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[Opinion](#)**Matt Hancock**

The Observer view on Matt Hancock's resignation

[Observer editorial](#)

A rotten culture of impunity pervades the Tory party, where blind loyalty counts for more than integrity and competence



‘Matt Hancock has made his intimate relationship with his old friend, adviser and paid director of the Department of Health a public matter.’
Photograph: Hugh Hastings/Getty Images

‘Matt Hancock has made his intimate relationship with his old friend, adviser and paid director of the Department of Health a public matter.’
Photograph: Hugh Hastings/Getty Images

Sat 26 Jun 2021 14.37 EDT

‘There must be no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The precious principles of public life – integrity, objectivity, accountability, transparency, honesty and leadership in the public interest – must be honoured at all

times.” So reads Boris Johnson’s foreword to the [ministerial code](#), written almost two years ago. Yet Matt Hancock, who resigned as health secretary yesterday evening, is only the latest minister to disrespect the citizens of this country by flouting this code.

Health secretary Matt Hancock’s private affairs are his own business, but he has made his intimate relationship with his old friend, adviser and paid director of the Department of Health a public matter. First, as he has openly admitted, he has broken the Covid regulations he was responsible for. Members of the public who were unable to hug loved ones before they died, who missed funerals and who went months without seeing newborn grandchildren will be justified in feeling furious at a minister breaking the rules to engage in an affair. Hancock has also said that public figures in far less high-profile positions were right to resign for breaking the regulations. His hypocrisy undermines faith in the government’s approach to public health during a pandemic. This alone was enough to prompt his immediate resignation.

But the affair also underlines his lack of integrity. He first appointed Gina Coladangelo as an “[unpaid adviser](#)”, a role with potentially hugely significant influence, but little transparency. Such roles are not governed by a code of conduct and there are no formal means by which parliament can hold them to account. Hancock then appointed her as a paid, non-executive director of the Department of Health. This is a role meant to scrutinise decision-making, yet since they were introduced by the Conservatives a decade ago, have increasingly become filled with friends, supporters and donors.

The following questions still hang over Hancock, even after his resignation: was he in an intimate relationship with Coladangelo when he appointed her, first to an unpaid, then a paid, position? Did he declare this relationship as a potential conflict and when, and if not, why not? It has also emerged that Coladangelo’s brother is the director of a company that won significant contracts from the Department of Health. Hancock has form: he failed to declare that the 15% of shares he owns in a company that is a supplier to the NHS in Wales has his [sister as a director](#). More broadly, the National Audit Office has found personal ministerial contacts were directed to a [high-](#)

[priority PPE procurement channel](#), where they were 10 times more likely to be successful in winning government contracts.

Hancock is also responsible for many deaths in this pandemic. It is true that he learned from the mistakes in delaying the first lockdown to push for an earlier lockdown in the second wave, unlike [Boris Johnson](#) and the chancellor, Rishi Sunak. This is, however, a low bar. He also oversaw disastrous government policy on care homes early in the pandemic. A lack of testing and PPE meant care homes quickly became the centre of the pandemic, with thousands of residents losing their lives.

This serious incompetence coupled with an undermining of the government's emergency response by transgressing its regulations and a breaking of the ministerial code mean that his position was untenable. But his resignation does not fix the wider lack of integrity in government. Johnson is a prime minister who has ripped up the political honour code. He [lies to the public](#) when it is politically convenient and, like Hancock, he has repeatedly failed to declare personal interests: his intimate relationship with [Jennifer Arcuri](#), whose company received thousands of pounds from City Hall when he was mayor of London and the appointment of the mother of one of his children as an adviser. He bears even more responsibility for the terrible pandemic death toll than Hancock. And he has permitted other ministers who have been found to have transgressed the ministerial code, such as Priti Patel, to continue in office.

The Hancock affair goes beyond the conduct of the health secretary. It speaks to a rotten culture of impunity, where blind and unswerving loyalty matters far more in high office than competence, integrity and honesty. The cabinet is filled with ministers who do not regard themselves as subject to the same rules as the rest of us, who regard public office as an opportunity for financial gain, who time and again disrespect ordinary citizens who obey the law and stick to the rules. This is government by people who see politics less as a chance to serve their country and more as a game at which they are entitled to play, regardless of the consequences. Hancock's position was untenable. But his resignation will do nothing to change the fundamental character of our government while Johnson remains prime minister.

Was Hancock in an intimate relationship with Coladangelo when he appointed her, first to an unpaid, then a paid, position?

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[OpinionGender](#)

The Observer view on the right to free expression

[Observer editorial](#)

Whatever your view on sex and gender, freedom of speech is key



German artist Jess de Wahls received an apology from the Royal Academy weeks after it accused her of ‘transphobia’ and stopped stocking her work. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

German artist Jess de Wahls received an apology from the Royal Academy weeks after it accused her of ‘transphobia’ and stopped stocking her work. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 27 Jun 2021 01.30 EDT

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of democracy, which cannot flourish unless citizens can articulate their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship or sanction. So it

should concern anyone who claims to be a democrat that there is growing evidence that women who have expressed a set of feminist beliefs that have come to be known as “gender-critical” have, in some cases, faced significant professional penalties as a result.

“Gender-critical” beliefs refer to the view that someone’s sex – whether they are male or female – is biological and immutable and cannot be conflated with someone’s gender identity, whether they identify as a man or a woman. The belief that the patriarchal oppression of women is grounded partly in their biological sex, not just the social expression of gender, and that women therefore have the right to certain single-sex spaces and to organise on the basis of biological sex if they so wish, represents a long-standing strand of feminist thinking. Other feminists disagree, believing that gender identity supersedes biological sex altogether.

Both are legitimate perspectives that [deserve to be heard in a democratic society](#). Both can be expressed without resulting in the abuse, harassment and discrimination of trans people or women. Being able to talk about these alternative perspectives goes to the heart of resolving important questions about how we structure society. They include: whether it is right that the law permits the provision of single-sex spaces and services; whether official government data, such as the census, should record a person’s biological sex as well as gender identity; whether women have the right to request that intimate medical examinations or searches are undertaken by someone who is female; what are the appropriate safeguards in the medical treatment of children with gender dysphoria; and whether it is legitimate to exclude those who have been through male puberty from competing in women’s sport.

We need to protect dignity and rights for trans women while respecting the dignity and rights of those born female

As a society, we need to resolve the question of how to protect the privacy, dignity and rights of trans women while also respecting the privacy, dignity and rights of those born female.

Yet there have been clear and significant attempts to interfere with women’s freedom to express gender-critical beliefs. [Maya Forstater](#) lost paid work as

a result of colleagues complaining about the gender-critical beliefs that she had expressed on social media. The [academics](#) Rosa Freedman and Jo Phoenix were disinvited from speaking at Essex [University](#) events because of their gender-critical beliefs and were subjected to violent threats from students, with serious wider professional consequences.

Two weeks ago, the [Royal Academy](#) announced in a social media post to half-a-million followers that it would no longer be stocking the artist Jess de Wahls's work because of her "transphobic" views, based on a gender-critical blogpost she wrote in 2019.

These are just a few examples but there have been many more of [women being harassed, punished, censored](#) – and even [physically assaulted](#) – for their gender-critical views. Meanwhile, the chief executive of [Stonewall](#) has likened gender-critical beliefs to antisemitism. The chilling result is the frightening of women into silence because they fear the consequences of expressing their feminist beliefs.

In recent weeks, there has been an overdue correction in the public realm, reinforcing the fact that both sets of beliefs – gender-critical and sex-critical – are legitimate perspectives that do not permit people to harass or abuse others or engage in hate speech and cannot be silenced. In the case of Forstater, an employment tribunal has found that her gender-critical beliefs are "widely shared", do not "seek to destroy the rights of trans persons" and have the status of a protected belief under equalities law. The barrister Akua Reindorf undertook an independent review for Essex University and found its treatment of Phoenix and Freedman was unlawful and that the university's policies misstated equalities law to the detriment of women. And the Royal Academy has issued an [apology to de Wahls](#), conceding that it had betrayed its most important core value: the protection of free speech.

For centuries, patriarchal societies have tried to limit the free expression of women. For centuries, women have fought back against attempts to curb their fundamental human rights. It should not need stating that gender-critical feminists have the same free-speech rights as all other citizens. In a democracy, there is no debate to be had about women's freedom of speech.

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Uefa VIPs get a quarantine-free pass to Wembley – cartoon

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[OpinionHealth](#)

It's shortsighted to spend too much time indoors, so step outside for your eyes' sake

[Rachel Cooke](#)



As I stumble around in glasses, a new book reminds me that a dose of daylight can work wonders on your eyesight



Visitors to the laburnum arch in Bodnant Garden, Tal-y-Cafn, Wales.
Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Visitors to the laburnum arch in Bodnant Garden, Tal-y-Cafn, Wales.
Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Sun 27 Jun 2021 02.00 EDT

For weeks, I've been struggling to get hold of new contact lenses. Whether because of Brexit, the pandemic or some other unknown factor, my prescription is always unavailable. This has never happened before and I've worn soft lenses since I was 18, when I begged my mother to buy them for me before I went to university, the better that I might espy all the boys I hoped to get off with at a distance.

These days, I don't mind how I look in my Coke bottles as much as I once did. But even so, I can't say that I'm happy. My sunglasses are a no-go, ditto my reading glasses. Worst of all, behind my spectacles' swotty thickness, I feel (ironically) slow-witted and lumbering, as if I'm moving around in thick fog.

In search of consolation, I picked up [*Through the Looking Glasses*](#), a new book by the groovy cultural historian Travis Elborough, in which he tells the long and often quite strange story of spectacles. It's fascinating.

I now know, for instance, that the earliest evidence of glasses for shortsightedness can be found in Italian ducal documents dating from 1451 and that there were still auctions of the shells of Atlantic hawksbill sea turtles (used to make, among other things, “tortoiseshell” frames) in London in 1939.

Elborough notes that myopia is on the rise. In the UK, [twice as many 10- to 16-year-olds](#) (one in five) are shortsighted than 50 years ago. In 2012, a study of 19-year-old men in South Korea found that an astonishing 96.5% were. Why? One culprit might be the fact that our lives are increasingly lived indoors. Time spent outside may help to protect against the development of myopia, perhaps because light stimulates the release of dopamine in the retina, preventing the overgrowth of the eye that leads to it.

Kids, you have been warned. Leave your bedrooms immediately in the knowledge that by doing so, you may go on being able to read your endless stream of Snapchat messages.

Emperor Osborne?



A bust of Nero at the British Museum. Photograph: Facundo Arrizabalaga/EPA

Having been appointed chair of the trustees of the British Museum, there's talk of the role that [George Osborne](#), formerly David Cameron's austerity chancellor, will play in helping the institution to reach "ever larger" audiences. Hmm. In 2002, I was dispatched to report on the state of the Conservative party under the disastrous leadership of Iain Duncan Smith. What was to be done with it? Who had any answers?

Osborne, then the youngest Tory MP, talked to me in his car outside a school in his constituency in Tatton, Cheshire. He agreed that things were bad. Its members, he told me, were too old: "What the party needs, Rachel, is people like *you*..." There was a brief pause while I sat to attention, wondering what on earth he could mean and whether I should be flattered or horrified. Then, full throttle, he said it: "*Ordinary* people." Still, his famous Caesar-style haircut of 2013 will be just right for the Roman Gallery.

Fake grass sucks



No fuss, no insects: artificial grass. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

When, if ever, will government or local councils outlaw artificial turf? In lockdown, sales of the stuff [apparently shot up](#) (even before the pandemic, 8m sq m of it were [sold every year](#)). This is madness. Real grass absorbs carbon dioxide and supports the insect population; fake grass ends up in

landfill. But these aren't the only reasons I hate it. Owners spend their evenings proudly vacuuming their phoney expanses of green as if they were carpet, a noise almost as annoying as that of a high-pressure hose or a leaf blower.

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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OpinionStonehenge

If only Stonehenge were of use in the culture wars, then it might be protected

Catherine Bennett



The government likes heritage when it helps in a fight. Otherwise, it just doesn't care



‘Campaigners can only wish the stones commemorated martial triumphs or that the area featured an inspiring ancient flagpole.’ Photograph: Marianne Purdie/Getty Images

‘Campaigners can only wish the stones commemorated martial triumphs or that the area featured an inspiring ancient flagpole.’ Photograph: Marianne Purdie/Getty Images

Sat 26 Jun 2021 12.30 EDT

Thankfully, as the prime minister once [reminded](#) us, “there are international conventions in place that prevent the destruction of cultural heritage”. At specific risk (from Donald Trump’s threats) at the time were 52 of Iran’s major cultural sites, 24 of them world heritage listed. Theoretically protecting them in 2020 was the 1954 Hague convention for the protection, in the event of armed conflict, of cultural assets: “Movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people.” Places, for instance, such as Stonehenge.

In peacetime, however, alterations that might be resented as “adverse and irreversible” if inflicted on a great monument by a foreign power may be completed by a national government with consequences hardly more serious – for a leadership that routinely courts both – than international condemnation and contempt.

Last week, as the government was in court, defending its decision to upgrade the road, partially covered in a tunnel, whose portals are within the Stonehenge heritage site, [Unesco](#) repeated its conclusion that the tunnel is too short to “avoid highly adverse and irreversible impact on OUV [outstanding universal value], particularly on the integrity of the property”. If the scheme goes ahead unmodified, Unesco warned, Stonehenge could lose its status as a world heritage site.

It seems unlikely at this stage to prevail on Grant Shapps who, along with Unesco’s initial intervention, [ignored advice](#) from his government’s planning inspectorate that the tunnel would cause “substantial harm” and should not go ahead. His arguably unlawful decision was the subject of last week’s [legal challenge](#) by campaigners.

As for Oliver Dowden, the heritage secretary, his many public pronouncements on the preservation of national monuments, some of zero or even negative universal value, are yet to feature Stonehenge. Campaigners can only wish the stones commemorated martial triumphs or that the area featured, atop even one sarsen megalith, an inspiring ancient flagpole. If it only showcased Georgian royalty, an olde-time wig or some glancing connection with slavery, Stonehenge might be better placed to elicit some protective intervention from Dowden, backed by his newly formed body of “custodians of our heritage”. For the man is not without higher feelings. Notably for football. “We invented it,” Dowden [announced](#) during the European Super League incident, “we helped export it around the world and it has been a central part of British life for over a century.”

Where certain heritage assets are concerned, inadequately reverent commentary is enough to trigger a passionate warning from Dowden, ever vigilant to the “woke agenda”. “I am proud of our nation’s heritage,” he told [Telegraph](#) readers in May. Thus he would not, no, not even as one of the “baying mobs” of Robert Jenrick’s imagination demanded this sacrifice, “look on as people threaten to pull down statues or strip other parts of our rich historic environment”.

Literally tunnelling through this same environment is, we gather, a different matter, best decided in defiance of expert advice by the thrifty “petrol-head” (“[I drive for](#) pleasure and for work”) Shapps. So far, in fact, is the

government from attributing national importance to Stonehenge, it seems not to have considered whether [dramatically increased sentences](#) for damage to memorials (reflecting “the emotional or wider distress caused by this type of offending”) might arrive just in time to expose Stonehenge’s tunneller-in-chief to a 10-year term.

Given the abundant evidence that government ministers care very deeply about the last night of the Proms, the renaming of student accommodation, the union flag, the accuracy of *The Crown*, a statue of Cecil Rhodes and the sanctity of a photograph of the Queen threatened by probably foreign postgraduates, maybe it’s only fair to pause – retain and explain – and wonder if their comparative indifference to [Stonehenge](#) couldn’t somehow make sense, once you put it in context. Maybe they don’t know any better?

Alternatively, given Dowden’s superior understanding of heritage of all kinds, maybe the stones really were overrated by generations of naive visitors, including [Samuel Pepys](#) (“[I] find them as prodigious as any tales I ever heard of them”) and [Henry James](#) (“It stands as lonely in history as it does on the great plain”), and are thus ideally suited, unlike the forthcoming national boat, to be treated with exemplary parsimony?

What evidence is there, after all, that Stonehenge fulfils the primary purpose of cultural assets under Johnson, that of, via some lurid nationalistic message, generating useful domestic discord? What did it do in the culture war? When, in fact, did Stonehenge ever win anything – unless you count its increasingly inconvenient world heritage status? “It is regretted,” says Unesco’s [latest contribution](#), “that for such an iconic world heritage property, the argument persists that the perceived benefits of a longer tunnel do not outweigh the costs.”

This insistence that Stonehenge’s importance merits expensive protections might be more easily dismissed if Johnson had not, in world-beating mode, [expressed](#) a wish for another “Unesco accolade” (for Gwynedd’s unique slate landscape). If Stonehenge surrenders its older honour because of Shapps’s cut-price road upgrade, Gwynedd could at least keep the [UK entries](#) stable, at 32, barring the threatened relegation of Liverpool’s waterfront.

