



National Audit Office

NAO update to FRAB on reporting timetables for 2020-21 and 2021-22

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June 2021

Introduction

We deliver over 400 audits per year – traditionally between 75% and 80% of central government accounts are laid ahead of the Parliamentary summer recess

For 2019-20, reporting timetables were significantly delayed as a result of COVID-19 disruption. We provided a briefing to FRAB in February 2021 on the expected timetables for 2020-21 and our plans for working with Departments to get accounts back on a pre-recess timetable as soon as possible.

This is an update on progress.

Recap – a phased approach

We set out in February that we had developed ambitious yet achievable plans that took into account the differing levels of challenge across departments/audits:

- **Phase 1** bodies – a realistic project plan in place to deliver the accounts (including a quality audit) pre-recess in 2020-21
- **Phase 2** bodies – pre-recess not achievable in 2020-21, but timetable advanced from prior year in order to aim for pre-recess in 2021-22
- **Phase 3** bodies – pre-recess not achievable in 2020-21 and *may* need more than two years to get back to pre-recess. *We are working with departments to achieve this sooner if it is feasible*

So how are we doing so far?

2020-21 Accounts

Thanks to the joint efforts of finance and audit teams, we are on track:

- **Phase 1** –remain on course to be published before the summer recess
- **Phase 2/3** – progressing to planned timetable, though there remain some complex issues to resolve on some accounts

2021-22 accounts

- Discussions on timetables and project plans taking place.
- We have brought in additional resources so that we have the capacity to bring work forward where needed.

What are the key challenges and how are we addressing them?

In February, we identified some of the key challenges to bringing accounts back pre-recess. These challenges remain, but together with departments we are making good progress in addressing them:

- **New/enhanced risks arising from COVID-19** – there are some complex accounting issues (such as guarantees, support schemes, inventory and vaccines) to address, as well as the consideration of fraud and error levels. Accounting judgements set in 2020-21 will, in many cases roll forwards for many years. Early engagement has been key and we have had constructive engagement. Supported by Parliament, we have brought in additional resources to give us capacity where needed.
- **External dependencies** - such as reliance on local auditors for key assurances over pension schemes – agreed timetable for LGPS reporting in place to support phase 2 audits, though there remain pressures in the local auditor sector
- **Remote working/lockdown** – remains the norm at the moment, but we have worked with departments to enable audit visits where needed.

Current planned publication dates for 2020-21 accounts

Phase 1: Accounts where the NAO and Department are confident realistic plans are in place to lay and publish ahead of the Parliamentary summer recess

Phase 2: Accounts where the NAO and Department are confident realistic plans are in place to lay and publish in early Autumn 2021. Includes those dependent on LGPS assurances.

Phase 3: Accounts where NAO and the Department's realistic assessment of delivery suggests a later laying and publication slot will be needed



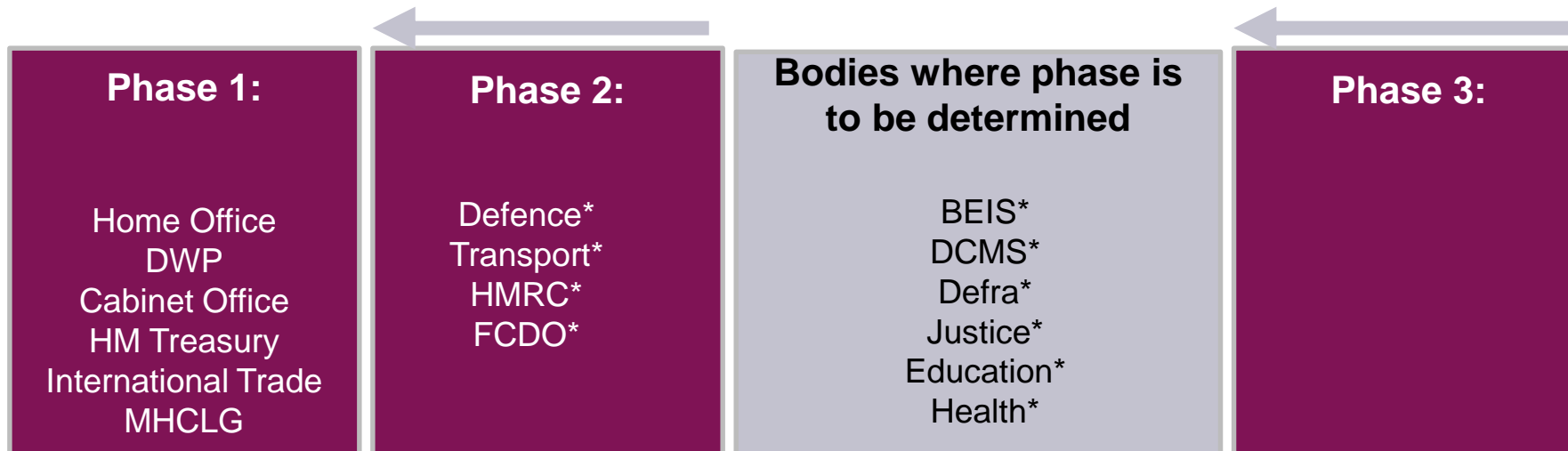
* denotes post-summer recess delivery in 2020

Indicative plans for 2021-22 publications

Phase 1: Accounts that should maintain a timetable to allow for laying and publication ahead of the Parliamentary summer recess

Phase 2: Accounts where the NAO and Departments can work together to allow for laying and publication ahead of the Parliamentary summer recess – we would like all Departmental accounts to lay and publish pre-recess if possible

Phase 3: Accounts where the NAO and Department should be able to work together to allow for earlier laying and publication in September 2021, but where pre-recess in this year may remain unachievable. Includes those dependent on LGPS assurances



May 2022

June 2022

July 2022

August 2022

September 2022

October 2022

* denotes post-summer recess delivery in 2021