

[News story: HM Courts & Tribunals Service advice to debtors on unpaid historic fines](#)

From:

First published:

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HMCTS provides advice to debtors who may receive a letter for unpaid historic fines.

In September 2016 HMCTS set up the Historic Debt Project to tackle outstanding debt which has accumulated over the years from unpaid criminal fines and financial orders where debtors could not previously be traced.

With the benefit of new intelligence and tracing tools, outstanding debts up to 10 years old are being pursued by a dedicated team in the HMCTS National Compliance and Enforcement Service.

Since the project commenced in September debtors across England and Wales have received letters and text messages from the Historic Debt Team about payment of fines and impositions for past offences. To date significant sums have been collected, including compensation owed to victims of crime.

The team will continue over the coming months to identify and enforce unpaid historic fines. If you have received a letter you should make immediate payment. If you have any concerns about a letter you have received please contact the Historic Debt Team who will be able to assist further. Information on how you can pay your fine will be included with the fines notice.

[Press release: Pollution of brook costs Evesham food processing company over £59,000](#)

Walsh Mushrooms, a mushroom packaging and distribution company operating at the Vale Park industrial estate in Evesham, appeared in Cheltenham Magistrates' Court yesterday (31 January 2017) and pleaded guilty to an

offence of polluting the nearby Battleton Brook with the effluent of rotting mushrooms.

The company was fined £50,000, ordered to pay costs of £8,888.16, along with a £170 victim surcharge.

The prosecution was brought by the Environment Agency, following reports of pollution of the brook in April and May in 2015. The company was charged with one offence contrary to Regulations 12 (1) (b) and 38 (1) (a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

On 24 April 2015, an Environment Agency officer visited the Battleton Brook in Evesham following a report it had turned black with a foul odour. The officer found the brook heavily polluted with organic matter, causing low levels of oxygen. Some frogs and a significant number of invertebrates downstream of Vale Park had been killed as a result of the pollution incident.

Officers, along with staff from Severn Trent Water Limited, identified the source of the pollution as a skip full of decomposing mushrooms on the Walsh Mushroom site, which was leaking into a surface water drain. Investigations of the drainage system suggested this had been ongoing for a number of days. Walsh Mushrooms were advised to remove the skip, undertake a cleaning operation, and conduct a full inspection of the site drainage system.

The Environment Agency stated that the company had failed to carry out the site drainage survey within a reasonable time after 24 April 2015. As a result, on 14 May 2015, officers attended the premises of Walsh Mushrooms again to examine the site drainage system and discovered that similar effluent was continuing to flow into it.

A representative of the company was interviewed and accepted that no training had been given to staff regarding the function or maintenance of the site drainage. No training had been given to staff regarding pollution risks associated with storing waste on the site. The company had failed to carry out any environmental risk assessments since it began operating at Vale Park in 2000.

The company, which had no previous convictions, expressed remorse for the incident. It acknowledged its failure to carry out environmental risk assessments or give appropriate training to company staff. The company stated that it had co-operated with the Environment Agency's investigation and taken steps to remedy the issues at the site. These included the monthly sampling of fluids from the on-site inceptor, the training of staff and the storage of waste mushrooms in leak-proof containers.

Following the outcome of court proceedings, an Environment Agency spokesperson said:

Walsh Mushrooms failed to conduct any assessments of the risks their operations posed to the environment. They did not understand or maintain their drainage system and they failed to provide any

training for staff on how to recognise or deal with pollution incidents. As a result of these failings, they caused significant damage to the brook. We will always seek to take action against those whose actions results in pollution of our rivers.

Many companies in the food processing industry fail to appreciate that food wastes can be highly polluting and cause serious damage to the environment. By following sensible environmental management procedures businesses will be better placed to comply with relevant legislation and reduce the risks damaging our stream and rivers.

If members of the public notice any signs of pollution in a river, stream or lake please report it to our Incident Hotline 0870 80 70 60.

[News story: Defence Minister meets poppy producing veterans going for gold](#)

The Poppy Factory employs 27 disabled veterans in Richmond to produce poppies and wreaths for the Royal Family and the Royal British Legion, but not content with making 12.5 million poppies last year, they are now looking to gold-plate their award-winning employment scheme.

They are also the country's leading employability organisation for disabled military veterans, providing a free service to veterans with a medical condition or impairment across England and Wales to get back into work.

Having helped almost 700 people into employment since 2010, the charity won the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Silver Award last year for demonstrating great support to the Armed Forces community, and one of Deirdre Mills' key goals in her new role is to go for gold this year.