Still, as Johnson discovered when he was trashing London's skyline, most irreversible damage to heritage assets, cultural and natural, can be achieved without serious annoyance from abroad. At home, complaints from the usual suspects – environmental and heritage bodies, distressed local campaigners – have been only marginal deterrents to incursions in the green belt or the elevation of party donors over local democracy in planning policy. To the question – if ostentatiously patriotic ministers would do this to Stonehenge, what won't they do to less precious or celebrated British heritage? – the answer is: take a look.

Si monumentum requiris, here's the historic Whitechapel Bell Foundry, which the government is happy to exchange, regardless of a widely supported campaign by actual heritage enthusiasts, for a US investor's [boutique hotel](#). Accusations of “money-grabbing philistinism” quite missed the point that these days – and coming from an arts professional! – that is quite the compliment.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[The weekly stats uncovered](#) **Coronavirus**

Why most people who now die with Covid have been vaccinated

[David Spiegelhalter](#) and [Anthony Masters](#)

Don't think of this as a bad sign, it's exactly what's expected from an effective but imperfect jab



An 18-year-old boy is vaccinated at Tottenham Hotspur's stadium in London. Photograph: Will Edwards/AFP/Getty Images

An 18-year-old boy is vaccinated at Tottenham Hotspur's stadium in London. Photograph: Will Edwards/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 27 Jun 2021 03.00 EDT

A *MailOnline* headline on 13 June [read](#): "Study shows 29% of the 42 people who have died after catching the new strain had BOTH vaccinations." In Public Health England's [technical briefing](#) on 25 June, that figure had risen

to 43% (50 of 117), with the majority (60%) having received at least one dose.

It could sound worrying that the majority of people dying with the now-dominant Delta (B.1.617.2) variant have been vaccinated. Does this mean the vaccines are ineffective? Far from it, it's what we would expect from an effective but imperfect vaccine, a risk profile that varies hugely by age and the way the vaccines have been rolled out.

Consider the hypothetical world where absolutely everyone had received a less than perfect vaccine. Although the death rate would be low, everyone who died would have been fully vaccinated.

The vaccines are not perfect. PHE [estimates](#) two-dose effectiveness against hospital admission with the Delta infections at around 94%. We can perhaps assume there is at least 95% protection against Covid-19 death, which means the lethal risk is reduced to less than a twentieth of its usual value.

But the risk of dying from Covid-19 is extraordinarily [dependent on age](#): it halves for each six to seven year age gap. This means that someone aged 80 who is fully vaccinated essentially takes on the risk of an unvaccinated person of around 50 – much lower, but still not nothing, and so we can expect some deaths.

The PHE report also reveals that nearly a third of deaths from the Delta variant are of unvaccinated people over 50, which may be surprising given high vaccine coverage; for example, OpenSAFELY [estimates](#) more than 93% among the 65-69s. But there are lower rates in deprived areas and for some ethnicities and communities with limited coverage will continue to experience more than their fair share of loss.

Coverage and effectiveness are important numbers for assessing vaccination programmes. It is better to look at cool analysis by analysts, rather than hot takes on social and other media.

- David Spiegelhalter is chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge. Anthony Masters is statistical

ambassador for the Royal Statistical Society

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2021/jun/27/why-most-people-who-now-die-with-covid-have-been-vaccinated>

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[Names in the news](#) [Rob Delaney](#).

Rob Delaney is going to prove that love is all about animal attraction

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



The comedian is hosting a TV show where contestants go on blind dates while dressed as sharks and pandas



Cocking an eye at love: Rob Delaney. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Cocking an eye at love: Rob Delaney. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Sat 26 Jun 2021 10.00 EDT

The TV dating show exists in a cultural landscape that encourages love-seeking participants to get married to each other without ever having met, to see if that works out, to get married having spoken to each other only through frosted glass, to see if that works out, to spend a long hot summer in a house full of attractive young people while being literally paid to resist having sex, to see if that works out, and to go on a date having seen the person only in the buff, from the genitals up, before ever having heard a word they have to say. You know, to see if that works out.

Now, joining these innovations, is [*Sexy Beasts*](#). The very funny Rob Delaney has signed on to narrate not one but two seasons of this new Netflix dating show that has cocked an eye at love and thought, hmm, what love needs is to take a few lessons from [*The Masked Singer*](#). “Take it off! Take it off!” would have a different meaning here.

The [trailer](#) came out last week and showed its mad, dystopian cards. People go on dates with three potential matches, while all are dressed as, or transformed into, animals, aliens, a scarecrow, a shark. They make their choice and only then do they see their match's real face: "Could you fall in love with someone based on personality alone?"

The very fact of a person being on a show such as *Sexy Beasts* might tell you a lot about their personality even without the need for a date, but it is amazing, and only a bit alarming, that we continue to go to such lengths to hack love.

All these shows remove one of the key elements of attraction – what a person looks like, sounds like, believes in or enjoys, or even the period of getting to know each other – and turns it into an experiment. Is this the element we don't need any more? Is this what was broken? In an era of apps, maybe we have become too obsessed with what is on the surface; what if you try looking like the devil, instead?

Without a hint of doubt, I will watch *Sexy Beasts*, just as I watched *Eating With My Ex*, *Dinner Date*, *Too Hot to Handle*, *Married at First Sight* and *Love Is Blind*. They haven't hacked love, but they put it on a pedestal, before chipping away at everything underneath it to see how much it can withstand. Can a panda impress a bull? I don't know, but in all honesty, I can't wait to find out.

Carl Nassib's adorable video turns player into pioneer



Carl Nassib: out and quietly proud. Photograph: Jacob Kupferman/Getty Images

The internet can be a gruesome place, which is why cute online videos have endured ever since videos stopped requiring a couple of hours of hogging the landline to load.

Sometimes, only a [LADbible](#) compilation of dogs driving vehicles or happy babies covered in food will do. I don't wish to patronise a grown man, but when I watched NFL player [Carl Nassib's](#) coming-out video, my first thought was that it was adorable, another entry into the canon of heartwarming videos.

"I just want to take a quick moment to say that I'm gay," said Nassib, in a clip posted to [Instagram](#), which made him the first active NFL star in history to come out. "[I'm so proud of your courage](#)," tweeted President Joe Biden, who also congratulated footballer Kumi Yokoyama for coming out as transgender, a brief reminder that, Toto, we're not in 2020 any more.

In that lovely, sweet video, Nassib became a sporting pioneer. He said he hoped coming-out videos like this would one day be unnecessary, but for now, it remains necessary and it makes him brave. Outside sport, Disney star Joshua Bassett told [GQ magazine](#) that he was "happy to be part of the

LGBTQ+ community”, while carefully explaining that at 20, he was still working it out.

Both Nassib and Bassett offer hopeful stories, presenting what they want to be known about their lives with maturity and consideration. People will say it’s nobody’s business who they are attracted to, but their honesty is courageous and makes it just a bit easier for those who will follow them.

Joni Mitchell: everyone gets Blue in the end



Joni Mitchell: a slow-burn love affair. Photograph: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

Last week marked 50 years since Joni Mitchell’s album [*Blue*](#) was released. Publications gathered quotes from her friends, collaborators, former lovers, famous fans and musical experts, who tried to explain her magic.

One common thread seemed to be that often, people didn’t like Mitchell until they got her, and then they were in deep. The musician Brandi Carlile talked to the [*New York Times*](#) about her aversion to the “I wanna shampoo you” lyric in All I Want, until another encounter transformed the album, and Mitchell, for her.

It reminded me of Zadie Smith's 2012 essay for the [New Yorker](#), Some Notes on Attunement, one of the best pieces of writing about music I have come across, which told Smith's story of how she went from seeing Mitchell as "just noise" to having her own epiphany. How rare, and perhaps rarer still now, that an artist demands considerable time, sometimes years, before what they have created makes sense on a wider scale. "I'm so pleased with all of the positive attention that *Blue* is receiving these days," said Mitchell, in a "message to you, from Joni" posted to [Instagram](#). With a chuckle, she added: "Fifty years later, people finally get it."

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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[Observer letters](#)[Housing](#)

Letters: from Eton to Africa, land is being over-exploited

We must learn to strike a balance between the needs of house-builders, people and wildlife



Namibian elephants are threatened. Photograph: Hemis/Alamy

Namibian elephants are threatened. Photograph: Hemis/Alamy

Sun 27 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

If the government wants to show it is taking the concerns of blue-wall constituencies such as Chesham and Amersham seriously, it should require that the new town proposed by Eton College in East Sussex generates a substantial public benefit from the dramatic increase in land values resulting from the change from rural to residential land use (“[Eton v the trout: college’s land deal sparks fears for rich spawning river](#)”, News).

This could be used to provide generous public facilities and genuinely affordable housing held under communal tenure systems and co-housing that

will meet local needs. The same approach should be applied for all new developments. Similarly, if Eton is serious about its public responsibilities, it will welcome such an opportunity.

Geoffrey Payne

London W5

The stories about Eton College selling off land for a major housing development and the prospects for the commercial opening of oilfields in Namibia and Botswana (["New oilfield in African wilderness threatens lives of 130,000 elephants"](#), News) should have sent shudders of horror through your readership. Both sharply pointed up the perennial conflict between animal welfare and human need.

If the housing development is given the green light, the existence of sea trout, so dependent on the hospitable Bevern stream, will be in jeopardy, while going ahead with the exploitation of oil reserves in Africa will seriously imperil elephants, despite the pious protestation from both groups of developers that care will be taken to minimise harm to the threatened species. The dilemma is identical: whether to protect the environment or to exploit it for profit and employment? Our planet is already close to breaking point and every step taken by such developers deepens the crisis. When will our species ever learn?

Denis Bruce

Bishopbriggs, East Dunbartonshire

The 1960s: not free for all

The subhead to "[The big picture](#)" (the New Review) read: "David Hurn's photograph captures the last hurrah of a decade of freedom." It might have been a good time for some but I'm sure there are plenty who would disagree that the 1960s was the decade of freedom – the gay community, the Windrush generation, those who fell foul of the glass ceiling.

Sean Doull-Connolly

London EN4

Parole board failings

Responding to [Catherine's Bennett's article](#) correctly vilifying the appalling decision to release the convicted child murderer and rapist Colin Pitchfork, Dean Kingham retorts in his letter that "the Parole Board will shortly have the authority to conduct parole hearings in public" and thus "will help improve transparency and public understanding of the process" ([Letters](#)). He implies that those opposed to Pitchfork's release would change their views on his release. Those opposed understand only too well the workings of the Parole Board and are aghast that they can ever regard a child rapist and murderer capable of reform. It is yet another example of too many involved in the British legal process regarding female lives as expendable. The recent appallingly lenient sentencing of the Cwmbran man who murdered his wife of some 40 years, in conjunction with the risible rate of conviction of rape cases involving largely female victims, further emphasises the low worth of a female life in British society.

Susan Thomas
Newport, Gwent

Putting a value on life

The musings of David Spiegelhalter and Anthony Masters were very interesting ("[Is there an 'acceptable' risk of death?](#)", Comment). The calculation depends in part on what we gain from accepting the risk or lose by accepting measures to reduce it. I doubt anyone would say that 2,000 deaths on the roads is acceptable but most of us use them regularly without feeling unduly afraid. On the other hand, no politician would dare suggest that a fraction of that level of risk of death from terrorist acts is acceptable.

Despite these difficulties and our natural distaste of any calculation that puts a value on human life, it is essential that we think about these questions and use the best data to guide us through the tricky balance of protecting ourselves from harm while living free and fulfilling lives.

Jonathan Wallace
Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne

Livingstone's debt

As Vanessa Thorpe highlights, Dr David Livingstone has often been portrayed as the lone expeditioner, leaving the contribution of Mary Moffat, his wife, untold (“[Mrs Livingstone, we presume?](#)”, News). This is similarly true for the African members of Livingstone’s expeditions. Africans such as Abdullah Susi and James Chuma also made important contributions to Livingstone’s work. And, as the Royal Geographical Society’s Hidden Histories of Exploration project reveals, there was recognition for them through the award of silver medals to Susi and Chuma.

Foregrounding perspectives such as these helps to expand the traditional narrative, which focuses on just one man, to one that does not leave the important contribution of others behind.

Steve Brace

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)
London SW7

The perils of alcohol

Barbara Ellen castigates the World Health Organization for recommending that women of childbearing age abstain from alcohol (“[It’s not our health that concerns you, guys. It’s women having fun](#)”, Comment).

In 2018, the *Lancet* published the synthesis of [research](#) from nearly 200 countries, linking alcohol with Alzheimer’s, at least two cancers and many other health problems.

In the years that followed, I watched with curiosity how little reaction there has been to this report.

I realise how deeply embedded regular alcohol consumption is in all strata of society, which it was not in my parents’ day. I wonder if in another generation this will be recognised as a problem for mankind on a par with Covid or anthropogenic climate change, and I’m glad I won’t be here to see it.

I sympathise with Barbara Ellen up to a point, but I find the notion that people can only have “fun” if there’s alcohol around rather pathetic. I recommend the *Lancet* report to her.

Sinclair Coghill Dunnett
Inverness

A brush with art history

As an art school graduate with a reasonable amount of art history knowledge, I have only ever identified one of Laura Cumming's guess the painting (the New Review). Am I alone or should I go back to school?

David Prothero

Harlington, Bedfordshire

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For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 27 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

While playing for Bolton Wanderers in 2012, Fabrice Muamba collapsed owing to a cardiac arrest, not a heart attack ([Shock as Danish player collapses on Euros pitch](#), 13 June, page 2 from 1).

An article ([From Tudors to BLM, a tour across centuries of black London's past](#), 20 June, page 16) referred to *Bronze Woman* being, in 2008, the first public statue of a black woman on permanent display in England. This omitted reference to Kevin Atherton's 1986 *Platform Piece* at Brixton railway station, which is thought to be the first public sculptural representation of black British people in the UK and includes a depiction of Joy Battick.

We said Sabrina Verjee “became the first woman to do all the Wainwrights in 2020”. In fact, her achievement then was to be the first woman to run all 214 of those peaks consecutively, which she did in six days, 17 hours and 51 minutes ([A record breaker at one fell swoop](#), 20 June, page 45).

An article said the garden designer Robert Barker was “turning potential clients away”. In fact, Barker has a waiting list of up to two months for potential clients ([Fancy a garden makeover? Better join the long queue...](#), 20 June, page 7).

An image that was captioned as being of Phuket actually showed the Phi Phi islands, also in Thailand ([‘Devastated’ Phuket in race to vaccinate 70% of islanders in time for holiday season](#), 20 June, page 29).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Hardliner Ebrahim Raisi hailed as Iran's new president](#)

[Ask Philippa: meet the Observer's brilliant new agony aunt](#)

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
email observer.readers@observer.co.uk, tel 020 3353 4736*

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[OpinionGrenfell Tower inquiry.](#)

From Grenfell Tower to the Met police, shirking responsibility has become endemic

[Kenan Malik](#)



The powerful don't answer for their deeds. Look at the latest from the tragedy's inquiry



A poster featuring Robert Black, charged by Kensington and Chelsea to manage its property. Photograph: Tim Ireland/AP

A poster featuring Robert Black, charged by Kensington and Chelsea to manage its property. Photograph: Tim Ireland/AP

Sun 27 Jun 2021 02.30 EDT

Being accountable for one's actions seems about as fashionable these days as a foreign holiday. It is telling that Dido Harding can oversee the debacle that was the [test-and-trace programme](#) and yet still be in the running to be the [next boss of NHS England](#); that the Metropolitan police commissioner, Cressida Dick, having been rebuked by the [inquiry into Daniel Morgan's death](#) for her failure to cooperate, can swat away all calls to account for her actions.

The culture of "It's not my responsibility, guv" and "Even if it is my responsibility, why should I be held accountable for my misdeeds?" is not confined to Westminster but now permeates society. Those with power feel little obligation to answer for their actions. To see the raw impact of this culture of impunity, have a look at the [Grenfell Tower inquiry](#). It's been going on for so long (the first hearings took place in June 2018) that it now barely makes a ripple in the news. What it continues to expose, however, is that the kind of culture that allows Harding and Dick to blithely brush off

failure and dodge responsibility was also the culture that led to that fire on the night of 14 June 2017 and the 72 deaths that resulted, and that has allowed relatives of the victims and the wider community to be ignored and abandoned ever since.

Private companies sold materials they knew could kill and crowed about their [lies and deceit](#). Such contemptuous disregard for people's lives in the pursuit of profit was buttressed by state institutions and officials who sought the cheapest solution to any problem, boasted about [cuts to fire safety regulations](#) and branded anyone who challenged them as [troublemakers](#).

Two reports, in 2009 and 2013, and a London Fire Brigade "deficiency" notice in 2014, all pointed to major failures

Last week, the main witness at the inquiry was Robert Black, former boss of the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation ([KCTMO](#)), set up by the council to manage its housing. He was responsible for the disastrous Grenfell refurbishment that took place from 2014 to 2016. Two reports, in 2009 and 2013, and a London Fire Brigade "deficiency" notice in 2014 all pointed to major failures in fire safety procedures at Grenfell, with systems in breach of statutory obligations raising the possibility of "fatal consequences" for tenants. The warnings were ignored; Black did not even inform the KCTMO board of the full details. The KCTMO's emergency procedures were 15 years out of date, for which [Black blamed staff](#) "with the ability to forget to fill in the paperwork".

