

# Report looking at how hateful extremists have been exploiting the current pandemic

News story

The Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) has published a report today, looking at the way in which extremists have sought to exploit the current pandemic.



The government needs to ensure that their response to dealing with COVID-19 and future crises takes into account the significant threat of hateful extremism and the dangerous narratives spread by conspiracy theories.

The Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) has [published a report](#) today, looking at the way in which extremists have sought to exploit the current pandemic. Through the use of conspiracy theories and fake news, the Commission has found that hateful extremists have used divisive, xenophobic and racist narratives to sow division and undermine the social fabric of our country. The CCE warns that investing in counter extremism work and urgently publishing a new strategy is critical as extremists will seek to capitalise on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 to cause further long-term instability, fear and division in Britain.

Lead Commissioner Sara Khan says:

The pandemic has not discouraged extremists from propagating their hateful ideologies. On the contrary they have, as is always the case in a crisis, fully exploited the lockdown to promote dangerous conspiracy theories and disinformation, most notably online. They seek to mainstream extremist narratives in society, for the sole purpose of inciting hatred, violence, public disorder and a breakdown in community cohesion. We have already seen how extremists discussed the 5G conspiracy theory on fringe social media platforms such as Telegram. In April 50 5G masts were

targeted for arson and vandalism in the UK.

In this report we've drawn attention to a variety of conspiracy theories that have been spread by groups from the Far Right to the Far Left and Islamists. The impact of extremist propaganda and disinformation to our democracy cannot be overstated. These conspiracy theories are harmful, dangerous and are used by extremists to cause division and breed hate. This is why I have called on policy makers to develop a system to classify dangerous conspiracy theories based on the harm they cause. This will help practitioners and social media platforms better challenge harmful conspiracy theories before they escalate.

The government also have to work closely with local authorities to understand and develop a strategy to deal with local extremist trends. For example, by understanding and countering anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, the government will be better placed to ensure there is sufficient uptake of any future vaccinations.

We need to be on the front foot to counter the activity of hateful extremists who seek to divide and undermine everything our country stands for; and we must begin work on it now.

Along with highlighting harmful conspiracy theories, the report shows how extremists were spreading disinformation and fake news about minority groups which has been used by sympathisers to incite hatred and violence. One study shows that during the pandemic, over 90% of social media posts containing misinformation were not taken down by social media companies, when flagged by volunteers. Another study found hundreds of thousands of Far Right posts around COVID-19 and millions of engagements with known disinformation sites.

In addition to classifying dangerous conspiracy theories, the Commission have also made the following recommendations:

- a commitment to ensure hateful extremism falls within the remit of the new online harms regulator and that existing laws on inciting hatred are enforced online
- a call for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to drive forward a COVID-19 cohesion strategy to help bring different communities together to prevent extremist narratives from having significant reach and influence
- a new counter-extremism strategy must include an assessment of how extremism manifests locally, the harm it causes, the scale of support for extremist narratives and how best to pre-empt extremist activity – this should also include assessing who is most susceptible to extremist narratives, in order to deliver vital interventions to engage and support these people
- for the government to work closely with local authorities to understand and develop bespoke support and interventions to pre-empt and deal with extremist activity
- for the government to develop plans to work with researchers and

practitioners to build a better understanding of 'what works' in relation to counter extremism online and offline

This is the first in a series of publications from the Commission looking at extremism in the context of the current pandemic.

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## [Applicants to nursing courses in England up 16% as NHS employs record number of nurses and midwives](#)

A record number of nurses and midwives are employed in the NHS, as the Nursing and Midwifery's Council reports its largest ever annual increase of registered nursing and midwifery professionals.

Around 18,370 more nurses, midwives and nursing associates are now on the Nursing and Midwifery Council's permanent register to work in the UK compared to a year ago, bringing the total number to 716,607 by 31 March 2020. The number of people trained in the UK leaving the register has also fallen to a five-year low.

The number of nursing and midwifery applicants to English universities has also risen for the second year running as the Government works towards delivering 50,000 more nurses by the end of Parliament.

The latest UCAS stats show that applicant numbers for nursing and midwifery courses are up 16% year-on-year, reaching 47,320 by the end of June.

This is the second year in a row that applicant numbers have risen. In 2019 there was a 6.4% increase in people accepted onto nursing and midwifery courses in England compared to 2018.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

I'm delighted to see record numbers of nurses and midwives now working in our NHS as we work towards delivering 50,000 more nurses in this parliament.

As we continue our battle with this deadly disease, our world leading healthcare system has never been more important. We will continue to give it the support it needs today, as well as protecting it for generations to come.

Nurses have saved countless lives during the pandemic, and the NHS simply couldn't function without them.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This pandemic demonstrated just how talented and valued our brilliant nurses and midwives are, and it is fantastic to see an explosion of applications for nursing and midwifery courses.

As well as a hugely rewarding career in one of the world's best healthcare systems, degree students will benefit from at least £5,000 a year from the Government in free additional support during their studies.

With over 12,000 more fully qualified nurses working in our NHS compared to last year, we are well on our way to delivering 50,000 more by the end of this Parliament.

