

News story: Mal Singh takes over as BPDTS Ltd's Finance Director

Mal joins BPDTS having been the Deputy Finance Director for Digital Group at the Department of Work and Pensions. He has held a number of senior finance roles across DWP Finance Group and Operations. Prior to this he spent 6 years at HM Treasury leading on the professionalisation of Whitehall's finance functions and managing the community of qualified accountants and trainees across government. He has also worked in a number of finance roles in HMRC and the Department of Health.

Mal Singh

Talking about the new role, Mal said:

I'm absolutely delighted to be joining BPDTS at such an exciting point in the company's evolution. I'm looking forward to having the opportunity to use my skills to help improve digital experiences of millions of UK citizens, and make a difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Loveday Ryder, BPDTS's Chief Executive Officer, when talking of Mal's appointment, said;

I'm delighted that Mal has agreed to become BPDTS's Finance Director. He brings a huge knowledge of both his finance profession and the workings of government. I'm very much looking forward to working alongside him to deliver our organisation's goals and ambitions. I'd also like to publically thank Paul Greening, our former Finance Director who has recently retired, for all of his hard work in establishing and making our company the success it is today.

Press release: Commission for Countering Extremism selects leading

academics for research papers

The independent Commission for Countering Extremism has today (Tuesday 9 April) announced the leading academics it has commissioned to write research papers on the far right, Islamism, far left and online extremism for its study into all forms of extremism.

The commission, announced by the Prime Minister after the terror attacks of 2017, has selected 29 academics and experts with a wide range of expertise, from extremism to community cohesion, to write 19 papers on different aspects of extremism after a competitive bidding process.

These papers will start to provide in-depth academic insights into extremism, as well as feed into the commission's study into all forms of extremism, released later this year.

The topics include the influence of social media on extremism on and offline; the extent to which far right and Islamist ideologies have entered mainstream public and political life and explorations of the links between extremism and terrorism through the lens of UK-based Islamist and far right groups, Al-Muhajiroun and National Action.

One paper will explore the tactics and objectives of the far left and their acceptance among the public, while 3 others will critique current approaches to countering extremism.

Two papers will examine how to change extremists' attitudes and behaviours, while 3 others will provide the latest insight on how extremists are influenced by their external environment.

A further 2 will map the spectrum of far right and Islamist world-views and groups, from those close to public and political life to those at the most violent fringe.

The papers are part of the commission's evidence-gathering for a first-of-its-kind study into the scale of extremism in our country. Lead Commissioner Sara Khan will present the study to the Home Secretary with recommendations later this year.

The commission, which was officially established as an independent body last March, has already gathered extensive evidence through visits to 15 towns and cities across England and Wales. The lead commissioner has spoken to more than 500 experts, activists and community groups about extremism on the frontline.

The organisation has carried out polling, reviewed academic literature on extremism and set out the 5 themes – its [terms of reference](#) – that it will consider for its forthcoming study. These are the public's understanding of extremism; the scale of extremism; extremists' objectives and tactics; the harms caused by extremism and the current response to extremism.

The commission is currently analysing the almost 3,000 submissions it received to the first [public call for evidence](#) on extremism.

As part of its evidence-gathering for the study, the commission is also reviewing government data on indicators of extremism, conducting a survey on public perceptions of extremism and speaking to individuals and communities with first-hand experience of the harms of extremism.

Sara Khan, Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism, said:

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 2017, I was asked by the previous Home Secretary to provide the government with impartial, external advice on the tools, policies and approaches needed to tackle extremism.

Since that time, the threat from extremism has grown – both in our country and across the world.

We cannot be under any illusion – we are living in an era of extremism and growing intolerance. In every one of the towns and cities I have visited, I have heard concerns about the changing face and increasing prominence of extremism online, the far right and Islamist extremism. This is having a devastating impact on individuals, communities and our wider society.

Countering extremism is a crucially important issue that requires serious and credible research to guide policymakers. The wide range of views put forward by these academic papers will be a vital element of our study on all forms of extremism in our country. They will provide in-depth academic insight that will complement the data and information we are collecting from thousands of individuals and organisations on the ground.