In 2010, there was a fire in the tower after some recycling bags caught alight. The smoke extraction system failed, causing inhalation injuries to a number of residents. When the Grenfell Tower leaseholders' association called for an independent investigation, KCTMO fobbed it off by blaming firemen for not knowing how the manual vents worked when its own internal maintenance report showed the problem lay with the vents themselves. Black did not make evacuation plans for disabled tenants, as required by law, even after being reminded by a report that he himself had commissioned. And, after all this, when he was asked at the inquiry if he took responsibility for the failures on his watch, he wriggled and squirmed before disdainfully saying: "Pass."

“Robert Black should be put in handcuffs after his evidence,” says Yvette Williams of the Justice4Grenfell group. “Instead, he will be allowed to go back to his villa in Marbella.” What outrages bereaved families and campaigners is that the litany of failure and irresponsibility in the years running up to the Grenfell fire has been compounded by a litany of failure and irresponsibility in the four years since.

Many want to know why the council, whose policies and policy failures helped kindle the fire, is still in charge. The council leader at the time, Nicholas Paget-Brown, eventually resigned but the body that oversaw the fire is now overseeing the recovery. “It’s like putting the criminals in charge of a crime scene,” says Kimia Zabihiyan, a spokesperson for the Grenfell Next of Kin group that represents the relatives of 31 of the 72 who died.

Transparency and accountability seem as lacking now as they were before the fire

Transparency and accountability seem as lacking now as they were before the fire. The first council cabinet meeting in the wake of the tragedy was due to [exclude the public and the press](#) until a high court judgment forced it to change its plan. The [Grenfell Scrutiny Committee](#), set up to allow public oversight of the council’s response to the disaster, was dissolved last year, much to the anger of local people. “It’s made scrutiny of council decisions so much more difficult,” says Zabihiyan.

The Grenfell Recovery Fund, established by the council “to support people in their recovery”, has [spent more money on consultancies and council staff salaries](#) than on proper support for the bereaved or the community. It has, says Zabihiyan, spawned an “industry of bureaucrats”. Those who object or criticise are, just as before, condemned as troublemakers. In the eyes of the authorities, Zabihiyan notes: “The problem isn’t the problem. You are the problem.” A council spokesperson replied: “Grenfell recovery is the top priority for the council.”

What particularly causes anger is that, for all the shocking details exposed in the inquiry, there won’t be any prosecutions, at least not until the inquiry is finished, which may not be for another three years. After the Manchester

Arena bombing, which took place the month before the Grenfell fire, the inquiry followed the prosecutions. Grenfell is a more complex case. Nevertheless, says Williams, even as the inquiry has exposed wrongdoing, it has also acted “like a shield” for the wrongdoers.

We live in a world in which making the wrong comment on social media can lead to people losing their jobs but where politicians and public officials, whose actions affect the lives of millions and whose failure can lead to deaths in the most unimaginable circumstances, can simply walk away and into their next lucrative assignment. It’s a world in which if you have power you also have the power not to be held accountable.

- Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)**Boris Johnson**

Our politics of nostalgia is a sure sign of present-day decay

[Nick Cohen](#)



Both the left and right are obsessed by a lost golden age. A confident Britain would look to the future



‘Ministers yearning for a united country would be less pitiable if they had not partitioned the UK by putting a trade border down the Irish Sea.’

Photograph: PeskyMonkey/Getty Images/iStockphoto

‘Ministers yearning for a united country would be less pitiable if they had not partitioned the UK by putting a trade border down the Irish Sea.’

Photograph: PeskyMonkey/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Sat 26 Jun 2021 14.00 EDT

The belief that the past was better than the present, and the only way forward is back, can be found in the corners of any society at any time. But when nostalgia grows to dominate Britain and much of the west it is as sure a symptom of decay as the stink of dry rot.

Every step of Britain’s decline has been accompanied by the sound of sighs for a lost country. To confine myself only to the past few weeks, we had Boris Johnson ordering [a new royal yacht](#) “to display the UK’s burgeoning status as a great, independent maritime trading nation”, a £200m attempt to feign 19th-century splendour that covers up the impoverishing consequences of Brexit on the UK’s real trade. After that, we had ministers promoting a well-meant but equally deceitful [patriotic song](#) that declared: “We are Britain/ And we have one dream/ To unite all people/ In one great team.” The yearning for a united country would be less pitiable if the same

ministers had not partitioned the United Kingdom by putting a trade border down the Irish Sea and were not now driving Scots into the arms of separatists, who are no slouches when it comes to myth-making themselves.

The [Brexit](#) movement was, above all else, a nostalgic movement. You should have guessed it would end badly when it failed to decide what imaginary past it wished to return to and still shows no sign of settling the matter today. Sometimes, it's the 1850s, when Britain was a "great, independent maritime trading nation". Sometimes, it is the 1950s, when we were united in "one great team" before the permissive society ruined everything. Sometimes, it is the summer of 1940, when Britain stood alone against a dangerous continental foe.

Modern conservatives are a brothel keeper's nightmare: they can never identify the fantasy they want to act out. All they know is that they want control, as if Britain were still a great power able to set its own rules rather than a medium-size European country whose influence depends on its alliances. Even now they have control, they cannot say what they want to achieve with it.

Many on the left believe conservative nostalgia is a yearning for a white country that existed before mass immigration. I am sure race is part of it but the Pavlovian response that the right is racist makes little sense when the cabinet has so many members from ethnic minorities and the Home Office's "hostile environment" of checks by police officers, landlords, employers, banks, doctors, hospitals, universities and marriage registrars is about to be turned on white EU citizens who haven't filled in the required paperwork.

Conservative nostalgia is a desire to feel comfortable before it is anything else

I do not mean to minimise the damage it causes when I say, instead, that conservative nostalgia is a desire to feel comfortable before it is anything else. The assault on the National Trust for telling the truth about slavery and colonialism reveals its nature. It could only happen in a society that wants to wallow in the satisfaction of seeing country houses as backdrops for Regency romances rather than as the profits of human bondage.

To my mind, the best way of understanding Johnson's appeal is that he allows his supporters to relax and laugh along with him as he joshes away the realities of our past and present. The Conservatives' opponents think the prime minister will fall when his supporters see through him. They miss the possibility that a large part of the electorate thinks Johnson's lies are the best thing about him.

If a desire for false comfort sounds relatively benign, I do not mean it to. Political nostalgia is always accompanied by conspiracy theory. Someone, somewhere must have cast the chosen ones out of Eden.

The British left is as convinced as the right is of the existence of a lost golden age. In this case, it was postwar Britain before Thatcherism destroyed the authentic Labour world of pit villages, community, honesty, Co-op stores and brass bands. Just as the right sees a liberal, pro-European elite using its "hideous strength", in the words of [Daniel Hannan](#), its tuppenny Jeremiah, to sabotage traditional England, so the left sees a neoliberal conspiracy destroying solidarity, altruism and community life. The one has Henley Regatta, the other the Durham Miners' Gala. Both slip into a panic-stricken and paranoid mentality that believes an enemy cabal is extinguishing everything that is worth having.

Confident countries are not nostalgic. A self-assured Britain would acknowledge it had a duty to face up to the legacy of slavery and colonialism as modern Germany acknowledged that it had to confront its histories of Nazism and communism. It would take it as read that the present is superior to the past and that, for all our faults, we have progressed enough to admit our mistakes. That a substantial proportion of the British do not believe in progress reveals a neurotic state of perpetual regret that aches to hear the bugle sound the order to retreat.

The right has built its power by appealing to elderly voters' outrage at modernity far more successfully than the left

The older you are, the more likely you are to be captured by expurgated memories of the past. The right has built its power by appealing to elderly voters' outrage at modernity far more successfully than the left has managed

to do. When the 2019 British Election Study is published in the autumn, it will report that 61% of over-65s in England and Wales voted Conservative.

A little more than irritation at the distortion of the historical record that a greying electorate brings with it is in order. A conservative core vote that has triple-locked state pensions and defined-benefit private pensions did not care overmuch about the destruction of jobs that Brexit would bring because pensioners' working lives were over and their income guaranteed. Nor do they appear concerned now about the Johnson administration abandoning children after Covid wrecked their education. Their children left education years ago.

The ultimate destination of the politics of nostalgia is a state like Vladimir Putin's Russia, where remorse at the loss of Soviet imperial power and paranoia about western conspiracies sustains a hyper-aggressive and lavishly corrupt dictatorship.

The British variant is less dangerous but no less ignorant. It lies to itself rather than to the whole world. It destroys its own country rather than other people's countries. But, as in Russia so in the UK: nostalgia for a glorious past offers only a failing future.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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- [Live UK Covid: Delta variant cases rise by 46% on last week](#)
- [Coronavirus UK Covid travel rules could change at short notice, warns minister](#)
- [Tokyo Olympics Some GB athletes still refusing to have Covid vaccine, says BOA chief](#)
- [Testing Almost 600m NHS home Covid kits unaccounted for, auditors reveal](#)

[Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)
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[Coronavirus](#)

UK Covid travel rules could change at short notice, warns minister

As some travel restrictions are eased, Grant Shapps refuses to say he would book foreign holiday now

- [UK eases Covid travel rules for tourist spots despite cabinet rift](#)
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Asked if he would rather people simply did not travel abroad at all, Shapps said: ‘No, that’s not my message at all.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Asked if he would rather people simply did not travel abroad at all, Shapps said: ‘No, that’s not my message at all.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 04.39 EDT

The UK transport secretary has refused to say he would book a foreign holiday for himself and his family yet, even as travel restrictions are eased for several destinations.

Grant Shapps warned anyone looking to travel abroad that the rules could change at short notice after Malta, Madeira and the Balearic islands, among others, were added to the list of countries from which travellers could return without having to quarantine.

[Covid travel: which countries have moved to the UK's green and red lists?](#)
[Read more](#)

But there was concern across the beleaguered travel sector, with one prominent figure accusing the government of being “overly cautious”.

Shapps said: “People will have to come to their own decisions ... If people are in a situation where, from next week, they wanted to get away then these are the places where you can go for the purposes of holiday, of course, being aware of all the caveats about the risk of things changing because ... that happens with quite a lot of regularity.”

And he acknowledged that the ongoing pandemic meant the status of any country could change with no notice, with [those on the “green watchlist”](#) most likely to see harsher restrictions reimposed.

“Whoever is booking to go anywhere this summer, travel insurance, making sure your flights are changeable and making sure the accommodation is changeable – all those things are going to be very, very important this year. And I think people need to weigh up whether that is going to work for them or not,” he told Sky News.

Asked if he would rather people simply did not travel abroad at all, therefore, he told BBC Breakfast: “No, that’s not my message at all. I’m transport secretary if people travel domestically in the UK or abroad.

“We must be aware that, when you travel abroad this year, there are complications because of this pandemic that, a couple of years ago, wouldn’t have existed and wouldn’t have been a factor. But it is for individuals to make that decision.”

The holiday company On the Beach said it would not be taking new bookings for July and August while so much uncertainty remained about countries on the watchlist.

Criticising ministers’ caution, the Airport Operators Association chief executive, Karen Dee, said: “Any extension of the green list is welcome, however small, but we also have to be realistic: this is not yet the meaningful restart the aviation industry needs to be able to recover from the pandemic.”

It was announced on Thursday evening that Malta was among 14 new countries and territories to be added to the green list or green watchlist from next Wednesday at 4am.

Explaining the difference, Shapps said people returning from any of those countries would not have to quarantine, provided they test negative for Covid before and upon their return. But he said ministers harboured greater concern over the green watchlist countries. These included all the newly added destinations, except Malta.

The lists are reviewed every three weeks, meaning that the next announcement will be on Thursday 15 July.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/25/uk-covid-travel-rules-could-change-at-short-notice-warns-shapps>

Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Some GB Olympic athletes refusing Covid vaccine over side-effect fears

- Handful of Olympians holding out over training concerns
- Andy Anson: 'People have right to choose but it's not helpful'



Women wearing protective face masks walk past the Olympic rings in Tokyo. Photograph: Naoki Ogura/Reuters

Women wearing protective face masks walk past the Olympic rings in Tokyo. Photograph: Naoki Ogura/Reuters

[Sean Ingle](#)

[@seaningle](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 03.45 EDT

The British athletes who do not want to get vaccinated against Covid-19 before the Tokyo Olympics are doing so over performance-related fears

rather than an anti-vax stance, the Guardian understands.

The [British Olympic Association](#) remains confident that almost all its 370 or so Olympians will have two jabs before they fly to Japan, with only “a small handful” still remaining unconvinced.

[Mo Farah in ‘good shape’ for last-ditch shot at Olympic qualification](#)
[Read more](#)

It is believed the remaining holdouts are worried that the possible side effects of the vaccine – which can include tiredness, headaches and chills – might affect a crucial period of their training given the Games are due to begin in just under four weeks. However, the BOA remains hopeful they will change their minds.

Speaking to the BBC, the BOA chief executive, Andy Anson, said “well over 90%” of British athletes will have two vaccine doses by the Olympics. But he also admitted “there are individuals who didn’t want to be vaccinated”.

Anson said: “We’re trying to convince them it’s the right thing to do. People have got the right to choose, and we have to respect that. But it’s not necessarily that helpful.”

The BOA said this month that it was on track to ensure all athletes and staff were fully vaccinated before the Olympics. The Tokyo Games, delayed last year because of the Covid-19 pandemic, will begin on 23 July.

Japan has largely avoided the kind of Covid outbreaks that have devastated other countries, but its vaccine rollout was initially slow and the medical system has been pushed to the brink in some places.

Many Japanese remain sceptical about the possibility of holding even a scaled-down Games safely during the pandemic. Organisers have excluded foreign spectators and limited the size of domestic crowds for the event.

Quick Guide

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Thank you for your feedback.

Anson said the Athletes' Village in Tokyo will be “probably the toughest environment in sports at this time”.

He said: “We are putting in place very strict protocols along with the organisers to make sure, to the fullest extent possible, we follow the rules of isolation, distancing and just keeping in our own ‘semi-bubbles’.”

On Wednesday a second member of Uganda's Olympic delegation, an athlete, tested positive for Covid-19 after arriving in Japan.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jun/25/some-gb-olympic-athletes-still-refusing-to-have-covid-vaccine-boa-claims-athletics>

NHS

Almost 600m NHS home Covid tests unaccounted for, auditors reveal

Results from only 14% of the 691m tests handed out in England have been registered with test and trace

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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NHS Track and Trace distributed 691m Covid lateral flow tests to people across England. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

NHS Track and Trace distributed 691m Covid lateral flow tests to people across England. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

[Rajeev Syal](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 19.01 EDT

Almost 600m lateral flow tests given to the public in England may not yet have been used, according to a report that says the hugely expensive test-and-trace system is still bedevilled by problems.

The National Audit Office said [NHS](#) Test and Trace (NSHT&T), which Boris Johnson promised would be world-beating and has a budget exceeding that of the Department for Transport, was struggling with some “fundamental parts” of its role.

In a move to help track and suppress the spread of coronavirus, NHST&T distributed 691m quick-result tests to people across England with the aim of helping people to return to workplaces.

The NAO said results from only 14% of them had been registered, meaning almost 600m had gone unaccounted for.

“NHST&T does not know whether the tests that have not been registered have been used or not,” the report says. “It has started a programme of research to understand why the registration of test results is so low and is working to increase public awareness of the need to register results and improve its ability to track tests.”

The startling finding will increase scrutiny of the test-and-trace system, which was hailed by the prime minister as a vital part of the government’s plan to beat coronavirus, and of its former head Dido Harding, who is seeking to become the next head of the NHS.

The shadow health minister Justin Madders said the report was damning. “If lateral flow tests are going to play their part in helping society reopen, ministers need to make sure results are registered. The British people have sacrificed so much. The government needs to step up,” he said.

The report, which examines NHST&T from November 2020 to April this year, questions the efficiency of the system when it is under strain.

It highlights how the system’s performance in returning the results of tests taken in the community within 24 hours “fell well below its target” during the winter spike in coronavirus cases in December. Only 17% of people

received their results within a day in December, compared with 90% by April.

Auditors said the government had advised that it was desirable that no more than 48 hours should elapse between identification of a case and their contacts self-isolating. “In-person PCR tests make up a declining minority of tests, and it is less clear whether the wider system is operating as quickly as it needs to,” the report says.

Meg Hillier, the Labour chair of the public accounts committee, said it was “deeply disappointing” that the test-and-trace system was plagued by many of the same problems that were identified earlier this year.

“NHST&T needs to get to grips with some fundamental parts of the process, such as its timeliness in reaching contacts for all the tests it provides, people coming forward for tests when they have symptoms, and compliance with self-isolation,” she said.

“Meanwhile, budget remains unspent despite the continued use of costly consultants and high levels of unused capacity in the system. As we learn to live with Covid, NHST&T must urgently improve performance to deliver the effective test and trace system we so badly need.”

Test-and-trace programmes for Covid-19 aim to reduce infections by identifying individuals with the virus, tracing their contacts and isolating them to limit further transmission.