The number of new applicants between January and June was 68% higher than the same period last year (11,360 in 2020, compared to 6,750 in 2019).

Nearly two thirds of nursing and midwifery applicants living in England are mature students aged 21 or over, a 24% increase on last year.

New applicants or those without an offer can still seek a place at university via the clearing process which runs from the 6th July to 20th October.

Student nurses and midwives starting courses from September will benefit from new guaranteed, additional support of at least £5,000 a year to help with their living costs, which they won't have to pay back.

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## **Business as usual won't tackle the challenges we face, warns Environment Agency**

Returning to business as usual after the Coronavirus pandemic won't be enough to address the challenges of the future, warns Sir James Bevan, chief executive of the Environment Agency.

Instead of working to return to a world we once knew, the Environment Agency is today setting out how it plans to lead the way toward a greener, healthier future.

Its new 5 year plan, EA2025, calls for a new approach which promotes health, equity and environmental enhancement and says that the Coronavirus pandemic presents an opportunity to reshape a better future. It can help society better understand the largest public health threat of the century: climate change.

[Video: EA2025 – Business as usual won't tackle the challenges we face](#)

By 2025 the Environment Agency aims to have created more climate resilient places and infrastructure, by ensuring the nation is prepared for flooding, coastal change and drought.

The plan also highlights a renewed focus on improving the health of air, land and water for people and nature – and ensuring green growth for a sustainable future.

Sir James Bevan, chief executive of the Environment Agency, said:

Tackling climate change must become a default position for everyone. We know that life post-lockdown presents a unique opportunity to change the way we live and work for the better.

We have been gifted a glimpse of how we could adapt our lives and think differently about how we operate. This applies not just to us but the communities we serve, too. People are ready to think differently, and with our new 5 year plan we want to make the most of this once-in-a-lifetime chance to lead the way.

Emma Howard Boyd, chair of the Environment Agency, said:

The Prime Minister has announced that the country needs to build back better, build back greener, build back faster. This action plan sets out how we will help to accelerate a just transition to a low-carbon and more resilient future.

Although the plan points at 2025 it starts now, and the lessons we learn along the way will help develop the whole UK workforce for the risks and opportunities of the coming decades.

Since lockdown began, the Environment Agency has remained fully operational, with the majority of staff working from home, and frontline staff remaining active on the ground tackling issues such as flood risk and pollution.

Staff have been making the best use of technology to continue work – such as remotely concluding legal hearings and using drones to monitor regulated sites, and looking at how we can adopt these practices in the future to be more efficient and effective. Teams have been maintaining equipment that supports public water supply, food production and river flows.

The hot weather led to several fish rescues, while fisheries enforcement teams were out in force clamping down on illegal fishing. Last month a major coastal flood defence scheme was completed which will protect more than 300 properties in West Sussex.

EA2025 sets out 3 long-term goals: a nation resilient to climate change; healthy air, land and water; and green growth and a sustainable future. Some of its ambitious targets for 2020/21 include:

- improving more than 4,000 kilometres of river
- creating nearly 1,200 hectares of habitat
- and being on track to be carbon-neutral by 2030

[Download EA2025 in full here.](#)

[Read the latest blog from Environment Agency chair Emma Howard Boyd on the launch of EA2025](#)

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## **SIDS require SIDS solutions**

We know too well that the dual threats of climate change and environmental degradation are felt acutely by Small Island Developing States. Rising sea levels, shifting weather patterns, declining biodiversity and habitat loss, and natural disasters are already causing significant loss and damage on a regular basis, devastating livelihoods and communities. As we have heard today, COVID-19 has brought additional health and humanitarian challenges, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.

The UK is alive to the distinct challenges that this perfect storm poses to SIDS sustainable development. Overcoming them is more urgent than ever. Building capacity, opening markets promoting investment and building adaptation and resilience will require tailored solutions, and international support.

Through our COP26 and G7 presidencies next year, we are committed to leading the international effort to address climate change and drive a green and resilient global recovery.

We will use our COP26 Presidency to encourage Member States – particularly the big emitters – to reduce their emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. We also need to do more to build resilience through adaptation, increase the availability, efficiency and accessibility of finance, and take

urgent action to avert, minimize and address loss and damage.

Once we have dealt with the initial impact of COVID-19, we owe it to future generations to build back better, including through creating a fairer, greener and more resilient global economy.

Our guiding frameworks for these efforts must be the SDGs, Paris, Addis, and Sendai. Collaboration between governments, international organisations, international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector will be essential for achieving success.

With that in mind, later this year the UK will invite representatives of SIDS, donor countries, international financial institutions and civil and private sector partners to discuss solutions to the concessional and private finance challenges facing SIDS, as described so eloquently and clearly by the distinguished Minister of Fiji at the start of today's discussion.

We want this discussion to harness the expertise of SIDS from all regions and to identify long-term solutions for these challenges that go beyond short-term emergency measures in response to the economic disruptions of COVID-19.

SIDS require SIDS solutions so look forward to working with you all on these issues going forward.

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## [Minute from the Prime Minister to the Permanent Secretary at the Cabinet Office](#)

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