Extremism is complex and there are many as yet unanswered questions about the scale of it and the best approach to tackling it, but my commission's study will start to set out what we can – and must – do as a country to stand up against those who seek to divide us.

The full list of papers is below. For data collection purposes, 2 papers will be included in the list below at a later date.

An overview of the far right

A paper mapping the spectrum of far right worldviews and groups, from those close to mainstream public and political life to the most violent fringe.

- By Dr Benjamin Lee, Senior Research Associate, Politics, Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST)

Mainstreaming the far right

A paper exploring how and to what extent the far right has entered mainstream public and political life.

- By Dr Joe Mulhall, Senior Researcher, at HOPE not hate, Panel Tutor, University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education

National Action: Links between the far right, extremism and terrorism

A paper exploring the links between extremism and terrorism through a deep dive into the UK's first proscribed far right group, National Action.

- By Dr Chris Allen, Associate Professor in Hate Studies, The Centre for Hate Studies, Department of Criminology, University of Leicester

Overview of Islamism

A paper mapping the spectrum of Islamist worldviews and groups, from those close to mainstream public and political life to the most violent fringe.

- By Dr Sadek Hamid, independent academic and author, publications include *British Muslims: New Directions in Islamic Thought, Creativity and Activism* (with Philip Lewis), (2018), *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, (2018)

Mainstreaming Islamism

Two papers exploring how and to what extent Islamists have entered mainstream public and political life.

- By Imam Sheikh Dr Usama Hasan, Head of Islamic Studies, Quilliam, assisted by David Toube, Director of Policy, Quilliam & Muna Adil, Quilliam
- By Damon Lee Perry, independent academic and author, publications include *The Global Muslim Brotherhood in Britain: Non-Violent Islamism and the Battle of Ideas* (Routledge 2019).

Al-Muhajiroun: Links between Islamists, extremism and terrorism

A paper exploring the links between extremism and terrorism through a deep dive into the first UK-based proscribed Islamist group, Al-Muhajiroun.

- By Dr Michael Kenney Associate Professor and Program Director of International Affairs, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh

Other forms of extremism

One paper exploring the tactics and objectives of the far left and their acceptance among the public.

- Daniel Allington, Senior Lecturer in Social and Cultural Artificial Intelligence, King's College London, Siobhan McAndrew, Lecturer in Sociology with Quantitative Methods at the University of Bristol & David Hirsh, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London

Drivers of extremism

Three papers exploring how and to what extent extremism is influenced by external environmental factors.

- By Dr Charlotte Heath-Kelly, Associate Professor of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick
- By Professor Tahir Abbas, Assistant Professor, Institute of Security and Global Affairs, Leiden University
- By Dr Noémie Bouhana, Associate Professor, Department of Security and Crime Science, University College London

Extremism online

One paper exploring how social media affects extremism online and offline.

- By Professor Imran Awan, Professor of Criminology and Deputy Director of the Centre for Applied Criminology, Birmingham City University, Dr Pelham Carter, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Birmingham City University & Hollie Sutch, PhD scholar, Birmingham City University

Critiquing approaches to countering extremism

Three papers exploring current and alternative approaches to countering extremism.

- By Dr Diane Webber, Visiting Fellow, Georgetown University Center on National Security and the Law & Dr Alison Struthers, Assistant Professor, University of Warwick School of Law
- By Dr Katherine E. Brown, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham & Professor Fiona De Londras, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham
- By Professor Helen Fenwick, Professor of Law (specialising in counter-

terrorism law and policy and human rights), School of Law, University of Durham

Understanding effective approaches to changing attitudes and behaviours

Two papers examining past and present methods and techniques to change attitudes and behaviours that may be applicable to counter extremism.

- By Dr Ajmal Hussain, Research Fellow in Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester & Professor Hilary Pilkington, Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester
- By Dr Kurt Braddock, Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University

[Press release: Highways England helping motorists over Easter period](#)

To help those miles flow as smoothly as possible, teams from Highways England are working around the clock to remove 459 miles of roadworks – meaning around 99 per cent of motorways and major A roads will be roadworks-free in time for Easter.