Auditors found that NHST&T, allocated a budget of £22.2bn, underspent by more than £8bn following a slump in demand for testing in January and February this year during the national lockdown.

The percentage of paid time that contact centre staff spend speaking to people who should consider self-isolating remains low, the report says. “The utilisation rate for its contact-tracers and other contact centre staff ... has generally remained well below the 50% target, peaking at 49% in January 2021 and falling to around 11% in February,” it adds.

Despite previous criticism over the use of expensive management consultancies, NHST&T said it anticipated that the amount recorded as consultancy spend would increase. “NHST&T estimated that it had spent £372m on agency and contractor staff and £195m on consultancy fees, compared with £52m on permanent and seconded staff,” the report says.

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Germany restricts foreign arrivals; UK cases up nearly 50% in week – as it happened

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[Israel](#)

Israel restores indoor mask requirement after rise in Covid cases

Increase is probably due to highly contagious Delta variant, says pandemic response chief

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The Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, has called for the wearing of masks again in closed spaces. Photograph: Atef Safadi/EPA

The Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, has called for the wearing of masks again in closed spaces. Photograph: Atef Safadi/EPA

[Bethan McKernan](#) and agencies

Fri 25 Jun 2021 07.03 EDT

Israel has decided to reimpose the mandatory wearing of masks in enclosed public spaces owing to a rise in Covid-19 cases just 10 days after the measure was lifted – a blow for a country that has prided itself on one of the world's [most successful vaccine rollouts](#).

The head of Israel's pandemic response taskforce, Nachman Ash, told public radio on Friday that mask mandates in most indoor situations would be reinstated from noon, after the country recorded four successive days of more than 100 new cases. Thursday's count of 227 new cases was the highest daily caseload in more than two months.

“We are seeing a doubling every few days,” Ash said on Friday. “Another thing that's worrying is the infections are spreading. If we had two cities where most of the infections were, we have more cities where the numbers are rising and communities where the cases are going up.”

Ash said the rise in cases was probably due to travellers returning to the country infected with the highly contagious Delta variant, which is believed to be responsible for 70% of the new cases.

[Israel cases](#)

Reimposing the mask requirement is a setback for Israel, [coming so soon after the measure was lifted](#) on 15 June following one of the world's quickest vaccination campaigns.

Approximately 5.2 million of the 9 million-strong population have received both doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, after Israel procured millions of doses in a special deal with the drugmakers in which it received early supplies in exchange for sharing health data on the vaccines' impact.

Israel has received criticism, however, for refusing to vaccinate most Palestinians living in the West Bank or in the Gaza Strip, which is under Israeli blockade. Only about 270,000 Palestinians have received two doses, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

A deal between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which controls the West Bank, for 1m Pfizer/BioNTech jabs was called off last week after the PA

rejected the shipment, saying the doses were on the verge of expiring.

The authority has received 5,000 vaccine doses from Israel so far, as well as shipments from Russia, China, the UAE and the UN's Covax programme for low- and middle-income countries.

Vaccinations

Ash said that despite the increased number of positive cases in Israel, there had not yet been a parallel rise in hospitalisations or deaths, and that he hoped a fourth wave of serious infections could be avoided.

“It's clear it's a factor of time, that not enough time has passed,” Ash said. “But we hope the vaccines will protect us from a rise in hospitalisation and difficult cases.”

The health ministry's new directive urges Israelis to wear masks in crowded outdoor spaces too, including at Pride events scheduled for this weekend.

A Pride march on Friday afternoon in Tel Aviv was expected to draw tens of thousands of people in the largest public gathering since the pandemic began. Last year's event was suspended owing to the virus.

This week Israel delayed plans to allow the renewed entry of individual tourists, and said other steps may have to be taken to counter the spread of the Delta variant. Israeli media has speculated there may be a return to limiting numbers on gatherings.

The northern town of Binyamina, near Haifa, earlier this week was categorised as red under the country's traffic light system – the first such designation in several months.

The rise in coronavirus cases is one of the first challenges facing Israel's new coalition government, headed by Naftali Bennett as prime minister, who warned on Tuesday that the country could be facing a new outbreak and asked citizens to limit international travel.

Yuli Edelstein, the health minister under the former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, wrote on Twitter: “When the government receives a healthcare

system in excellent shape and blames its predecessor for its own failures, its citizens ought to be worried. This was the state of the infection on the day of the changing of the guard in the health ministry: 253 active cases, 0.02% testing positive, an average of 12 sick people every day. And the finale – 5.5 million vaccinated people.”

The fall in new cases allowed much of daily life to return to normal but did not save Netanyahu’s job: Bennett, a onetime aide turned political enemy, replaced him as prime minister this month.

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[Coronavirus](#)

UK eases Covid travel rules for tourist spots despite cabinet rift

Holiday hopes boosted as quarantine lifted for arrivals from Balearics, Malta and some Caribbean islands

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Malta has been added to the UK government's green list from next week.
Photograph: Insignis Photography/Alamy Stock Photo

Malta has been added to the UK government's green list from next week.
Photograph: Insignis Photography/Alamy Stock Photo

[Aubrey Allegretti](#), [Daniel Boffey](#), [Nicola Davis](#) and [Gwyn Topham](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 16.15 EDT

Ministers have sought to rescue the summer holiday season by easing travel restrictions for a number of tourist hotspots, amid a cabinet rift over plans to grant extra freedoms to people who have received both doses of their Covid vaccine.

But Thursday evening's long-awaited move to scrap self-isolation for Britons returning from certain countries risked being immediately undermined, when some European leaders indicated they would toughen their own border measures to stop the UK's surge in Delta variant infections in the UK hitting their shores.

Malta is to be added to all UK governments' green lists from next Wednesday at 4am, and the Balearic islands, Madeira and Israel are being moved from the amber list to the "green watchlist" – meaning they are at risk of returning to amber. In all instances, travellers will not have to quarantine, provided they test negative for Covid before and upon their return home.

A handful of Caribbean nations will also be added to the green watchlist, including Barbados, Bermuda and Grenada, while six countries – including Tunisia, Uganda and Eritrea – are being placed on the red list. This means travel is only allowed for British residents and nationals, who will be forced to pay £1,750 for an 11-night hotel quarantine on their return.

Ministers have also promised that people returning from amber list countries who have had both doses of their Covid vaccine will be able to avoid quarantine later in the summer, instead of having to isolate at home for up to 10 days.

They did not, however, agree a date for the change to come into force, following a showdown at the Covid operations committee on Thursday.

The Guardian understands some cabinet figures are concerned that people will rush to try to bring forward their second doses once they realise it will grant them extra freedoms that would allow them to return home from foreign trips more easily.

Ministers fear this will put strain on supplies just as they are pushing to meet the target of offering all UK adults a first dose by 19 July, the “terminus date” by which Boris Johnson has promised to lift all remaining restrictions. Therefore the easing of restrictions for those returning from amber list countries, including the dropping of official government advice not to travel to them, is not expected to happen until August.

The health secretary, Matt Hancock, who vetoed Malta being added to the green list three weeks ago, is said to be one of the ministers most wary of unlocking international travel, along with the home secretary, Priti Patel, given the importation of the Delta variant from India that was blamed for delaying the final stage of unlocking, originally scheduled for 21 June.

[Red, amber and green destinations](#)

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, has been under pressure from aviation and tourism companies to add more countries to the green list, and the Cabinet Office minister, Michael Gove, is said to have stopped “gunning” as hard for a more cautious approach to international restrictions.

Meanwhile, Johnson left open the possibility he might take a foreign holiday this summer, saying he had not ruled it out.

The Balearic islands accounted for more than 8% of UK flights to EU countries in the summer of 2019, when almost 1,000 flights a week would depart from the UK, according to data from analysts Cirium.

Next week just 214 are scheduled to fly from the UK to the islands, mainly from Jet 2 and Ryanair, with 32 to Malta and 19 to Madeira, although the number of flights is expected to rise rapidly. EasyJet said it would be adding more services to the Balearics to meet an anticipated surge in demand.

Virgin Atlantic welcomed the addition of Caribbean destinations to the green list but said the announcement did not go far enough, calling for the US to also be added.

The Unite union said that the small changes showed that the system was not fit for purpose, and reiterated calls for help for the beleaguered travel and

aviation sector.

The promised opening up came as Covid cases in the UK reached levels not seen since early February, when the country was in lockdown, prompting EU leaders to warn British travellers they could have quarantine restrictions imposed on them when they enter the bloc.

01:00

Double Covid jabs offers 'real prospect' of opening up travel, says Boris Johnson – video

The move would deal a severe blow to those hoping to see family and friends they have been unable to visit since the pandemic began, or planning a getaway in the sun.

On Thursday, 16,703 new infections were reported across the UK, a sharp rise from 16,135 the day before and 11,625 on Tuesday. The steep increase has in part been attributed to surge testing in Scotland, but there was a substantial rise in England, with 13,068 new cases reported on Thursday – up from 12,765 on Wednesday and 9,096 on Tuesday. Figures released by Public Health England on Friday revealed that 99% of new cases in the UK now involve the Delta variant.

The relative lack of vaccination coverage across the EU has led to fears the variant could inflict a heavier death toll in the 27 member states than in Britain.

Belgium has announced that it is banning British travellers from Saturday, following the German chancellor Angela Merkel's call for other EU leaders to impose tougher restrictions.

Portugal's prime minister, António Costa, had opened up the country to British tourists who can provide proof of a negative Covid test, [but he hinted at a summit in Brussels that he could make U-turn.](#)

He said Merkel was “completely right” about needing “to coordinate regarding our external borders, since we have freedom of movement within the EU”.

A summit communique issued in the name of the 27 EU member states said they would “be vigilant and coordinated with regard to developments, particularly the emergence and spread of variants”.

Downing Street has tried not to be drawn into a row over the restrictions. “Currently it is down to individual EU member states to decide on the rules governing their borders,” a No 10 spokesperson said on Thursday.

“We will continue to have discussions with our European partners on the reopening of international travel but we’re very confident that our vaccination programme is providing a good way forward.

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Spain

Elation in Spain as Balearic Islands join UK's Covid green list

Authorities are expected to be diligent in enforcing Covid rules in Majorca, Ibiza and Menorca

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Cala Mitjana, Menorca. Travellers from Britain will not need to quarantine after visiting Majorca, Ibiza and Menorca from Wednesday. Photograph: Visions from Earth/Alamy

Cala Mitjana, Menorca. Travellers from Britain will not need to quarantine after visiting Majorca, Ibiza and Menorca from Wednesday. Photograph: Visions from Earth/Alamy

[Ashifa Kassam](#) in Madrid
[@ashifa_k](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 16.28 EDT

The easing of restrictions on UK travellers heading to the Balearics has prompted elation among officials and businesses in the islands, even as an outbreak of 394 coronavirus cases among Spanish students who had recently travelled to Mallorca highlighted the risks of opening up.

On Thursday, Britain's transport secretary, Grant Shapps, announced that the Spanish archipelago [was among the territories added to the UK's green list](#) as of next Wednesday, meaning travellers will not need to quarantine when returning to the UK.

Last month [Spain began allowing British travellers](#) into the country without the need to provide a negative Covid test, a move that sharply contrasts with the [growing push by EU leaders](#) to tighten restrictions on British tourists.

[Best of the Balearics: four Spanish islands to visit from the green list](#)
[Read more](#)

The 14-day infection rate in the Balearics is among the lowest in Spain at 48 per 100,000 inhabitants. Before the pandemic, the islands, which also include Ibiza and [Menorca](#), relied heavily on British tourism, with approximately 3.7 million holidaymakers arriving in 2019.

The region's green-list status was declared hours after several regions in [Spain](#) began sounding the alarm over clusters of coronavirus cases among high school students who had travelled to Mallorca earlier this month.

Spain's health ministry said they were closely monitoring the situation, adding: "To date we are aware of 394 cases of Covid-19 associated with end-of-year trips."

[uk corona lists global](#)

Officials and businesses in the Balearics celebrated the UK's decision to put the islands on the green list. "For us it's like a rebirth," said Javier Pascuet, the director of tourism for the municipality of Calvià, which includes Magaluf. "We only have 40% of hotels open."

He stressed that authorities would be diligent in cracking down on parties, crowds and any other behaviours that could risk exacerbating the pandemic. “Holidays are about being laid back but we cannot afford to have our numbers go up again,” he said.

The lesson was laid bare last year after images [emerged of drunk, maskless tourists](#) flouting social distancing norms as they partied in Mallorca. Authorities responded swiftly, [shutting down Magaluf’s](#) notorious Punta Ballena strip.

While the strip has now reopened, the region has put in place rules prohibiting dancing, both indoors or outdoors, and which require drinks ordered in restaurants and bars to be consumed while sitting at a table. “We’re going to be watching very carefully,” said Pascuet.

In the confederation that represents business associations in the Balearics, known as CAEB, there was little worry that the arrival of British tourists would deter German holidaymakers, who rank as the other major source country for tourists to the region.

On Wednesday the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, said the [EU should require travellers](#) from the UK to quarantine upon arrival after forecasts suggested the Delta variant could swell to 90% of cases across the bloc in the coming months.

German and British tourists often are drawn to different parts of the islands, said Carmen Planas of the confederation. “For example in Palma beach, most are Germans. In Magaluf, most are British. Ibiza sees more Britons and fewer Germans.”

[Spain corona cases](#)

She brushed off concerns over the Delta variant, pointing to the more than 77% of residents over the age of 40 who have had at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine.

Juan Manuel Ordinas, who leads an association representing small hotels, described the green-list status as excellent news.

While he acknowledged there was a generalised worry about Covid among many in the region, he pointed out that the pandemic has wreaked havoc on the tourist-dependent islands, forcing the shutdown of Ibiza's world-famous nightclubs last year, ushering in severe restrictions on restaurants and shops and sending the region's GDP plunging about 25% in 2020.

In the case of Ordinas, the plunge in tourism has meant one of the two hotels he owns has remains closed. Of his staff of 20, there's only enough work to sustain five and a half jobs.

"There's a point where you have to be realistic," he said. "We only have July, August and September left. That's three months to make what you would normally make in six months."

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2021.06.25 - Spotlight

- [Lorde I'm not a climate activist. I'm a pop star](#)
- [Mental health How the pandemic got us addicted to longing – and why it's bad for us](#)
- [UK pop pilgrimages From Paul McCartney's Kintyre to Giggs's Peckham](#)
- [Thomas Vinterberg There is a great need for the uncontrollable – but little room for it today](#)

[Lorde](#)

Interview

Lorde: ‘I’m not a climate activist. I’m a pop star’

[Laura Snapes](#)



Lorde: ‘It’s my joy to be patient zero on a harmony virus.’ Photograph: Ophelia Mikkelsen

Lorde: ‘It’s my joy to be patient zero on a harmony virus.’ Photograph: Ophelia Mikkelsen

She quit social media, embraced the feral and grieved for her beloved dog. Now rejuvenated, Lorde is back with a nature-inspired new album – though she tells our writer there’s a sinister side to its sunniness



Fri 25 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Lorde, in case it wasn't obvious, has made her name on glorification. Ella Yelich-O'Connor was an aristocracy-obsessed 16-year-old when her imperiously cool debut album, 2013's [Pure Heroine](#), elevated suburban New Zealand adolescence to pop echelons in which those kids had never previously seen themselves. In 2017, [Melodrama](#) cast post-breakup hedonism in glittering synths, dramatising one fabulous night on the cusp of adulthood as if it were Greek tragedy.

Her forthcoming third album, *Solar Power*, has humbler origins, especially for a songwriter who likes describing inspiration as "divine". The loose, sunny instrumentation – inspired as much by Crosby, Stills & Nash as Nelly Furtado – mirrors a shift within the 24-year-old. "When I got my dog, all of a sudden you're literally picking up shit, cleaning up vomit and not caring," she says cheerfully, video-calling from the start of a jet-lag-addled workday in Los Angeles.

Her elegant jewellery and sleeveless black top contrast with her gusto for animal bodily functions. "It's all in service of this huge amount of love. You feel this shift toward the feral and a relinquishing of the control that would have maybe kept that feral nature at bay." She loved it. "Because I've been

the master of my own universe since, like, 16. Which is a very unusual experience.”

More on the dog – the dearly departed Pearl – later. These may seem insalubrious beginnings for one of the year’s most anticipated albums, but if Solar Power glorifies anything, it is life’s natural rhythms: tides, seasons, the evolution of a feeling, or indeed, canine cogitation. [Lorde](#) wanted to reflect how she feels at home in Auckland, where she lives in blissful obscurity. There are hardly any paparazzi; once in a blue moon she pops up on MailOnline, buying a rug. In 2018 she deleted all but a few posts from her Instagram and Twitter and abandoned both. Her greatest joy is contemplating the promise of a long summer day: will she garden? Swim? Fish? She rues spending today’s solstice trapped on Zoom; at home, she would have swum at dawn.

The album’s genesis, she says, “was this feeling of the clothes coming off and the skin being exposed and feeling this playfulness”. Behold the artwork, in which she leaps over the camera, revealing an acute bikini wedgie. “When I first saw it I was like, ooh!” she gasps coyly, raising a dainty hand to her mouth. But it worked. “It felt innocent and free, a little feral, a little spicy.”



‘I’m very comfortable in the periods of limbo, or times where I feel afraid or vulnerable.’ Photograph: Ophelia Mikkelsen

The simple life dissolved a little self-seriousness. “Making my first record, I would have rather *died* than have an acoustic guitar,” she says. “Acoustic guitars were like, bonfires and guys in dumb hats, it was very mid-2000s to me.” She belly-laughs. “And then everything I listened to became guitar music by way of both 2004 and 1976!”

She was too young to enjoy the “bright, forward, shimmery acoustics” of Natalie Imbruglia, Natasha Bedingfield and All Saints first time around. Delving back, she heard “a time of optimism” in this critically maligned era. “‘Take me to my beach’, ‘[If you’re fond of sand dunes and salty air](#)’ – all these crunchy outdoor images were so compelling to me, and felt so ripe for a return.” (I hear the Spice Girls’ Viva Forever in it, and am mortified to learn she has never heard it. I send it to her later, and it hits the spot. “Gonna spend some time with this.”) She told her drummer Matt Chamberlain to make his parts “sound like skateboarding”, a sense memory she wanted to channel. She can’t skate, although her teenage friends could. “I always remember seeing that light come up from the bowl and it being so blue, it’s a very visceral memory.”

This newfound ease does not, however, portend a crusty campfire singalong. She and co-producer Jack Antonoff “still pored over every fucking detail! I’m a maniac, my ears are unparalleled. You can’t get a thing past me.”

Solar Power’s title track and lead single draws on the transformative pleasures of the beach, referencing the buoyant daze of Primal Scream’s Loaded and George Michael’s Freedom 90. (Bobby Gillespie and Michael’s estate gave it their blessing.) It doesn’t reach for the wayward euphoria of Melodrama’s lead single Green Light, but more attainable epiphanies. Some critics called it slight. “I don’t think of Solar Power as a shallow moment,” says Lorde. “It’s still very much a moment of depth and it feels very big to me, it’s just also light and flirty.”

Melodrama was one of the most critically acclaimed albums of 2017. Lorde still considers it a miracle it got made – she and Antonoff, both “young and clueless”, were left alone for two years. “We had taste and feelings but we

didn't really know how to make anything." Yet it failed to replicate Pure Heroine's commercial highs. She didn't seem to care. (In 2018, she said: "If you're here for the commercial performance of my work you'll only become more and more disenchanted.") Nonetheless, her influence has never been louder: the likes of [Olivia Rodrigo](#), [Conan Gray](#) and [Holly Humberstone](#) have appropriated Lorde's instantly identifiable [sprite-like vocal harmonies](#). She hasn't noticed – she doesn't listen to much contemporary pop – although she's flattered. "It's my joy to be patient zero on a harmony virus."

I have heard half of Solar Power. Unless there are massive pop songs hidden elsewhere, it is much more intimate than its tumultuous predecessor, centring those trademark vocals in classic pop melodies that summon the Carpenters' uneasy beauty. While Lorde still thinks of herself "absolutely" as a pop artist, she is "way past being interested in if it's going to play on the radio or anywhere in a literal pop context. It'll be interesting to see if this becomes a sound people are interested in because it's so fucking zany."

She calls Solar Power joyful and optimistic, but I am struck by its sadness: the laments on celebrity, the climate crisis, wellness culture and time passing; the weighty self-doubt. "I didn't think it was that sad," Lorde says, surprised and inquisitive. She cites the prismatic folk song Stoned at the Nail Salon. "That kind of searching, being unsure that I had chosen the right path and feeling lonely, I don't see those as permanent or even bad emotions. It's all part of the thing" – life – "to feel that trepidation. Maybe it is sad, but I'm very comfortable in the periods of limbo, or times where I feel afraid or vulnerable."

Also on that song, she sings of how "all the beautiful girls will fade like the roses". That relatively recent revelation was "truly the first time that I had entertained the notion that the sexy models on Instagram who made me feel inferior – they too will age". She shrugs happily. "We're all on the same bus. At some point we have to get on the bus back." Contemplating time passing was comforting, she says. "I was old enough to finally think about it. When you're a kid, you're immortal."

[Lorde's comeback single is a lesson in letting pop stars take their time](#)
[Read more](#)

She says the record is definitively a product of joy, albeit joy born from the revelations of grief. Which brings us back to Pearl. In 2018, exhausted from touring and craving stability, Lorde decided to get a dog. “And he would have gold hair, and that would take me somewhere,” she says. “And he did. He was the ultimate tour guide.” He lay under the piano while she learned to write on an instrument for the first time. “To feel this energy that was not being generated by me was really profound,” she says.

Caring for him helped her understand her parents and contemplate her own future children, to consider things “that are greater than my feelings on this dancefloor”, she says, with self-deprecation. “I could have the worst workday ever, but you come home and this being is pleased to see you. You’ve done that right for another day, you know? There was an element of wanting to take my performance scores away from ‘How’s this review?’ I’m not so that way inclined now, but maybe at the time I was a little more.”

After less than two years together, Pearl succumbed to lifelong health issues. Lorde emailed fans to say the loss would delay her new record; the grief was long-lasting. She hasn’t returned to the park where they walked. Without wishing to diminish his life, the scale of her devastation seemed to represent some greater loss. “It was absolutely, you’re right, something bigger,” she says. “It was everything. But I don’t know how much of this I wanna talk about with a journalist.” She chuckles kindly and tries to trace its outline. “Grief is a really transformative force. I’d never experienced it fully like that, and it makes you question everything. It overturns a lot.”

How it has changed her is probably a detail for the next album. “This record is about how precious life is, really,” she says.

She got a sense of it when she fulfilled [a lifelong dream to visit Antarctica in February 2019](#). “The only thing to contemplate there is this raw force,” she says. “It’s as much terror as beauty. You don’t feel welcomed by the natural world – I completely felt like an interloper.” She calls it a spiritual pilgrimage. “It was the middle of summer in New Zealand. Going from the beach and tans to this hostile, cold environment and back to the beach, that whiplash helped set the scene to start writing this record.”



Lorde on stage in Austin, Texas, in 2014. Photograph: Ashley Landis/EPA

Addressing the natural world on the album “was kind of a grieving process as well as a celebratory one”, she says. Fans are convinced that the video to *Solar Power*, in which Lorde skips around a rudimentary beach civilisation populated by bored acolytes, is a political comment. Dressed in yellow, she must represent the sun duping braindead kids into ignoring climate warning signs! Or callous politicians ignoring the issue while everyone suffers! The beach will appear in more videos and “reveal its mysteries”, she teases, but the album is not “my big climate change record”. “I’m not a climate activist, I’m a pop star. I stoke the fire of a giant machine, spitting out emissions as I go. There is a lot I don’t know.”

A much-analysed moment from the *Solar Power* video, in which she hustles the camera past some rubbish, is her “winking at the huge amount of idealism that people direct at where I’m from”, she says. “We have our literal and metaphorical trash on the beach like everyone else.” She won’t be drawn on Jacinda Ardern, a focus of global adulation but a source of frustration for young New Zealanders, who consider her risk-averse. “We’ve got a lot of shit we need to work on.”

She wanted to disabuse anyone of the idea that she had any answers. The album opener, *The Path*, is set at the 2016 Met Gala, where Lorde steals a

fork for her mum, observes “supermodels dancing around a pharaoh’s tomb”, then admits: “If you’re looking for a saviour, well that’s not me.” She says it’s an odd place to start, “but I know enough about how people view me – we’re taught to view famous people as gods now – and I just wanted to dismantle that”.

One song, *Fallen Fruit*, is a crushed flower-power lament for the spoiled Eden her generation inherited. But that’s the only protest song. She recalls [Mark Rylance saying that artists should tell love stories about the climate](#). “The opposite has been proven not to work,” she says. “I do think these songs are love stories more than anything. But love is complicated.”

The lost flower-children in the *Solar Power* video and the sad girls in the album’s lyrics mollifying emptiness with weed, manicures and crystals chime with the quote in Lorde’s Instagram bio from Joan Didion’s 1967 essay [Slouching Towards Bethlehem](#), about dropouts and psychedelics in Haight-Ashbury. In isolation, “a return to innocence – the mysteries of the blood – an itch for the transcendental” looks like a statement of artistic intent. In context, it comes from a psychiatrist assessing how romantic movements formed in times of crisis always end in authoritarianism.

Is she suggesting darker times still to come for a generation who have reached for alternatives in the absence of traditional support structures? She’s wary of revealing too much, but “that’s the vibe”, she says coyly. “I read a lot about the dropping-out movement and commune life, the ideological crises people were having then, and felt a lot of parallels with what people are going through now. It’s all gonna become clear later, but it was such a fun, rich zone to be mining.”

Lorde spent most of the pandemic in New Zealand, which was minimally impacted by Covid. “I don’t feel like I’m that tapped into the greater cultural consciousness around it,” she confesses. She has never felt better. “I think it’s getting offline, but I really feel like I’m only just now scratching the surface of my powers, which is a very exciting feeling.”

She quit social media and turned her phone into a “dumbphone” – she shows me the greyscale display, believed to minimise compulsive checking – after she came across the author [Annie Dillard](#)’s aphorism: “How we spend our

days is how we spend our lives.” She repeats it emphatically. “I was like, I can’t do this for ever, this can’t be it.” Social media was fun for years. “But I think it was altering my neural pathways and homogenising my trains of thought. I was losing touch with my ability to explore an idea at my own pace, which felt like losing my free will at times.” She laughs, baffled. “I was very addicted. To be able to put that aside has put me into such a position of power and fertility and creativity and confidence.”

Over email, I ask if she worries about losing touch, especially making work that touches on generational predicaments. “I actually think falling out of touch is one of the better things, emotionally and creatively, to happen to me in my 20s,” she replies. “I’m aware it’s absolutely a social and economic privilege to do so. I really think people need me to be able to see our world clearly in order to write about it, and I couldn’t do that and remain online.” The work, she says, “can be as rich and personal as it is” because of those boundaries.

['We have to nurture each other': how Olivia Rodrigo and Gen Z reinvented the power ballad](#)

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She was inspired to get offline after reading the artist [Jenny Odell's How to Do Nothing](#), a polemic on resisting productivity. She hopes Solar Power will do for fans “what that book did for me, which was to retrain my attention. It was literally walking my dog – 45 minutes twice a day at the local park – and that was so big and transcendent for me.”

When Lorde emerged, articulate teenage pop stars who wrote their own songs were few and far between. Now there are dozens in her wake, from Rodrigo to Billie Eilish. Her own precocity has shapeshifted, evident in how she has enforced normality on her life. “I was just at home for *years*,” she says of Solar Power’s roots. “It would make me feel vulnerable sometimes, feeling that cut off and that irrelevant, so to speak. But it’s also very powerful, and I can understand that as something that is precious.”

Solar Power is out on 20 August

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Mental health

How the pandemic got us addicted to longing – and why it's bad for us

I learned first-hand about longing through decades of celibacy – but why do we do it, and how can we stop?



Google searches for ‘Why am I dreaming about my ex?’ shot up 2,450% in April 2020. Photograph: Colin Anderson Productions Pty Ltd/Getty Images

Google searches for ‘Why am I dreaming about my ex?’ shot up 2,450% in April 2020. Photograph: Colin Anderson Productions Pty Ltd/Getty Images

Amanda McCracken

Fri 25 Jun 2021 00.00 EDT

I was a 35-year-old virgin when I realized I was addicted to longing. I got off on the high of anticipating sex I knew I wasn't going to have, and then masochistically wallowed when letdown inevitably followed.

My crushes were the popular guys in high school, the elusive seat-mate on an airplane ride, and the soldiers shipped overseas. I binge-watched When Harry Met Sally and planned weekend trips to far-flung destinations hoping to rekindle an old flame or attract the eye of a romantic interest I'd spent hours stalking on Facebook.

By the time I was a 41-year-old virgin, I found myself living a unique form of purgatory. Longing for a relationship with unavailable men had become a way of protecting myself from the loneliness of being single and the messiness and monotony of being in a long-term relationship. Sexual abstinence amplified the anticipation factor. My friend with anorexia told me she fantasized about elaborate meals but never ate them. I understood. My addiction to longing was never about sex, it was about control.

The fact that I entered the fifth decade of life a virgin puts me in the minority, but idealizing the past and seeking the thrill of anticipation to avoid discomfort is exceedingly common – particularly since the pandemic. If you've reached out to an ex during lockdown, you're far from alone.

Idealizing the past and seeking the thrill of anticipation to avoid discomfort is exceedingly common – particularly since the pandemic

Google searches for “Why am I dreaming about my ex?” shot up 2,450% in April 2020 compared with the year before. Online-dating apps have seen a [surge of activity](#) during the pandemic. Ashley Madison, the world's leading married dating site, saw its sign-ups increase from [15,500 members a day to over 17,000 a day](#) at the start of the pandemic. Most members of the site, whose tagline is “Life is short. Have an affair”, say having affairs helps maintain their marriages. Only 1% of members see themselves leaving their spouse. When asked about this, those surveyed say having an affair is either a great distraction, or something to [look forward to](#).

So we can't help Googling exes and trying to have affairs. In fact, recent [research](#) suggests we're wired for longing – and trying to connect with unavailable current and past lovers is just one way we do it.

For others, anticipation comes not in the form of a virtual stranger but a box on our porch. As the pandemic cut many of us off from in-store shopping, dining and other experiences, US e-commerce sales increased [44% in 2020](#). There is actually a surprising psychological concept which could explain this splurge: when we feel our lives threatened, we develop new ways to cope. So with routines falling apart and the world uncertain, online shopping provides a way to feel some sense of control.

Mike Miller, an outdoor enthusiast, admits he spent about \$4,500 online in the first three months of the pandemic, having turned to impulse-buying for satisfaction when he realized his usual pastimes – travel and experiences – were cut off to him. “I’d look at camping gadgets and sports equipment I knew I wouldn’t wear anytime soon. It would give me a chance to daydream about life returning to some kind of normal,” he explains.

To feel happy, many of us turned to anticipation without guaranteed payoff. People invested time and money surfing travel sites, even booking trips not knowing if and when they’d be able to take them.

Science proves it doesn’t matter if we do. And when it comes to making purchases, psychologists have found we derive more enduring happiness from anticipating experiential purchases (money spent on doing) than material purchases (money spent on having). “Trips don’t just make us happy while we’re on them; they also make us happy when we’re talking to other people about what we’re going to do,” says Amit Kumar, a professor at the University of Texas who [wrote a paper on this phenomenon](#) in 2014.

[Tell us: Have you experienced burnout during the pandemic?](#)

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But what is longing – is it bad for us, and if so, is there a way of curtailing the habit?

Why do we long?

[Neuroscience](#) suggests our brains are wired to crave what we don’t have. Dopamine (known as the happy hormone) is released not when we get what we want, but when we anticipate getting it. Our brains [release more](#)

[dopamine planning a vacation than taking it](#). Even [thinking about touch you crave](#) can trigger the release of dopamine in the reward system. Once we get what we want, the dopamine fades – and so we crave more. With anticipation being a key stage in happiness, and depression rates in the US [tripling](#) last year, it's no wonder so many people find themselves longing.

[Dr Kent Berridge](#), professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of Michigan, says powerful emotional experiences and stress – such as those that might ensue after being locked inside for months on end due to a deadly worldwide virus – exacerbate the hyper-reactivity of the dopamine system. In other words, these experiences increase our appetite for wants (food, sex, material objects, drugs) as a way of escaping the discomfort of reality.

What could be so bad about that? Well, our “want” brain circuits have been getting a workout this year, and repetition builds habit.

“Any habit is formed through three elements: a trigger, a behavior and a reward,” says Dr Jud Brewer of Brown University. If anxiety is the trigger, longing distracts us. The excitement is the reward. “The next time we’re anxious, our brain says, ‘This doesn’t feel good. Start longing again,’ and the behavior gets reinforced,” explains Brewer.

What’s wrong with escaping unpleasant feelings?

Ancient philosophy has long argued that happiness is found in the present moment. Science [supports this](#). Incessant daydreaming about the past and future is related to psychological symptoms like depression, anxiety and stress – while thinking about the present [reduces those symptoms](#).

Bingeing on The Crown or scrolling through Zillow listings for hours every night might provide us with a temporary escape, but these habits produce drug-like dopamine highs that elicit more longing and [lead to depression and increased anxiety](#). The high is so strong that almost [half of Zillow users](#) surveyed this year said they’d rather search for a dream home than have sex. And the same [neuronal pathways](#) are responsible for addictions to both heroin and binge-watching.

The issue, says Brewer, is that we tend to confuse joy and contentment with excitement and anticipation. “If you really look at what excitement feels like, it’s got a restless, driven quality to it. That’s the dopamine urging us to do something, because we’re *not* satisfied with what’s happening right now,” explains Brewer.

Of course, binge-watching movies, online shopping and daydreaming aren’t inherently bad behaviors. They are a way to find momentary reprieve, to imagine good things to come, without actually being there yet.

