

**NEWS UPDATE FROM THE
NATIONAL CONSUMER
FEDERATION
OCTOBER 2007**

NO EYEWASH HERE

Soon you will no longer have to go to your doctor to obtain a prescription for treatment for dry eye syndrome or conjunctivitis or a whole range of other eye conditions. This is because optometrists are to be given greater powers to prescribe medicines.

I am not sure when this comes about but I was reassured to read that optometrists have to have a degree and undergo a full year of supervised practice before they are fully qualified. Furthermore they will all now undergo extra training in prescribing medicines.

BUT BOOKS THERE

Some people do weird things. The hotel chain TRAVELODGE has drawn up a list of the most common books left behind in hotel rooms. Top of the list came *The Blair Years* by Alastair Campbell, while in second place in the discards was *Don't You Know Who I Am?* by Piers Morgan, the former editor of The Daily Mirror. Katie Price wrote a book called *A Whole New World* and it was the third most left behind book. "Katie who?" you might say. I think she is better known as Jordan.

[The above were spotted in *The Times* of August 29th]

ABN AMRO SAGA CONTINUES

The manoeuvring between the Barclays Bank consortium and the group led by The Royal Bank of Scotland to buy the Dutch bank ABN Amro continues.

In mid-September the Dutch government gave approval for the RBS bid of €71 billion to go ahead. This is conditional on there being sufficient continuity in membership of the bank's management and supervisory boards. One wonders what Barclays will now do.

DCMS

The above letters stand for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. With the recent Government changes and the Olympics fast approaching you may like to know who is in charge of what.

The Secretary of State is the RT. Hon James Purnell who takes particular responsibility for broadcasting, the creative economy (I wonder what

that is?), BBC Charter Review, and the digital switch-over. The Rt. Hon. Margaret Hodge is Minister of State and has responsibility for the arts, creative industry, heritage and tourism.

The Rt. Hon Tessa Jowell is Minister for the Olympics and London, while Jerry Sutcliffe is Minister for Sport and also has responsibility for gambling and the National Lottery. There seems to be a certain amount of overlapping but I am sure that they all know the boundaries of their responsibilities even if they are less clear to us.

On the other side we have Jeremy Hunt as Conservative shadow Secretary of State for the Creative Industries; Ed Vaizey, shadow Minister for the Arts; Hugh Roberts for the Olympics and Sport generally and Tobias Ellwood for Tourism and Gambling. The Liberal Democrats have appointed Don Foster as their shadow Secretary of State.

So who runs the show? Well, the Permanent Secretary at the DCMS is Jonathan Stephens and Andrew Ramsay is Director General of the Creative, Culture and Economy Division.

I found all this information, and a lot more, in the newsletter of the *Voice of the Listener and Viewer*, a body the membership of which I can heartily recommend. One attraction might be the conference that VLV has arranged, entitled *Trust and Transparency in Broadcasting*, on 29th November in London. This is particularly topical in view of the considerable loss of confidence among many viewers following revelations of phone-in sharp practices, misleading editing and even a bogus prizewinner on Blue Peter. The keynote speakers are Sir Michael Lyons, Chairman of the BBC Trust and Peter Davies, Director of Radio and News Media at OFCOM.

For more details ring VLV on 01474 352835 or visit www.vlv.org.uk

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY OPEN BOARD MEETINGS

The next Open Board Meetings are on 17th October at the Hilton Hotel, Belfast and 13th December at the Russell Hotel, London. To register for papers and to tell them that you will attend go to fsaboardmeetings@glasgows.co.uk

The Food Standards Agency would like everyone to know that there are other ways of becoming involved in Open Board Meetings besides actually attending them. In my opinion nothing is better or even as good as actually being there but, if you cannot get to one, you should know that the FSA has been webcasting meetings for some time

now, both live and on-demand via www.food.gov.uk

For the September meeting the Agency tried out a live telephone listen-in service and will no doubt continue trying it out at subsequent meetings. To get it dial 0800 073 0228 free from a UK landline.

Recordings of Board Meetings are available as Podcasts. These allow you to receive automatically the latest coverage as a series of agenda audio clips soon after the event. You can transfer these to your portable MP3 player or iPod and listen to them in bed if the fancy takes you. To find out more about this log on to www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/ourboard/boardmeetings/

SECTION 75 UNDER ATTACK AGAIN

I am actually writing this piece on October 2nd while credit card issuers are appearing at the House of Lords to appeal against the Court of Appeal judgement made in March last year that section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act 1975 does apply to overseas transactions.

The hearing is expected to last for two days and a judgement will be handed down in due course.

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC GUARDIAN

There has been some publicity about the introduction on 1st October of a lasting power of attorney (LPA) to replace an enduring power of attorney (EPA). It seems that there is a new form to fill in and some solicitors have suggested that, because it is much longer than the old one, their charges will inevitably be higher.

However, Richard Brook, the chief executive at The Public Guardianship Office and Public Guardian designate wrote in, appropriately, *The Guardian*, on September 27th, saying that the forms are longer because they contain many of the options that solicitors might have added to an EPA for a person.

He went on to suggest that, as the forms now being issued have been carefully designed on the basis of extensive public consultation and usability tests, many people will be able to fill them in without requiring legal assistance.

The cost of registering an LPA is £150. This is an increase of £30 over the cost of registering an EPA. This extra cost, we are told, reflects the additional safeguards put in place to address some of the shortcomings of EPAs and to protect vulnerable people from potential fraud and abuse.

Mr. Brook made an interesting suggestion that one could obtain the form by downloading it from the Public Guardianship website, fill it in but not register it until circumstances suggest one ought to do so.

So what does the Public Guardianship Office do? The first thing to say is that it has set up a new website which started operating on 1st October at www.publicguardian.gov.uk

This site tells us that the Office of the Public Guardian supports and promotes decision making for those who lack capacity or would like to plan for their future within the framework of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. There are sections dealing with making arrangements for yourself, what to do if you have concerns for another person and how to go about making decisions for someone else. The customer service phone number is 0845 330 2900.

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