for his services. Nor had he performed any of the duties and responsibilities of a transport manager, continually failing to download tachograph data, failing to ensure that vehicles were given safety inspections at the stated six-week intervals, failing to ensure that brake tests were carried out and failing to ensure that the safety inspection records were completed correctly. By remaining on the licence as a transport manager he had enabled the operator to display the outward sign of professional competence when in reality no such professional competence existed.

The operator was found to lack professional competence since 2007, as ever since then it has not had a contract with its supposed transport manager, had not paid that transport manager and that transport manager has failed to carry out any transport manager functions. Maintenance practices appeared stuck in the 1970s and do not reflect modern day requirements. There was a complete lack of drivers' hours supervision, and the transport manager did not understand the need to check driver entitlement, as Mr Northwood was "a friend".

The commissioner said "In the end I cannot ignore the fact that he [Mr Northwood] has in essence operated without a functioning transport manager for many years, thereby gaining an unfair competitive advantage over those operators who bear the cost of professional competence.

"Mr Austin's good repute cannot possibly survive such negligence and deception. I find that his good repute is lost and I am thus obliged to disqualify him from acting as a transport manager under any operator's licence. Mr Austin's ignorance of the role of a modern-day transport manager is such that the mere passage of time will not suffice for him to re-establish his repute."

Further details can be found [here](#).

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