Healthy longing feels like nutrition, rather than sucking the life out of you

But there is such a thing as too much daydreaming. Maladaptive daydreaming (MDD) involves living in fantasy worlds so vivid they interfere with sleep, work and relationships as a means of distracting oneself from our emotions. At its most extreme, a person paces while dreaming, carves out hours of their day to enter their fantasies, forgets to eat and can’t sleep. Daydreamers often enter worlds they created as children trying to cope with great loss or trauma.

One [study](#) shows that the lockdown has resulted in heightened levels of MDD. Meanwhile tens of thousands of maladaptive daydreamers have flocked to the [MDD Reddit page](#) and [Facebook group page](#) for support. Many of the posters would agree with the Three Musketeers writer Alexandre Dumas: “When you compare the sorrows of real life to the pleasures of the imaginary one, you will never want to live again, only to dream forever.”

Nora has been maladaptive daydreaming for 20 years, but neither her husband nor her teenage son know. (She asked me to use a pseudonym for privacy.) “Periods of solitude – like when my husband is deployed – are worse for me,” she wrote to me. Nora started daydreaming when she had a prolonged illness at age 15. During that isolating time, she felt useless and lonely as friends’ visits dwindled. Nora fixated on the Lord of the Rings books for comfort; she revisits them in her daydreams 20 years later. “A

story about the smallest person being able to change the world appealed to me. I'm always in the background of my dreams helping," she wrote.

[I've spent years taming the OCD monster. Coronavirus has ruined everything](#)
[Read more](#)

Is there a good kind of longing?

There is a positive side to longing, says the author Cheryl Strayed, who wrote intimately about longing in her memoir, *Wild*. About longing for her mother, who passed away 30 years ago, she told me: "Healthy longing, even when you know it can never come true ... It feels like nutrition, rather than sucking the life out of you."

Now, most of the time when she longs for her mom, she says, "I actually feel a sense of wonder. What a beautiful thing that I had the experience of loving someone so much that I will really love them like that for ever. That longing has just come to feel like a gift."

Can we stop longing?

To change a behavior, we have to get out of our heads and into our bodies. Beyond the thrill (the dopamine hit) we get from anticipating, we must consider the cumulative effect it has on us: the post-dopamine letdown, the emotional energy and time wasted, and the impact on those around us.

[Dr Nirit Soffer-Dudek](#), a consciousness researcher at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, suggests that psychotherapy for MDD patients should help them be more mindful in the present, less judgmental of themselves, and more aware of what triggers the behavior they want to change. "A lot of people escape to these other realities because they don't like themselves in real life. Self-acceptance should be a major part of treatment, alongside changing what we can change."

The key question is: what is the emotion behind the need to crave something, someone, or somewhere other than what you have right now?

Personally, I realized that buried deep in my gut I felt unworthy of love. I felt anxious about failure and guilty about relationships that hadn't worked out. Longing for the ideal partner in the ideal location at the ideal time kept me distracted from addressing this self-loathing. And, ironically, it meant I sought out men who didn't or couldn't love me. During the year of 2019, I broke up with longing when I gave a healthy relationship a chance with a man who loved me.

After three pandemic postponements, I will celebrate my marriage with this man and our daughter this summer in a wedding I've longed for for years.

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Music

UK pop pilgrimages: from Paul McCartney's Kintyre to Giggs's Peckham



Clockwise from top right, Paul and Linda McCartney in 1971 and Saddell Bay; the Leadmill and Pulp; Aphex Twin and Carn Marth; and Giggs and Peckham Composite: Getty/Alamy/Redferns

Clockwise from top right, Paul and Linda McCartney in 1971 and Saddell Bay; the Leadmill and Pulp; Aphex Twin and Carn Marth; and Giggs and Peckham Composite: Getty/Alamy/Redferns

With festivals looking thin on the ground, why not visit the places that have inspired some of our best songs and greatest bands, including Pulp, the Undertones and ... Cliff Richard

[Malcolm Jack](#), [Eamonn Forde](#), *Sam Davies*, [Laura Snapes](#), [Ian Gittins](#), [Daniel Dylan Wray](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 05.30 EDT

Paul McCartney's Kintyre

Your desire to be among dramatic Scottish scenery where mist may or may not roll in from the sea will depend on at least some appreciation for [Paul McCartney](#) and Wings' 1977 hit Mull of Kintyre. Naff as its faux-Scots stylings may be, its emotion is pure, romanticising Macca's back-to-basics rural bolthole, High Park farm – his life-saving sanctuary from Beatlemania.

The Beatles' final single, The Long and Winding Road, was inspired by an unknown route on the Kintyre peninsula – perhaps the coast road past roaring Atlantic waves. The estate in the hills above Campbeltown still belongs to McCartney, though he no longer visits. A memorial garden and statue beside the local library commemorate Linda's death from cancer in 1998.

Mull of Kintyre.

Home today to a human-like sculpture by Antony Gormley standing eerily below the tideline, postcard-pretty Saddell Bay may be familiar from the Mull of Kintyre video, where pipers in full regalia march along the beach. (The cottage in the video is commonly mistaken for the McCartney home.) To the south stands the Mull of Kintyre itself, the peninsula's high headland where, provided there's no mist, you can see clearly all the way to Northern Ireland. **Malcolm Jack**

The Undertones' Derry



The Undertones in 1980. Photograph: Mirrorpix/Getty Images

Derry is Northern Ireland's second city, but claims its greatest band: the Undertones. Their effervescent optimism amid the Troubles are Derry's spirit incarnate. Sadly, the Casbah, the flat-roof bar on the junction of Bridge Street and Orchard Street where they were resident in 1977, was flattened to make way for Foyle-side shopping centre. The band's singer, [Feargal Sharkey](#), once claimed the bar was a plastered portable building covering a crater where, poignantly, the former pub had been blown up.

The wall the band sat on for the cover of their debut album is in Bull park; 22 Beechwood Avenue, childhood home of guitarists John and Damian O'Neill but since demolished, was the band's HQ, its back yard featuring in the My Perfect Cousin video.

The Nerve Centre opened on Magazine Street in 1990 and remains a key arts and performance space. A walk around Creggan and the city walls to gaze over the Foyle will allow you to drink in the inspiration for Phil Coulter's hymn to the beauty and pain of the city in The Town I Loved So Well. Finally, Free Derry Corner, on the junction of Lecky Road and Fahan Street, is where visiting rock bands (never local ones) would crassly pose. **Eamonn Forde**

Giggs's Peckham

Talkin Da Hardest.

If you're coming to Peckham in south London, start with a walk in Burgess park past Willowbrook Bridge, beneath which Giggs shot the video for his 2008 single [Talkin Da Hardest](#), now considered a national anthem by Britons of a certain generation. From there, head south to Peckham Rye (scene of Giggs and B.o.B's Don't Go There video), then on to Peckham's covered market, where Giggs's crew, SN1, once opened a merch store to satisfy adoring local fans. Reporting from Peckham in 2012, a writer in the Evening Standard said: "Every two minutes somebody shuffles past wearing SN1 hoodies, T-shirts or even PVC leggings with the word 'UUMMM!' on the derrière" – "UUMMM" being a trademarked Giggs ad-lib.

Hungry? Get some Morley's chicken. Nike filmed an ad here in 2018, showing a runner complaining about having to run through Peckham at night, before cutting to a hooded man in a chicken shop (Giggs), asking: "What's wrong with Peckham?" It's much less dangerous than it once was, in part thanks to Giggs, whose collaborations with the Brixton rappers Tempman and Sneakbo helped pacify gang friction in the late 2000s. Peckham High Street's vintage shops and pop-up food trucks even attract hipsters. [Just remember who the landlord is](#). **Sam Davies**

Aphex Twin's Cornwall



Carn Marth, Cornwall. Photograph: Laura Snapes

Lanner, the village where Richard D James grew up, hides its charms. To drive straight through on the road to Redruth reveals little more than pasty shops, off-licences and pubs. It's off the main drag that you'll find the locales that have cropped up in James's work over the years: Gwennap Pit is a natural amphitheatre formed as a result of mining subsidence, hailed by the Methodist leader John Wesley, who frequently preached there, as "the most magnificent spectacle this side of heaven". You can see James and fellow local producer Luke Vibert chatting to John Peel there in [the 1999 Channel 4 show Sounds of the Suburbs](#), and James warps its concentric geometry into the shape of the Aphex logo in [the video for 2018's T69 Collapse](#) (and on the cover of the Collapse EP).



Richard D James, AKA Aphex Twin. Photograph: Publicity image

Up the hill towards Redruth is Carn Marth, the inspiration for the title of a flickering, prismatic track from the 1996 Richard D James album. The highest point in the area, it offers magnificent views on a clear day and conceals kaleidoscopic delights: two different quarries, one littered with mysterious holes in the cliff face (where miners tested their drills), one another natural amphitheatre where local theatre companies stage shows. At the top is a chilly lake fit for – I sincerely apologise – a fine spot of wild swimming, or some robust teenage delinquency. Continuing on towards the north coast, head to Chapel Porth, a beach that appears on the cover of the *Surfing on Sine Waves* EP, and home to a cafe where most things come with some degree of clotted cream, including the sausage sandwich. Get the famous hedgehog ice-cream: scoop of vanilla, scoop of clotted, rolled in crushed hazelnuts.

If you dodge the coronary, take the long drive west to two more sterling Aphex spots. Just off Marazion is castle island St Michael's Mount, immortalised on *Drukqs*. And at the rugged tiptoe of the country, Treen is where you'll find the titular teetering edifice of *Logan Rock Witch* (the last song on Richard D James), a 65-tonne block of granite balanced on a cliff, which used to rock until some naughty navy men pushed it off as a dare in 1824. If you're feeling similarly brazen, take the vertigo-inducing steps

down to Pedn Vounder nudist beach, listening to Aphex to double down on disorientation. **Laura Snapes**

Cliff Richard's Hertfordshire



Cliff Richard mobbed by fans at the Hulton Boys and Girls Exhibition at Olympia's Disc theatre. Photograph: Keystone/Getty Images

The leafy environs of Hertfordshire appear an unlikely crucible for the birth of British rock'n'roll, but a day trip can retrace the steps of how [Cliff Richard](#) became the English Elvis. Start in Hargreaves Close, Bury Green, Cheshunt, where 10-year-old Harry Webb moved to a council house with his family in 1951, having arrived in the UK from India three years earlier. Head to nearby Riversmead school (formerly Cheshunt secondary modern), where he sang in a hobby doo-wop quintet, the Quintones. Proceed to the site of an epiphany: the corner of Waltham Cross High Street and Park Lane, where, one Saturday morning in May 1956, 15-year-old Harry heard Heartbreak Hotel blaring from a car outside a newsagent named Aspland's, fell in love with Elvis Presley and resolved to become a singer.

Go on to the former Regal cinema in Sterling Way, Edmonton (today a Lidl), where he watched Bill Haley play the first US rock'n'roll tour of Britain in 1957. Finish up in Burford Road, Hoddesdon, where Harry was talent

spotted, later in 1957, playing the now-demolished Five Horseshoes pub with his band, the Drifters (the embryonic Shadows). The following year, Harry became Cliff, and the rest is history. **Ian Gittins**

Pulp's Sheffield



The City Hall ballroom in Sheffield. Photograph: Dennis Gilbert-VIEW/Alamy

Pulp's official commemorative blue plaque is outside gig venue the Leadmill. But an unofficial plaque was placed outside Plantology on Division Street by Sensoria festival, marking the location where Jarvis Cocker fell out of a window doing a Spider-Man impression to woo a girl. It's the key to Cocker's appeal, and the perfect starting point from which to explore Sheffield's musical history: you'll find the light-up dancefloor as in Pulp's Disco 2000 video in the City Hall ballroom, a venue once home to pioneering club night Jive Turkey. A room behind it birthed Meat Whistle, the theatre and arts group that attracted future members of the Human League, Clock DVA and Heaven 17. Cabaret Voltaire drank in the nearby Beehive (although the Red Deer is a better modern option) after rehearsing at Western Works studio, a since demolished industrial building that captured the Cab's singular sound, along with New Order's first demos.

Disco 2000.

Pop into Bear Tree Records before walking past the old Cole Brothers department store, which Richard Hawley nods to on Coles Corner. Further down – near food hall, Kommune – was the Boardwalk, where the Clash played their first ever gig. Underneath – as epitomised on the Beneath the Boardwalk demos by Arctic Monkeys – is now an e-sports bar, but the nearby DIY venue Delicious Clam is where you’ll hear the next wave of Sheffield talent. **Daniel Dylan Wray**

What are your favourite UK pop pilgrimages? Tell us in the comments below.

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[Thomas Vinterberg](#)

Interview

Thomas Vinterberg: ‘There is a great need for the uncontrollable – but little room for it today’

[Nicholas Blincoe](#)



‘I hope it is a film about how we care for one another’ ... Lars Ranthe, Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo Larsen and Magnus Millang in *Another Round*.
Photograph: Zentropa\samuel Goldwyn/Allstar

‘I hope it is a film about how we care for one another’ ... Lars Ranthe, Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo Larsen and Magnus Millang in *Another Round*.
Photograph: Zentropa\samuel Goldwyn/Allstar

The Danish director’s new Oscar-winning film *Another Round* is about a group of teachers who dedicate themselves to getting drunk. He talks about losing control, patching up his friendship with Lars von Trier and the death of his daughter

Fri 25 Jun 2021 05.00 EDT

Thomas Vinterberg looks back on the past six months with disbelief. “I made a film about four white, middle-aged, semi-fat men teaching their students to drink. I didn’t think it would survive.” Instead, [Another Round](#) swept the award ceremonies (best foreign language film at the Oscars and Baftas; best film at the European film awards and London film festival), and proved a spectacular box office success in his native Denmark when it opened between Covid restrictions. Vinterberg is a boyish 52-year-old, with an open smile and chestnut hair that has a touch of gel. A priest’s cassock hangs from the bookcase behind his chair. It is easy to overlook the cassock but, like Chekhov’s gun, it fires in the final act.

Vinterberg admits his film evolved in the making. “The initial idea was to be provocative. We wanted to celebrate alcohol and drinking. But that idea hit reality. It is a film about the generation divide. I hope it is a film about how we care for one another.” Another Round opens with a title card quoting the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard: “What is youth? A dream. What is love? The dream’s content.” This thought comes alive as golden youths are seen racing around a lake on an idyllic summer’s day, carrying crates of beer that they must finish as a team. It is a summer bacchanal, drawn from real life. “Both of my oldest daughters took part in the Lake Run,” Vinterberg says. “When I described it to American friends, they were shocked. They listened to the rules: the winners are the first to finish the crate. They wanted to know, was I OK with this? How could I tell them, actually, I was kind of proud?”

[Mads Mikkelsen](#) stars as Martin, the teenagers’ history teacher who was once a golden youth himself but is now so withdrawn he cannot speak to his wife or children, and is failing his students. Mikkelsen’s handsome face looks blankly ruined, his eyes glistening as the Lake Run is discussed at Monday’s staff meeting. We are in an ivy-covered school; filming was on location at the school attended by Vinterberg’s oldest daughters.



Vinterberg with his wife Helene Reingaard Neumann at the Oscars in April.
Photograph: Getty Images

After the race, the children had continued drinking on the subway, charming their fellow passengers. However, when a guard asked them to be quiet, one of the boys handcuffed the older man to a rail. The principal announces that drinking will be banned at school. That evening, Martin and his equally broken teacher friends decide to go the other way, and start day-time drinking to test the claim of real-life Norwegian psychiatrist, [Finn Skårderud](#), that humans are born a few drinks below their best. By boosting their blood alcohol content by 0.05% the friends hope to become better, brighter and more open. When pressed, Vinterberg backpedals on the soundness of their experiment. “I’m not a scientist, and perhaps it’s not true to call it a theory, exactly. It’s more like just something Skårderud said.”

The film’s Danish title, *Druk*, translates as binge drinking and, of course, the friends’ boozing soon accelerates. History classes fizz as Martin regales his students with tales of Winston Churchill and Ulysses S Grant fighting wars while drunk. The students respond with passion, though we wonder if they will make their grades following Martin’s drinks-based curriculum.

Vinterberg says: “Do you think their experiment is an alibi, and they are using it as an excuse to drink? If you are doing an experiment, it makes

sense to explore reactions at different levels, and to push it.” But surely they only embrace the theory because they are so miserable? Vinterberg nods. “Tommy, the games teacher, is a little further along. There’s an open bottle of white wine beside the fridge, which is a clue.” That and the fact that every nook and cranny of his locker room contains bottles of spirits. Vinterberg laughs: “Yes. That was a scene that ended up being moved earlier in the final edit.”

The editing process was long. Vinterberg took a month over the birthday scene. What appears to be ultra-naturalistic is actually the result of rehearsals, rewrites and painstaking edits. Vinterberg’s process seems to mirror his life. His parents brought him up in a free-spirited commune, and he works best with a close-knit circle of collaborators that he has known for decades. He and his fellow screenwriter, Tobias Lindholm, didn’t give the characters the names of the actors until late in the process. Tommy, the soulful games teacher, retains the name of Thomas Bo Larsen, who has worked with Vinterberg through his first international hit, [Festen](#) (1998), right back to his student picture, [Last Round](#) (1993).