As part of the Armed Forces Covenant, which the government enshrined in law as a promise from the nation to ensure that the Armed Forces community are not at a disadvantage, the annual Defence Employer Recognition Scheme encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same – and the Poppy Factory is certainly doing that.

Defence Minister Earl Howe said:

From helping veterans across the country overcome adversity and get back into work, to empowering those who have inspired me here in Richmond today to contribute to such an honourable cause, the magnificent work of the Poppy Factory is a credit to the Armed Forces Covenant and I'm thrilled to see Deirdre is driving for even more success.

Earl Howe with Poppy Factory CEO Deirdre Mills.

Their new CEO Deirdre Mills enjoyed a successful career in the British Army herself before getting involved in charity work.

She said:

Our support is really making a difference, whether it be providing career advice or meeting the more complex needs of some of the hardest-to-help individuals in society. There is also a growing number of disabled veterans who are being referred to us by other organisations; this is both testament to the quality of our work and indicative of the growing number of military charities that are now working together to produce the best results.

We are working hard to accommodate and champion the needs of disabled people and a Gold Award will really help us demonstrate this to our donors and the public – we need to secure over £2m in sustainable funding each year to provide our life-changing service.

Earl Howe met Gary Lock, an ex Serviceman from 4 Battalion Royal Regiment of Wales.

Amongst those who Earl Howe met today was Gary Lock, an ex Serviceman from 4 Battalion Royal Regiment of Wales, who has been working at the factory since September. Suffering from a serious hip injury, Gary got in touch with the Poppy Factory looking for employment.

He said:

I really enjoy coming to work, and it's great to have a laugh and a joke while you're doing something that's making a difference.

[News story: Combinex Oral Suspension –](#)

Product defect recall alert

From:

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Product defect recall alert for Combinex Oral Suspension manufactured by Elanco Animal Health.

We wish to make wholesalers and veterinary surgeons aware that the VMD has been notified that Elanco Animal Health has issued a recall of certain batches of its combination fluke/wormer Combinex Oral Suspension for Sheep (Vm 00879/4084).

When the product is used in conjunction with a product applicator gun, the applicator gun fails to operate, causing no product to pass through the gun and be administered to the animal.

Batches affected and expiry dates:

- C608040 (Exp 04/2019)
- C608744 (Exp 04/2019)
- C608747 (Exp 04/2019)
- C614045 (Exp 05/2019)

Should you have any queries in relation to the recall of these batches, please contact ElancoVets:

Email: elancovets@elanco.com Tel: + 44 (0) 1256 353131 Option 1

Speech: Robert Halfon: BETT 2017 speech

On behalf of myself and the Secretary of State for Education, it's a real pleasure for me to welcome you all to the Bett Show 2017. And in doing so I also welcome the foreign ministers and delegations who are here for the closing of the Education World Forum.

Thank you all for coming to London to see the great range of companies and innovations on display here this week.

Many of you will have seen that on Monday our Prime Minister, Theresa May,

launched a consultation on Britain's Industrial Strategy.

The UK government is determined that all people in this country should be able to obtain the skills they need to be successful in life. At the same time we recognise how important this is for our economy – particularly as we prepare to leave the European Union – so that we can make the most of our people capital.

In a modern, globalised economy that increasingly relies on technology, digital skills are key to staying competitive. They are fast becoming as important as numeracy and literacy.

So we have to make sure all our people have the opportunity to gain digital skills, whether that's at school, or accessing them later in order to catch up.

Technology can open up a world of opportunities so it's crucial we harness it properly to get the best educational outcomes possible for all people – so that, whatever their individual talents, they get the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I'm so impressed by the fantastic range of products on offer here today and how the ed tech sector has grown in recent years.

I don't want government's role to be to intervene in this space. However, I know that we need to be enabling all schools, colleges and other education providers to take advantage of the opportunities that technology presents.

I want my department to facilitate the education system in being able to impart the skills our people need and get the most out of the ed tech sector in order to raise educational outcomes.

Today I want to set out some of my thinking on how we do that.

Digital skills

So firstly, we need to focus on digital skills. We should be making sure that our young people enter the jobs market with relevant skills and that's why we are introducing a number of actions in this area. We have to be mindful of where skills gaps exist for all young people, and those people who have left school and are already in the labour market.

The reality is that more than 10 million people in this country lack the basic digital skills required by modern jobs.

We have to take steps to address that gap.

We recently announced that we are reforming technical education to match the best international systems, and are introducing 15 new routes to skilled employment. One of these routes will be in 'digital' and it will be designed to meet the needs of relevant employers. All other routes will also contain some digital content, as it is crucial for all occupations in the modern

workplace.