Highways England research shows almost half of all breakdowns are caused by simple mechanical problems which could be avoided with simple checks and nearly a quarter are caused by tyre problems.

Highways England's customer service director Melanie Clarke said:

We're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible this Easter and that's why we're keeping around 99 per cent of the road network we manage, free from roadworks.

Safety is our top priority and we know from experience that almost half of breakdowns can easily be avoided if motorists carry out simple vehicle checks before setting off over this period.

The motorway and major A-road network will be free of roadworks from 6am Thursday 18 April 2019 until 12.01am on Tuesday 23 April 2019.

Highways England traffic officers will be working around the clock to help people who get into difficulty.

Before they set off, Highways England is urging motorists to:

- check fuel: make sure you have enough to get to your destination
- check tyres: check your tyre pressure and the condition of your tyres, including the spare. Look out for cuts or wear and make sure the tyres have a minimum tread depth of 1.6mm, which is the legal limit
- check engine oil: use your dipstick to check oil before any long journey, and top up if needed – take your car back to the garage if you're topping up more than usual
- check water: to ensure you have good visibility, always keep your screen wash topped up so you can clear debris or dirt off your windscreen
- check your lights: if your indicators, hazard lights, headlights, fog lights, reverse lights or brake lights are not functioning properly, you are putting yourself at risk. In addition, light malfunctions can be a reason for your vehicle to fail its MOT.

Highways England is also reminding people to ensure that they have the correct licence and insurance to tow whatever the weight, make sure you have connected correctly, and always ensure your load is secure and within the limits for your vehicle before setting off.

A series of [specialist videos](#) can be found online to help people carry out basic vehicle checks before they set off on their travels.

Highways England is also urging drivers to stay safe this Easter by adhering to motorway signage, including the red X signals on smart motorways. Highways England close lanes for a reason and drivers ignoring red X signs put themselves and others at risk.

Find out more about [driving on smart motorways](#).

Drivers planning to use the Dartford Crossing are reminded to pay Dart Charge in advance or by midnight the day after crossing.

More information can be found on our [website](#) or by calling our information line (0300 123 5000) where they can keep you up to date with conditions on the roads.

For more detailed information on how to carry out your vehicle checks, view the [Think!](#) page.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Press release: Construction suppliers accused of colluding to keep prices up

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is investigating M.G.F. (Trench Construction Systems) Ltd (MGF), Vp plc and Mabey Hire Ltd (Mabey) – 3 major suppliers of groundworks products to the construction industry.

The CMA has provisionally found that the 3 businesses formed a cartel to reduce competition and keep prices up. This involved sharing confidential information on pricing and commercial strategy and coordinating their commercial activities. In a Statement of Objections issued today the CMA states its provisional view that Vp and MGF operated the cartel for periods totaling nearly two years and Mabey took part for a single period of 5 months.

Groundworks products (including braces, props and sheeting) are used to protect excavations – such as those made for foundations or for laying pipes – from collapse and are important for keeping construction sites safe. The 3 companies supply these products for a range of major housing and road developments, railway line works and water pipe upgrades.

The companies' behaviour came to light after one of the firms blew the whistle and brought information about the conduct to the CMA's attention. Mabey has confessed its role and will not be fined in accordance with the CMA's leniency programme – provided it continues to cooperate with the CMA's investigation.

Michael Grenfell, the CMA's Executive Director for Enforcement, said:

These are 3 major suppliers of equipment used to keep construction workers safe. It is crucial that builders and their customers benefit from genuinely competitive pricing for this essential equipment.

Everyone must follow competition law, which protects customers from being exploited and paying more, as well as encouraging companies to compete for business in other ways – through innovation, quality and service.

The CMA uses its powers vigorously and robustly to root out illegal cartels.

The CMA's findings are, at this stage in its investigation, provisional and do not necessarily lead to a decision that the companies have breached competition law. The firms now have the opportunity to consider the detail of

the CMA's provisional findings and respond to it. The CMA will carefully consider any representations made before issuing its final findings as to whether the law has been broken.

Find more information on our [case page](#).

