



National Audit Office

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Reference FOI-1298

Date 17 February 2020

Dear Joan Crawford

NAO'S INVESTIGATION INTO IAPT

Thank you for your email of 20 January 2020 for information related to the NAO's Investigation into IAPT. Your specific questions and our responses are outlined at **Annex A**.

Your request is being handled under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

I hope this reply is helpful to you. However, **Annex B** sets out the steps you may wish to take if you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Yours sincerely

Philip Taylor

Head of FOI

I would like information about the following please:

1. *The National Audit Office made an inquiry / investigation into IAPT. I understand that this was either not completed or not published. Please can you tell me:*

- **What was it that prompted your inquiry / investigation into IAPT**

We received correspondence which raised concerns about the way that waiting times for the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme were being reported.

- **What were the concerns raised?**

The correspondent was concerned that in some cases, providers may be recording assessment appointments as 'treatment' or 'assessment and treatment' appointments, when, no treatment has taken place.

- **Why did the NAO consider these concerning enough to investigate?**

The type of recording reported could potentially help providers to report they are meeting their targets by artificially reducing the waiting time recorded between the referral and the first treatment appointment.

- **Who raised their concerns to you initially?**

The original concerns were raised with us by a worker within the NHS

- **What was the scope of the inquiry?**

The work was commenced as an investigation. The purpose of National audit Office investigations is to establish the relevant facts, rather than to draw evaluative or value-for-money conclusions. The investigation aimed to focus on IAPT services only. It was planned to set out the available waiting times data and describe the responsibilities of different health sector bodies, principally the CCGs, NHS England and NHS Digital, in contracting these services and then assuring and overseeing the accuracy and integrity of the reported data.

The investigation was not intended to comment on clinical judgements or the extent to which services meet patients' needs. We did not intend to examine individual patient records but instead focused on the contracting arrangements and the assurance gained on data quality.

- **Why was it not completed?**

We commenced work on the IAPT programme in 2017-18. However, the work on this programme was curtailed in June 2018 by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) of the time in response to changing priorities. The alterations to the work programme were made so that the C&AG could respond quickly on important topical issues, such as work on the UK's exit from the European Union, the government's handling of the collapse of Carillion, and on significant NHS spending increases in 2017-18 on generic medicines in primary care.

- **Why does the inquiry report remain unpublished?**

As noted above the work was stopped to react to other competing priorities.

- **When will this inquiry be completed? If it is already completed, when will the report be published?**

There are no plans to revisit work within our current work programme.

2. Has the National Audit Office plans to audit the effectiveness, value for money, efficacy and so forth of the IAPT services? If so, what methods will be used by the NAO to establish this? If there is no plan to audit IAPT please can you detail the decision-making process that was used that shows that such an audit is not required and the reasons for it.

The NAO has no current plans to examine the IAPT services in isolation. We are aware of the commitment within the [NHS long term plan](#) to improve and widen access to those needing mental health support and the [interim report on the Clinically-led Review of NHS Access Standards](#) and the subsequent [progress report](#). We await the final recommendations report which is due by the end of March 2020.

We will take account of any final report and government's response when considering the make-up of our future work programme.

With regard to how we plan our work and the type of decisions we take to inform our work programme you can read about them [here](#).

Statement of Policy

Our policy is to respond to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as helpfully and promptly as possible, having regard to the principles set out in the Act. I therefore hope you are happy with the way we have handled your request. If you are not, then you should take the following steps.

In the first instance, within 40 working days, write to the National Audit Office Freedom of Information (FOI) Team at FOI@nao.org.uk or by post to:

FOI Team, Red 2, National Audit Office, 157-197 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 9SP

The Head of FOI will arrange a review, which will be conducted by a senior member of staff who was not involved in decisions relating to your original request. Once the review has been completed we will write informing you of the outcome.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF