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28 March 2012

Dear Sir/Madam

AGE ASSESSMENTS – DENTAL X-RAYS

I am writing to let you know that, in conjunction with Croydon Council and Professor Graham Roberts of King's College Hospital, we are planning to embark on a trial of dental X-rays, starting on 29 March. The purpose of the trial is to establish whether dental X-rays are a useful tool in helping to establish people's ages when they have been assessed as an adult yet continue to maintain that they are a minor.

Many of you will be aware of the difficulties that arise when we are not able to establish, with any certainty, the age of an asylum applicant. We are keen to utilise any appropriate tool which can increase our levels of certainty (as long as it does not have a negative impact on the individual in safeguarding terms, of course). We believe that the process developed by Professor Roberts offers a potential means of achieving this, and we intend to explore the possibilities by testing his process within the framework of the asylum system.

We shall be offering individuals who are assessed by Croydon Council as adults, but who continue to contend that they are children, the opportunity to have a dental X-ray at Guys Hospital. The results will be passed back to the Agency, and the Agency will then contact the applicant. If the X-ray indicates that the individual is likely to be under 18, Croydon Council will be invited to review the age assessment in the light of the new evidence. If the X-ray indicates that the individual is likely to be over 18, their position will not change – they will continue to be treated as an adult in the asylum system, subject to any additional evidence emerging.

It will be made clear to asylum applicants who are offered the opportunity to participate (and, to be clear, the people who fall into this category are those who have recently been the subject of an age assessment from Croydon Council and who have been assessed as adults), that participation in the pilot is completely voluntary and that, if they do not choose to participate, it will not adversely affect their claim for asylum or humanitarian protection.

We anticipate that the trial will last for three months. We are currently finalising the evaluation arrangements with the Home Office Chief Scientific Adviser.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zilla Howell', written in a cursive style.

Zilla Howell, Director of Asylum