Some recent examples of the CMA's action against cartels affecting the construction industry include:

- [Fining water tank firms](#) over £2.6 million after they formed a cartel, agreeing to fix the price of tanks, divide up customers and rig bids for contracts.
- [Fining office fit out companies](#) £7 million after they participated in cover bidding for competitive tenders, colluding on the prices they would bid for contracts. Typically, cover bidding involves companies agreeing with each other to place bids that are deliberately intended to lose the contract, which reduces the intensity of competition and can lead to customers paying an artificially high price or receiving poorer quality services.

The CMA also runs a [Stop Cartels](#) campaign, which aims to educate businesses about which practices are illegal and urges people to come forward if they suspect a business has taken part in cartel behaviour, such as fixing prices or rigging contracts.

1. The Chapter I prohibition in the Competition Act 1998 prohibits agreements and concerted practices between businesses which have as their object or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the UK. Article 101(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) covers equivalent anti-competitive agreements and concerted practices which may affect trade between EU member states.
2. Any business found to have infringed these prohibitions can be fined up to 10% of its annual worldwide group turnover, taking into account a range of factors including the seriousness of the infringement and any mitigating or aggravating factors.
3. The Statement of Objections is addressed to the following parties, which the CMA provisionally considers were directly involved in the alleged infringements or are liable as parent companies of the undertakings directly involved: M.G.F. (Trench Construction Systems) Limited and its parent company MGF Limited; Vp plc; Mabey Hire Limited and its parent companies Mabey Engineering (Holdings) Limited and Mabey Holdings Limited. The CMA provisionally considers that MGF and Vp were involved during three periods between 23 September and 4 October 2011, 14

February to 24 November 2014 and 12 November 2015 to 28 November 2016, and that Mabey was involved between 14 February to 16 July 2014.

4. A Statement of Objections gives addressees notice of a proposed infringement decision under the Competition Act 1998 and the equivalent EU law prohibitions. It is a provisional decision only and does not necessarily lead to an infringement decision. Addressees have the opportunity to make written and oral representations on the matters covered. Any such representations will be considered by the CMA before any final decision is made.
5. Anyone who has information about a cartel is encouraged to call the CMA cartels hotline on 020 3738 6888 or email cartelshottline@cma.gov.uk.
6. Enquiries should be directed to the CMA's press team: press@cma.gov.uk, or 020 3738 6460.

[Press release: New divorce law to end the blame game](#)

- strong support for Justice Secretary's divorce reforms
- six-month minimum timeframe to allow for reflection and better future planning

Divorcing couples will no longer have to blame each other for the breakdown of their marriage as the Justice Secretary today (9 April 2019) announced a new law to help reduce family conflict.

The move follows a public consultation where family justice professionals and those with direct experience of divorce voiced their support for reform. New legislation will therefore be introduced to Parliament to update our 50-year-old divorce law which has been shown to exacerbate conflict.

Ministers are acting to change the law after responses also revealed that the current system can work against any prospect of reconciliation, and can be damaging to children by undermining the relationship between parents after divorce.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

Hostility and conflict between parents leave their mark on children and can damage their life chances.

While we will always uphold the institution of marriage, it cannot be right that our outdated law creates or increases conflict between divorcing couples.

So I have listened to calls for reform and firmly believe now is the right time to end this unnecessary blame game for good.

Aidan Jones OBE, Chief Executive at relationship support charity, Relate said:

This much-needed change to the law is good news for divorcing couples and particularly for any children involved. The outdated fault-based divorce system led parting couples to apportion blame, often resulting in increased animosity and making it harder for ex-partners to develop positive relationships as co-parents.

As a large body of evidence shows, parental conflict is damaging to children's wellbeing and chances in life, whether the parents are together or separated. It's good that the government has listened and taken action on this, demonstrating commitment to reducing parental conflict.

While divorce isn't a decision that people tend to take lightly, we do support the extension of the minimum timeframe which will allow more time to reflect, give things another go if appropriate, and access support such as relationship counselling or mediation.

Current laws demand proof that a marriage has broken down irretrievably and force spouses to evidence 'unreasonable behaviour' or years of separation, even in cases where a couple has made a mutual decision to part ways.

Marriages are not saved by the ability of one spouse to 'contest' a divorce in court. Very few divorces are contested but this practice is known to be misused by abusers choosing to contest a divorce purely to continue their coercive and controlling behaviour. The government therefore proposes to remove it.

Proposals for changes to the law include:

- retaining the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage as the sole ground for divorce
- replacing the requirement to provide evidence of a 'fact' around behaviour or separation with a requirement to provide a statement of irretrievable breakdown
- retaining the two-stage legal process currently referred to as decree nisi and decree absolute
- creating the option of a joint application for divorce, alongside retaining the option for one party to initiate the process
- removing the ability to contest a divorce
- introducing a minimum timeframe of 6 months, from petition stage to

final divorce (20 weeks from petition stage to decree nisi; 6 weeks from decree nisi to decree absolute).

Starting a minimum timeframe at the initial petition stage reflects consultation respondents' views that couples 'feel divorced' when the court grants the provisional decree of divorce (the 'decree nisi'). This will provide a meaningful period of reflection and the opportunity to turn back. Where divorce is inevitable, it will better enable couples to reach agreement on practical arrangements for the future. Courts will retain the power to expedite the process where appropriate.

These reforms retain what works well in existing divorce law and remove what stands in the way of resolving difficulties more amicably when a marriage has irretrievably broken down and requires an orderly, legal ending. The new legislation is expected to be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Notes to editors

- The government's consultation paper, [Reducing Family Conflict: reform of the legal requirements for divorce](#), was published on 15 September 2018 and ran for 12 weeks closing on 10 December 2018.
- Current divorce law requires people seeking divorce to give evidence of 1 or more of 5 facts; 3 are based on 'fault' and 2 are based instead on a period of separation.
- The 5 facts are: adultery, behaviour, desertion, 2 years' separation (if the other spouse consents to the divorce) and 5 years' separation (otherwise). These are summary versions of the facts.
- The behaviour fact, for example, which was an issue in the case of *Owens v Owens*, is sometimes called "unreasonable behaviour" but is actually "that the respondent has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with the respondent".
- At present, where both parties agree, the court can dissolve the marriage after the couple have lived apart for a minimum 2 years. Where one spouse disagrees, the other spouse will either have to wait to be separated for 5 years before a divorce is granted or may instead obtain a divorce if they demonstrate to the satisfaction of the court that their spouse has committed adultery or that they have behaved in such a way that the party cannot reasonably be expected to live with them. Desertion is rarely relied upon. The legal definitions of the facts can be found in section 1(2) of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 at www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1973/18/section/1
- Data shows that out of every 5 divorce petitions over the last 3 years, close to three rely on conduct facts and 2 on separation facts. Between 2016-18, the behaviour fact accounted for nearly half of all petitions (46.4%, or 47.1% when combined with the adultery fact). In 2018, 118,000 people petitioned for divorce in England and Wales.
- The ability to contest a divorce is rarely used (in less than 2% of cases). Under proposed changes, all divorce applications could still be challenged on the bases of jurisdiction, the legal validity of the marriage, fraud or coercion and procedural compliance.
- The current law does not require a period of time to elapse before

granting the decree nisi. Between 2011 and 2018, around 1 in 10 cases reached decree nisi within 8 weeks, and three in ten cases between 9-13 weeks. We expect that without the introduction of a minimum timeframe, the average time would reduce as online divorce is extended.

- The average period to the final decree is much more varied, as some parties take a long time to make financial arrangements before they apply for the final decree. We will retain the current minimum period of 6 weeks before a final decree can be applied for.
- The divorce will not be automatic at a fixed date at the end of the minimum timeframe, but will require the applicant to continue to affirm their decision to seek a divorce. This keeps the important safeguards of the existing process.
- Parallel changes will be made to the law governing the dissolution of a civil partnership which broadly mirrors the legal process for obtaining a divorce.
- The proposed legislation will not cover other areas of matrimonial law such as financial provision. Financial provision on divorce is handled in separate proceedings and the court has wide discretion to provide for future financial needs.