Last year I was fortunate enough to open [ADA, the National College for Digital Skills](#). This is just one example of where young people can join a cutting edge community of digital thinkers and leading tech companies to develop their digital skills.

But digital skills aren't just for the young. Where specified basic digital skills qualifications are made available by providers as part of the publicly-funded adult education offer, we will ensure that they are free of charge to adults who need them.

The [Digital Economy Bill](#), currently making its way through Parliament, will introduce a statutory duty to honour this commitment.

Broadband

Delivering all this on digital skills means we need to have the right, cutting-edge infrastructure in place. High-quality broadband connectivity is a crucial part of that – no modern digital economy can survive without it.

It supports business growth and job creation, particularly in rural areas. That's why the government has placed such an emphasis on making sure the provision of high-speed broadband is as widespread as possible.

Alongside our colleagues at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, we are looking at delivering a full-fibre broadband pilot, as part of the fibre rollout programme announced at the [autumn statement](#).

Our aim is to connect a small number of schools that currently only have poor quality broadband, to test how best to maximise coverage in local areas.

At the budget the Chancellor will set out further detail about the wider coverage plans, on which the Culture Secretary is currently seeking evidence.

Enabling schools to be better buyers

Secondly, schools tell us that they often lack the relationships and skills to be really savvy when it comes to buying valuable education technology – which can be a complex process – so we need to help.

That's why we are working with partner organisations to make sure proper procurement advice is available. But we want to go further and we're determined to support schools to maximise their budgets and specifically their investment in technology, with products that are really right for their students.

My department is going to roll out a [programme to buy tablets, laptops and desktop devices](#) – allowing schools to purchase them cheaper by going through my department.

We've already run 2 successful buying pilots, working with suppliers and 100

schools – which led to tens of thousands of pounds worth of savings.

The full rollout of the programme will allow schools to make the most of the technology on offer, whilst continuing to safe guard their financial resources.

Knowing what works in ed tech

Another challenge for schools and colleges is knowing what works in education technology.

Building the evidence base so that teachers can make informed decisions about technology is vitally important in this growing sector. There are so many exciting products and services out there now, but leaders in education have told us that they often find it difficult to navigate the market and decide what is best for their schools. I encourage all those building the evidence base around what works to continue with this so that educators can understand the impact of tech.

I know the sector is stepping up to this challenge.

Today I welcome the EDUCATE initiative led by UCL which will bring together educators, researchers and the ed tech industry in order to develop and use the best research informed ed tech.

EDUCATE will create a 'golden triangle' between teachers and learners, educational technology companies and educational technology researchers. This is centred around evidence and effectiveness to ensure that the UK produces the products and services that have the greatest impact on learning.

EDUCATE will translate research into new and better educational products, and will stimulate demand for new and improved ones. This type of initiative is hugely valuable in ensuring the ed tech sector can grow sustainably and respond in the way that education leaders want.

Data sharing for the benefit of everyone

How we drive standards in schools and colleges relies heavily on access to quality data. If we can easily input, collect and share data throughout someone's education, this will inform policy, encourage early intervention where required and allow the continued development of ed tech.

But we know that, whilst we have some of the best data sets in the world, how we input, collect, store and make accessible that data must first radically improve. Data collection is currently seen as a burden rather than being embraced for providing the wealth of information to drive education standards.

We announced last year that we will be prototyping new systems for data collection through our Data Exchange programme. Teams have been working with the education sector and I am pleased that considerable progress is being made to address these issues.

Whilst the sector is making huge leaps in taking on the policy challenges of the day, there are plenty of opportunities for tech designers and developers to create impactful tools for teachers, leaders, students, and their families.

We know that the way we use technology will be one of the determining factors in our future success as a nation – so we need to get it right.

The Secretary of State and I are really excited about the impact technology can have on education in this country and how it can allow us to get the very best out of our people capital – both for their sake and for UK plc. But we need to give it the proper emphasis if it's really going to make a difference.

That means we need to make sure we:

- equip young people – and those already in the workplace – with the digital skills they need to get ahead in the labour market, while at the same time making sure our economy gets the skills it needs too
- build the evidence base on what works in education technology and support schools and colleges to harness it properly, while at the same time making sure they can access technology at good value for money

I'm also incredibly excited about education technology as a British export – you only need to look around this hall to see the depth of innovation on offer and the amount of enthusiasm for what it can achieve.

I fully intend to support the sector as it continues to go from strength to strength both here and abroad.