Festen, 1998. Photograph: 50/October Films/Allstar

Larsen’s characters in Last Round and Another Round are caught saying goodbye, although their friends do not realise it. Vinterberg confesses that

his student film has become a touchstone. “It is so naive, so unguarded and so unmanipulative that I always look at it when I am feeling old and corrupt. When somebody suggested the title *Another Round* (for *Druk*), I suddenly realised how much those films have in common.”

Leonardo DiCaprio is planning a [US remake of *Another Round*](#). Does Vinterberg see similarities between DiCaprio and Mikkelsen, vigorous men with huge charismatic faces, marked by wear and tear? “I do see similarities, but I also see ways for DiCaprio to make the film his own.” *Another Round* is “a love letter to Denmark,” he says. It feeds off a unique Danish duality: “We are caught between being crazy Vikings, drinking in the street, being very liberal – you know we had a very liberal sexual culture back in the 70s – and yet we are still very modest and provincial and at times mediocre.” He sees America as conservative rather than mediocre. “The difference is they put their drinks in bags. They are hiding things in different ways. The film will feel more rebellious, I guess. But Leo will have to learn to dance. Mads is a hell of a dancer.”

We Danes are caught between being crazy Vikings, drinking in the street – and being modest and provincial

In a key sequence, the friends make the New Orleans cocktail [Sazerac](#) and dance to the city’s great funk band, the Meters. Their evening becomes a carnival, but the duality is always there: the abandonment would not work without its opposite. But is it really mediocrity? I suggest Scandinavians have a reputation for gloominess. Vinterberg reacts: “Didn’t you find the film funny?” On the contrary, it’s hilarious. It’s one of the funniest films I’ve seen: it so often explodes into exuberance. He nods. “My wife says it is a film about the uncontrollable. When you bring a bottle to your lips you are making a contract with the uncontrollable. You never know where it is going to end. We live a life of repetition, without risks. As she says, there is a great need for the uncontrollable. And there’s not much room for it today.”

Was Vinterberg undergoing a stultifying midlife crisis as he planned the film? After all, he was approaching his 50th birthday. “Not at all. I had a young family, I had a young wife. Life was great. Work. Everything.” His

voice fractures abruptly. I know what is coming, and I try to speak before him. In that moment, he says: “My daughter died.”

On 4 May 2019, Ida Vinterberg was killed when a car driven by her mother, theatre director Maria Walbom, was hit by a driver who was distracted by his phone. Walbom survived. “Physically, she recovered reasonably quickly,” Vinterberg says. “But she saw her daughter pass away, and this is not something you get over.” Vinterberg and Walbom married young. Vinterberg was 19, the same age as Ida when she died; Walbom was two years older. During their divorce in 2007, Vinterberg began seeing the actor Helene Reingaard Neumann, who was also then 19. Neumann and Vinterberg are now married, with two young children. It is tempting to see shades of their marriage in the new film, as Neumann plays the younger and more capable wife of the hapless psychology teacher Nikolaj (Magnus Millang), a bumbling, yearning figure, forever protesting that his toddlers pee on him at night.



Another Round. Photograph: Zentropa\samuel Goldwyn/Allstar

Ida was supposed to play one of Martin’s two children. Production was under way when she was killed. Vinterberg considered abandoning the film. He could not face the thought of replacing Ida. Even recasting the children as boys did not help. “I couldn’t write those scenes. I couldn’t return to

them. They were written by Mads and Tobias.” On the days that family responsibilities kept Vinterberg away from the set, the production was taken over by Lindholm, a notable director in his own right.

Lindholm has been a consistent collaborator over the years, but is currently in New York filming *The Good Nurse*, the story of serial killer Charles Cullen that will star Eddie Redmayne. Vinterberg is writing a new television project alone. He describes it as a thought experiment: “What would happen to family relationships if Danes had to become refugees?” Rising sea levels mean Danes must plan new lives abroad. At heart, it is not a film about ecological disaster but of a fractured family trying to plan under the weight of a shadow. Vinterberg sees his own family in the story. “In my family, some would be able to afford to establish homes in the UK or France, and others wouldn’t. Children would have to decide whether to go with mum or dad, and whether the new father-in-law would come. It’s about who would fit into the lifeboat.”

Lars is a very important person in my life. He is also the type of person I have to put outside the door occasionally

The importance of old friends and allies has become clearer in the past year. One friend who rallied to Vinterberg’s side is [Lars von Trier](#). “I hadn’t really seen or even spoken to Lars in 10 years,” Vinterberg says. His earliest successes were made through Zentropa Studios, a company set up by Von Trier and producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen on a programme of deliberate provocation. “Lars is a very important person in my life. He has been a source of inspiration and friendship. Lars is also the type of person I have to put outside the door occasionally, and create some distance. But as a result of [Ida’s death] he was very supportive. We also agreed to go into Zentropa much more, which he has done: I haven’t yet kept my side of the agreement.”

Zentropa is less than half the size it was in its heyday, under Jensen, the studio head whose idea of creative provocation included the sexualised spanking of employees. This met reality when the national newspaper *Politiken* published accounts by nine ex-employees, all women. What was claimed to be a colourful and alternative workplace with an adored leader

instead looked very much like an “old-fashioned patriarchal power structure”, according to the journalist Anna Mette Lundtofte, who had [worked there undercover](#). Vinterberg says: “Zentropa was a crazy place in every sense. You had to be robust to survive making movies there. But you know, the madness, the nudity, the drunkenness, the scandals, have decreased, but something else has grown up. It has lost some of its madness but it has also put aside some of its vanity.”



Vinterberg with his Oscar for best foreign language film. Photograph: Reuters

The story of Zentropa reflects the duality Vinterberg sees in Danish life, and which is reflected in his own childhood and the commune he rebelled against by an early marriage. If Another Round began as a provocative celebration of craziness, it soon changed, first in the writing and rehearsal process, and then by reflecting Ida’s death. Vinterberg points to the cassock that hangs from his bookcase. “My wife is a vicar.” Neumann began studying theology after getting together with Vinterberg: she provided the Kierkegaard quote that opens the film. Two and a half years ago, she was ordained as a Lutheran priest. Vinterberg says: “We are a family in grief. It comes in handy having a priest around. I can’t say I believe in God, or that I have faith. But Christianity has so many ways of speaking about love, and

that is inspiring. I don't consider my wife very religious. But she is drawn to this huge thing that makes everything else seem meaningless.”

Vinterberg's story begins in a nostalgic view of youthful exuberance, but when the four friends find love it is unabashedly mature, seen in their commitment to their students, their ability to love their partners, and, most of all, their devotion to each other ... as they go another round.

Another Round is released in the UK on 2 July

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/jun/25/thomas-vinterberg-there-is-a-great-need-for-the-uncontrollable-but-little-room-for-it-today>.

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[Opinion](#)Conservatives

Picking fights has served Johnson's Tories well – but it's a strategy that may backfire

[Andy Beckett](#)

The divisive style of Britain's most dominant incompetent may lose its appeal as his voters feel their incomes shrinking



Nate Kitch OPINION 210624 WEB PINK Illustration: Nate Kitch/The Guardian

Nate Kitch OPINION 210624 WEB PINK Illustration: Nate Kitch/The Guardian

Fri 25 Jun 2021 02.00 EDT

Until last week's [Chesham and Amersham byelection](#), politics seemed incredibly easy for Boris Johnson's Conservatives. However disastrously

they governed, the political outcomes – in opinion polls, elections, and control of the national conversation – were consistently favourable. Johnson has arguably been Britain's most dominant incompetent ever.

In our often-sour old democracy, politics is supposed to be difficult, especially for parties in their second decade in office, when disillusionment has usually set in. But the government has seemingly defied this convention, as it has so many others.

One of the keys to its unlikely ascendancy has been a willingness to pick fights. Liberals, lefties, lawyers, remainers, antiracists, Scottish nationalists, the EU, Channel 4, the BBC, even the Oxford students who voted to take down a photo of the Queen – no potential enemy has been too large or too small, it seems, for the government to leave it in peace.

You could say there has been a frankness about this appetite for confrontation. In some ways politics is always about conflict, between interest groups and philosophies as well as parties. Before Johnson, prime ministers such as Tony Blair and David Cameron often sought to play these conflicts down – “[We're all in this together](#),” as Cameron liked to say – in order to appeal as widely as possible. Yet since 2015 the Conservatives have found that they can win elections with the strong support of only a few large sections of the population, principally older white voters and inhabitants of rural and smalltown England.

Out of this realisation the Johnson government's strategy of confrontation has emerged. Overseen by his trusted adviser [Munira Mirza](#) – a former member of the abrasive but surprisingly rightwing Revolutionary Communist party, who is now head of the Downing Street policy unit – this strategy claims that the best way to mobilise these groups of sometimes anxious and resentful voters is to tell them that their country and values are being undermined by subversive forces.

As a government source recently [told the website Tortoise](#): “Boris thinks that he and Munira are in the same place on this as the vast majority of the public, and that every time there is another row about statues or Churchill or white privilege, another Labour seat becomes winnable.” If the

Conservatives capture the west Yorkshire seat of [Batley and Spen](#) from Labour next week, as is widely expected, then the Tory culture warriors will feel further vindicated.

Their aggression seems to bewilder what remains of centrist Britain. From the Tory remainers who lost their seats in the 2019 election to Keir Starmer, with his ineffectual “constructive opposition”, our politics is strewn with reasonable people who haven’t come to terms yet with its change of tone.

The media have been much happier. Confrontational ministers attract audiences, from Twitter to the Today programme. Meanwhile the rightwing press, which has been picking fights with liberals and lefties for decades, seems delighted to see the Conservatives so wholeheartedly joining in. In their coordination of attack lines, the relationship between the party and these newspapers feels as close as it has ever been.

This aggression also seems to suit the times. Ever since the 2008 financial crisis, much of our politics has been a search for scapegoats, for people to blame for the ending of the relative prosperity and stability of the 90s and 2000s. Attacking the liberal left is a good way of drawing attention away from the real causes of today’s deep environmental and economic crises: Conservative free-market capitalism and the consumer appetites of voters themselves.

And yet there is something a bit too neat and self-satisfied about this Tory strategy. There are no magic potions in politics: the effects of new tactics always wear off after a while. The unexpected loss of the Tory citadel of Chesham and Amersham to the Lib Dems may be a sign that aggression is starting to repel. Voters there preferred [Sarah Green](#), a remainder who emphasised her record of “helping individuals facing injustice”. After years of polarised, exhausting politics, it would not be a surprise if voters elsewhere also began to find less divisive figures appealing again. The relatively consensual politics of the 90s and 00s was itself partly a reaction against the red-toothed Conservatism of the Thatcher era, with its constant hunger for “the enemy within”.

At the G7 in Cornwall this month, there was another sign that Tory

aggression may be reaching its useful limits. Johnson's plans to use the gathering as an advertisement for "Global Britain" were partly ruined by his government's argument with the EU over [Northern Ireland](#). Like all rows between Britain and the EU, this may play well with Tory voters. But to see it in only those terms is shortsighted and parochial. Not all politics is national; relations with other countries also matter. If Britain is seen as untrustworthy in trade negotiations, that will affect the economy and ultimately voters' incomes.

Blair sometimes made the mistake as premier of trying to reduce politics to the governmental, to efficient administration. Johnson is making a different but equally large error: trying to reduce politics to the electoral. And as he may discover if the post-Brexit trade deals he promised don't happen, elections can be influenced by external factors. Culture wars and government flag-waving may attract new voters, but they may melt away if a clumsily nationalistic foreign policy makes it harder for them to pay their bills.

By picking fights, the Conservatives also assume that their chosen enemies are weak and will remain so. Yet the balance of forces in a society isn't static. Today's left-leaning millennials, so derided by the Tories, will become decisive voters in future elections, like generations of young people before them. Unless they drastically change their views, it's hard to see what Conservatism can offer them.

Finally, all the current, outwardly-directed Tory aggression feels like a premonition of – or a way of delaying – the battles likely to come within Conservatism itself: between its northern and southern voters, its free-spending ministers and fiscally cautious ones, its free-marketeers and economic interventionists, its reactionaries and social liberals. In Chesham and Amersham, some of these tensions burst into the open, and the Tory vote disintegrated.

Divisive politics, when it's successful, is about drawing lines: between your party and an electorally sufficient mass of supporters, on the one side, and your enemies on the other. Johnson's government is doing that well for now. But if lines start being drawn within your own party, politics gets harder.

When that happens – and the Tories’ acrimonious history since Thatcher suggests it soon will – Johnson’s days of easy dominance will feel like a distant world.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#) **Work & careers**

No one should be penalised if they want to carry on working from home

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Unless men also ditch the commute, flexible working is bound to be held against those who embrace it



‘The big thing Whitney Wolfe Herd seems to have got right is making clear that this is time off for everybody.’ Photograph: Caitlin Ochs/Reuters

‘The big thing Whitney Wolfe Herd seems to have got right is making clear that this is time off for everybody.’ Photograph: Caitlin Ochs/Reuters

Fri 25 Jun 2021 03.00 EDT

If dating can sometimes feel like hard work, then playing Cupid is evidently no picnic either. Whitney Wolfe Herd, founder of the dating app [Bumble](#), has just given her entire company a week off to recover from what one senior executive (in a swiftly deleted tweet) called [“our collective burnout”](#), following similar gestures at Facebook and LinkedIn.

[Post-Covid work patterns must not be imposed by bosses with an eye on cost](#)

[Read more](#)

Some may wonder what exactly they’ve all been doing to their staff to leave them craving a break. But if Bumble employees have emerged from a mentally and physically draining year of holding things together in a pandemic feeling frankly knackered, then they’re certainly not alone. The big thing Wolfe Herd seems to have got right, meanwhile, is making clear that this is time off for everybody.

It's not designed as an opportunity for the psychopathically ambitious to make a point of coming into the office anyway, just to show how terribly committed they are. It's not one of those paper perks that technically anyone could ask for but which would obviously spell career suicide in practice, with the result that everyone is too paranoid to actually take advantage, yet the company still gets to polish its halo in public. (Those ["take whatever holiday you want"](#) policies fashionable among tech companies in the noughties may sound generous, but in intensely competitive industries they can paradoxically lead to people taking less time off for fear of looking like the office slacker.) And as British office life emerges from hibernation, there's a lesson here.

When lockdowns began to lift, this spring and last, some companies noticed a phenomenon of people coming into the office even when they weren't obliged to, seeing it as a chance to hobnob with senior managers (often the only people still at their desks) and get one over on rivals still stuck obediently at home. The home worker's perennial fear of being excluded from some loop that they didn't know existed is seeping anxiously back, and may only increase when the "work from home" rule is finally abandoned (theoretically on 19 July, if the government sticks to its Covid roadmap).

Companies that are offering staff the freedom to choose whether they return to the office post-pandemic or carry on working mostly from home on a permanent basis may be doing so for the most generous of reasons. Yet as [Prof Cary Cooper](#), the psychologist and president of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, has pointed out, they risk inadvertently deepening the gender divide if it's predominantly women with caring responsibilities who end up taking the home option. Unless men – young and old, senior and junior, fathers or not – also seize the chance to ditch the commute, move out of the city or make a lifestyle change, then the new flexibility will inevitably become associated with being on a "mummy track", and be held against those who take it up.

It's clear that many men do want something to change. One [survey of people](#) who had worked from home during the pandemic, conducted by the IT firm Atlas Cloud, found that 87% of respondents wanted to continue doing so at least some of the time. The charity [Working Families](#) found that 56% of fathers enjoyed spending more time with their children during lockdown,

while men who pitched in with home schooling and housework may have seen some knock-on benefits for their relationships; two in five couples felt the domestic load was more fairly shared during the pandemic, and younger couples in particular wanted to carry on that way.

But history suggests that a fear of being judged at work often stops men doing what they might otherwise do. Only 2% of fathers take up their right to [shared parental leave](#) allowing couples to split maternity leave between them – which isn't all that surprising, when many will have seen female colleagues' careers suffer after having a baby. Working Families found that one in four men thought parenthood would make them more vulnerable to redundancy when furlough ends.

The equalities minister, [Liz Truss](#), has sent some helpful signals that the government is considering introducing flexible working by default – normalising it for everyone unless there's a good reason why it's impossible, which would take the pressure off workers having to go into personal details to justify why they wanted it. Labour would go further, with a universal right to flexible working unless there's reason to refuse. The political climate should encourage employers to be bold, knowing that change is coming anyway, and take advantage of potential cost savings on office space.

But senior men need to lead by example, making clear that younger men's careers won't suffer for taking advantage, and both companies and government must monitor very carefully the gendered takeup of home working and its impact on pay or prospects. Ministers should also publicly link the idea of more home working – which could mean less commuter traffic and reduced carbon emissions – to helping companies meet their own net-zero goals.

