

Press release: Commission for Countering Extremism launches call for evidence on extremism in England and Wales

The independent Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) has today (Thursday 22 November) called on the public to share their views, experience and evidence on extremism and its impact for a first-of-a-kind study.

The Commission, announced by the Prime Minister after the terror attacks of 2017, has launched a 10-week [Call for Evidence](#), inviting firsthand accounts of the harms extremists inflict on individuals, communities and our society.

The evidence, which will be treated sensitively and in the strictest of confidence, will feed into a wide-ranging study of extremism to be published in spring 2019.

The aim of the study is to build understanding of extremism, in all its forms, in our country and give people the confidence to challenge it. The Commission's mission is to help everyone do more to challenge extremism.

The Commission wants to hear from all those concerned about rising extremism – including charities working with communities affected by extremism, academics studying the issue and those who work on the frontline to counter extremism.

The Commission is asking crucial questions as part of the online consultation, including how Government can strengthen its response to extremism, what the scale of the problem is and how social media plays a role in spreading extremist ideas and activities.

The Call for Evidence comes after eight months in which the Commission has visited 13 towns and cities across England and Wales, begun a review of academic literature on extremism and met more than 400 counter-extremism experts and activists.

These experts and activists – often unsung heroes who receive more abuse than support – have raised concerns about the impact of extremism on individuals, communities and wider society, and revealed that British extremists are adopting increasingly sophisticated tactics, including co-opting anti-racism and free speech, to corrupt vulnerable minds.

Sara Khan, Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism, said:

Extremism is thriving in some parts of our country, but we do not know the true scale of the problem and the full impact it is having on our society – what we do know is very likely to be just the tip

of the iceberg.

I know from meeting more than 400 experts and activists in 13 towns and cities across England and Wales over the last six months that extremism is affecting not just individuals but also our communities and the very fabric our society.

It is weakening trust in the very institutions we cherish, is undermining our democratic values and is inciting violence, hatred and hostility.

Extremists appear increasingly professional and we have heard how they deliberately employ anti-racist and pro-free speech arguments, try to intimidate and promote a warped us vs them mentality to shut down debate and spread hateful ideologies. They rely on social media to normalise conspiracy theories and disinformation. Brave counter-extremists who take them on suffer horrific abuse both online and offline.

Despite the threat of growing extremism, we still lack a full picture of it in our country; and how best to counter it. Extremism is a complex and multi-faceted issue. It is a whole society problem and requires a whole society response.

It is imperative that we develop a pro-active and proportionate response. The first step however is to improve our understanding of extremism and to give everyone the confidence to challenge it.

That's why my Commission is calling on NGOs, academics, all those who work in counter-extremism and everyone concerned about this growing threat to take part in our Call for Evidence.

It is essential we defend our fundamental freedoms and rights from those who seek to undermine them. All of us – families, communities, schools, civil society, academia and government have a part to play in defeating extremist ideas and activities and my Commission will support society to do this.

As part of the Call for Evidence, the Commission is asking for:

- Personal accounts of extremism
- People's views on the Government's definition of extremism
- Insight into the objectives and tactics of extremists and the scale of extremism in England and Wales
- Evidence of the harms extremists cause to individuals, communities and society at large
- How government should strengthen its response to extremism
- Social media's role in spreading extremism

The public consultation is the latest milestone as the Commission works towards a first-of-its-kind Study into all forms of extremism.

The Commission will also:

- Write to Government departments asking them to share information about extremism (as agreed in the Commission's Charter)
- Commission new research on the Far Right and Islamist extremism from leading experts
- Seek testimony from victims of extremism and those countering extremism
- Commission a nationally representative survey to gauge the public's views on extremist ideas and behaviour

The [Commission](#), which is led by Sara Khan, was launched as an independent body in March. In September the CCE published a [document](#) setting out its engagement so far and the questions it would look to answer as part of the Study.