Ultimately, men may have to be as bold as women have had to be in the past, knowing that there's safety in numbers. Of course, some workers can't wait to be back in the office, after months of fighting their flatmates for space at the kitchen table, and that's fair enough. But for the rest, the moral of the pandemic is arguably that life is short and too precious to waste. Take it or lose it – for this may be a once-in-a-generation chance for change.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/25/working-from-home-men-commute-flexible-working>.

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[OpinionIsrael](#)

There's little cause for hope in Israel's new government

[Raja Shehadeh](#)

Some see promise in the fact the coalition includes an Arab party. In reality, peace with the Palestinians is further away than ever



Israel's new prime minister, Naftali Bennett, at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, June 2021. Photograph: Atef Safadi/EPA

Israel's new prime minister, Naftali Bennett, at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, June 2021. Photograph: Atef Safadi/EPA

Fri 25 Jun 2021 04.00 EDT

In his [speech to the Knesset](#) as incoming prime minister of Israel, Naftali Bennett had very little to say about his country's biggest challenge, making peace with the Palestinians. It was as though by giving them only the briefest of mentions, the Palestinians, the nation that has lived under Israeli

occupation for the past 54 years, would be obliterated out of existence. Instead he said he would “strengthen the building of communities across the land of Israel”, a statement clearly intended to include settlements in the occupied West Bank. Yet this was not the only violation of international law that appeared in the speech. In a clear rejection of the Oslo accords signed between Israel and the PLO in 1993 and 1995, he brazenly promised to “ensure Israel’s national interests in Area C”. This comprises some 60% of the area of the West Bank occupied by Israel in 1967, which according to those accords was to be handed back to the Palestinians.

Many commentators found hope in the fact that the [new coalition](#) includes an Arab party. Yet to the dismay of most liberal Palestinians in Israel, the United Arab List is a conservative religious party that opposes individual freedoms, including women’s and LGBTQ+ rights. By joining the coalition government this party has been willing to forgo the struggle for Palestinian national rights in return for winning some civic benefits for the Palestinians in Israel, such as better policing of Arab towns.

After the election results were announced, I reviewed the platforms of past Israeli governments to check whether any previous governments had provided me with hope. I found none. Even during the late 1980s, when the Palestinian intifada had convinced many Israelis of the necessity to come to some form of peaceful arrangement with the Palestinians, the staunchest opponent to peace with the Palestinians, [Yitzhak Shamir](#), was elected to lead successive governments from 1986 to 1992. Shamir was more interested in building settlements in the West Bank than in supporting the Madrid international peace conference of 1991, which hoped to revive the Israeli–Palestinian peace process.

When Yitzhak Rabin formed a government in 1992, during the time when secret peace negotiations were taking place in Oslo between [Israel](#) and the PLO, there seemed to be a modicum of hope for peace. This ended in 1995 when Rabin was assassinated. A year later, Benjamin Netanyahu, who was openly opposed to the Oslo Accords, took over. Then began the inexorable drift to the right, becoming ever more pronounced. The present coalition government includes such parties as Gideon Sa’ar’s (deputy prime minister and minister of justice) New Hope, with six seats, which calls for the annexation of the West Bank, and Avigdor Lieberman’s (minister of finance)

Yisrael Beiteinu, with seven seats, which is a staunch supporter of the illegal settlements.

It is true the coalition includes groups less intent on continuing settlement than Bennett's party, which only won seven seats. Yet the likelihood that they can move the ship of state in the direction of compromise with the Palestinians is slight.

There are some possible benefits that might arise from this weak coalition, however. One example is the hurdles the government is expected to meet as it tries to extend the validity of the blatantly apartheid citizenship law of 2003 for another year. This law has been extended for the past 18 years. Under the law, a Palestinian citizen of Israel is not allowed to live in Israel with his or her spouse who is a resident of the Occupied Territories. This means the right of a Palestinian Israeli citizen to marry a spouse of their choice is curtailed.

Should the coalition government fail to extend the validity of this law, that would mean a reversal of the ban on family reunification. In relation to the larger issues facing Palestinians in their battered land, this might seem like an insignificant development. Yet it affects scores of families. Faced with an intransigent neighbour that still refuses to even consider recognition of the right of return, one searches for any measure, however small, that helps Palestinians hold on to their land.

- Raja Shehadeh is a Palestinian lawyer and writer, and founder of the human rights organisation Al-Haq

[OpinionBrexit](#)

Five years on, we finally know what Brexit means: a worse deal for everyone

[Polly Toynbee](#)



On trade, finance, migration, food standards and more, the UK suffers fresh ignominy on a daily basis



Boris Johnson arrives for a press conference at Vote Leave headquarters in London, on 24 June 2016, the day the Brexit vote was confirmed. Photograph: Mary Turner/AP

Boris Johnson arrives for a press conference at Vote Leave headquarters in London, on 24 June 2016, the day the Brexit vote was confirmed. Photograph: Mary Turner/AP

Thu 24 Jun 2021 11.32 EDT

Five years ago today, in the early hours, Britain discovered what it had done – and what had been done to it by the liars, charlatans and rogues who mis-sold [Brexit](#) as “taking back control”. The wound is as fresh as ever. Breaking apart political parties and reversing erstwhile red or blue wall seats is a minor matter, but Brexit’s explosive division of the country by social class, geography and a deep sense of personal identity is a lasting injury.

Few have changed their mind: though polls put remain (or return) [ahead by a nose](#), no one wants to be put through that hell again. Brexit is done for the foreseeable future, though a government thriving on national disunity strives to keep it alive with infantile culture wars and “anti-woke” phoney patriotism. Polls [give](#) the Conservatives a 14-point lead, as they head into next week’s Batley and Spen byelection. No surprise, for what party in power could dream of a better boast than this: the vaccines are genuinely

bestowing the gift of staying alive on every single citizen. And Britain is out ahead of other European countries: pollsters tell me voters sincerely (though unjustly) believe that had we remained in the EU, we couldn't have had our own programme. Despite EU vaccinators catching up, and the UK having more people dead and more debt than they do, Covid is still a convenient cover.

Yet barely a day goes by without further proofs of Brexit's damage, some of it now forcing its way into the Tory press. This week, pigeon fanciers are [barred from having their birds participate in cross-Channel races](#) by new rules. Less niche is the alarming [17% rise in food prices](#): Ian Wright, of the Food and Drink Federation, tells me Brexit costs and obstructions have sent commodity prices soaring, and those are now working their way on to the shelves. The unexpected £2bn fall in UK food and drink exports to the EU in just the [first quarter of this year](#) is, Wright tells me, "no teething problem, but very real and sustained. Smaller firms have stopped exporting", overwhelmed by the new obstacles. The government may turn a permanent blind eye to import checks starting next week: "But that soon gets dangerous. When no one checks, who knows if imported food is what it says on the tin, and not, say, horse meat?"

Financial services are migrating to the EU: by March, Brexit had already driven away an [estimated](#) £1.3 tn of assets and jobs. By April, more than 440 finance firms had [fled](#), taking 10% of the UK's financial sector assets, worth a staggering £900bn, while [foreign investment subsidies](#).

Boris Johnson's hastily botched EU trade deal left out finance, responsible for 80% of our exports by value. It nearly stalled over fishing, a sector with just 12,000 jobs, yet even that industry is wrecked – and the Express [says so](#): "“They've sold us down the f*****g river!” British fishermen hit out on Brexit anniversary.” Wherever you look, expect the same story. The assault on the arts, music and broadcasting is lethal for a sector where Britain excels. This week, the music industry has been [begging](#) for an end to the deadlock over EU touring, vital for its viability. Another thunderbolt struck this week with a report showing the EU is likely to enforce its rules [limiting](#) non-EU content in its broadcasting: nothing new here, the EU is always strict on cultural protection against the US. That strips millions from

financing for drama and other programmes, on top of BBC cuts and the possible privatisation of Channel 4.

Look at almost any industry and you find too much damage done to fit in this space: vanishing EU workers, no EU arrest warrant or crime data sharing, the loss of Erasmus, EU visitors handcuffed at our airports, and EU citizens here in peril of being failed by the Home Office, in a manner redolent of the Windrush scandal – a poisonous message that will deter EU tourism.

As the Brexiters' reckless unreadiness unfolds, the government emerges devoid of basic policy. Is it for protecting our farmers, manufacturers, steel or wind turbine makers, or is it for wild free trade, with the cheapest food and products imported, regardless of home industries? The Australia deal sold out farmers, with 60 times more beef imported next year for a puny 0.02% GDP increase over 15 years.

Yesterday the sausages were kicked down the road, but this will only delay the Northern Ireland protocol crisis beyond the tense marching season. There's an easy answer to food export dilemmas if a pig-headed prime minister hadn't appointed the mulish Lord Frost to block it: only ideology stops them agreeing to EU food standards, as we have agreed to EU employment and environment norms. That should alarm most voters who may not relish an inalienable right to lower food quality.

It's high time Labour broke its silence on these calamities, and it should start right there with food standards. It would be an easy win. Had the Brexiters lost by a whisker five years ago, do you think they would have quietly capitulated, any more than the SNP did after it lost in 2014? The omerta of Labour remainers has done them no favours, letting these Brexit car crashes pile up unopposed. True, Brexit is electoral dynamite that Johnson plans to exploit for ever, but that's why Labour needs to make a stand now. There's no reopening the referendum, it should just target the failed trade deal. Polls show the public knows how bad it is, Strathclyde university's Prof John Curtice [found](#) that even among leave voters, only one in three thinks it a good deal.

Emily Thornberry, shadowing on trade, sees that wide-open goal. “Be grown-up and pragmatic,” she says. “We need a good deal. We can make the best of Brexit, while they’ve made the worst of it.” So far Covid shrouds the effects, driving the EU trade deal’s disasters from most front pages. But on everything from farming, manufacturing and finance to entertainment and food the government is vulnerable and culpable, if Labour would shake off its paralysing Brexit-phobia.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionChannel 4

Selling off Channel 4 is a terrible idea. Here's a better one

[Phil Redmond](#)

Yes, it's time for a change – so why not merge the channel with the BBC to turbo-charge public service broadcasting?



‘Once Channel 4 is absorbed by the BBC, the old crystal palace HQ could go.’ Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

‘Once Channel 4 is absorbed by the BBC, the old crystal palace HQ could go.’ Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Thu 24 Jun 2021 09.00 EDT

So, here we go again. Another review of public service broadcasting and another round of soul searching about whether to privatise [Channel 4](#). It's a bit like reviewing supermarkets and deciding to spin out the flowers.

[Channel 4 privatisation proposal: 'This could prove irreversible'](#)
[Read more](#)

The focus here should be on value for money. Why sell off a very valuable public asset for short-term gain, when the bigger gain is to be found in sweating that asset to underpin the BBC's licence fee? Don't flog it. Merge it with the [BBC](#). In supermarket terms. Two for one.

Of course, the current review is another attempt to rationalise the strange, sometimes frustrating but curiously brilliant ecology that has underpinned our public service provision since 1926, when the [BBC](#) morphed from the British Broadcasting Company to the British Broadcasting Corporation. More importantly, the change ushered in the notion of public funding, something the public by and large still support, remembering that the BBC is far more than its national news provision and rows about whether a few good men were [taken in](#) by a bounder.

In thinking about nurturing and sustaining public service broadcasting (PSB) provision across our green and pleasant land, we cannot look at one flower and ignore the rest of the garden. The biggest challenge is not the sustainability of Channel 4 per se, but public service broadcasting itself, as all our terrestrial, state-protected broadcasters try to navigate a path from a protected lineal world to the cold chills of cyberspace. Streaming is the future, as it always was, even when Channel 4 was [launched](#) in 1982.

Those of a certain age will remember the verve, excitement, chaos and pain of 2 November 1982. Channel 4's [first night](#). There were only three terrestrial channels and the BBC's hegemony over both television and radio was clear. A black and white Fleet Street in decline and disarray. Above us no Sky. And [YouTube](#) was over two decades away as Tim Berners-Lee was still beaver away on what would later become the world wide web. Mobile phones were two years away and a tablet was something you got from the doctors. It was into this world that Channel 4 arrived with its singular contribution to the UK's creative landscape: 30% more airtime.

It had to be filled, so it had to take new people with new ideas and new ways of doing things, with the remit to provide a platform and voice for those not

previously heard, while stimulating the nascent independent production sector.

Stream forward to 2021, take a break from whatever screen you are looking at, then try to count the various platforms, never mind channels and apps that you could lose yourself in. Having had my name on [Channel 4](#) from that first night to today's episode of Hollyoaks, I can look back and say what was then a brilliant tweak to the PSB ecology, now looks more and more like an anachronism. The challenge then was to break ITV's monopoly on the television advertising market, the licences to print money, while fulfilling that strong public service remit. Neither now seem so urgent or relevant.

The government is right to keep reviewing Channel 4's place in the PSB garden, but it needs to avoid transplanting when all that's needed is a bit of dead-heading. There will be the usual privateers and carpetbaggers rabble-rousing on the verges, lusting for the sale, but, of course, only at a cut-price, bargain bin discount and, naturally, the right to ditch its remit.

Let us be under no illusion. Any would-be buyer will not be looking at Channel 4's programming prowess, as it relies on others; nor its programme library, which is not extensive, but the back-office stuff like the publicly owned broadcasting frequencies it squats upon free of charge, its youth-oriented database and the prized, state protected position on the electronic programme guide. It may be fourth up, but it's still always on the front page for the grazers to find.

Instead of wasting time debating all that, we should focus on rationalising and reinvigorating the whole notion of public service provision. We should stop trying to patch up the 100-year model the BBC is preparing to celebrate next year, and look, as Oliver Dowden, the secretary of state for culture suggests, for what is right for the 21st century. Including how it is all funded.

Folding Channel 4 into the BBC would not only allow the BBC to reach a section of the audience where they are weak, the 16-34 age group, but the £1bn advertising [revenue](#) would provide an immediate injection into the programming budget.

Oh yes, the naysayers will align with the carpetbaggers and raise the purist argument of no advertising on public service broadcasting, perhaps forgetting that Channel 4 itself is currently a public service broadcaster, as is, by the way, ITV. Ad-free was a 20th-century mantra, which in the 21st century seems well past its sell-by date. Running advertisements doesn't seem to affect the editorial principles of media outlets like the Economist, FT and, er, this news provider.

[The great British broadcasting shake-up – all you need to know](#)
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A simple merger would allow the transfer of all assets and intellectual property at the stroke of a pen, just as the BBC did when shifting from company to corporation status nearly 100 years ago. No need for expensive due diligence; eliminate the admin and infrastructure costs and, for the taxpayers – the real shareholders – eliminate half-baked moments like one public service broadcaster spending [huge amounts](#) to steal a cooking show from another, driving up costs.

If there is a real passion to sell something and shore up the Covid-ravaged public finances, then once C4 is absorbed by the BBC the old crystal palace HQ in Horseferry Road, central London, could go, as indeed could the frequencies, auctioned off for more mobile streaming devices.

Above all though, putting £1bn a year into the BBC would not only underpin its viability but an injection of that scale into its content budget would probably stimulate exactly what the arrival of Channel 4 did in 1982. It could recapture the excitement, verve and innovation that a real shake-up of public service broadcasting would achieve. New people, new ideas, [new ways](#) of doing things.

- Sir Philip Redmond CBE is a television producer and screenwriter

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[Joe Biden](#)

Biden reaches bipartisan infrastructure deal after meeting with senators

Pared-down \$953bn plan could open door to the president's more sweeping \$4tn proposals later on



President Joe Biden speaks outside the White House with a bipartisan group of senators after meeting on an infrastructure deal on Thursday. Photograph: Win McNamee/Getty Images

President Joe Biden speaks outside the White House with a bipartisan group of senators after meeting on an infrastructure deal on Thursday. Photograph: Win McNamee/Getty Images

Associated Press

Thu 24 Jun 2021 13.50 EDT

Joe Biden announced on Thursday that “we have a deal”, signaling a bipartisan agreement on a \$953bn infrastructure plan that would achieve his

top legislative priority and validate his efforts to reach across the political aisle.

Biden made a surprise appearance in front of the cameras with members of the group of senators, [Republicans](#) and Democrats, after an agreement was reached on Thursday. Details of the deal were scarce to start, but the pared-down plan, with \$559bn in new spending, has rare bipartisan backing and could open the door to the president's more sweeping \$4tn proposals later on.

The president said not everyone got what they wanted and that other White House priorities would be done separately in a congressional budget process known as reconciliation.

"We've struck a deal," Biden then tweeted. "A group of senators – five [Democrats](#) and five Republicans – has come together and forged an infrastructure agreement that will create millions of American jobs."

The senators have struggled over how to pay for the new spending but left for the White House with a sense of confidence that funding issues had been addressed.

Biden's top aides had met with senators for back-to-back meetings on Capitol Hill and later huddled with the House speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer.

The agreement comes with a complex legislative push. Pelosi on Thursday welcomed the bipartisan package, but she warned that it must be paired with the president's bigger goals now being prepared by Congress under a separate so-called the budget reconciliation process.

"This is important," Pelosi said. "There ain't going to be a bipartisan bill without a reconciliation bill." The Democratic leader vowed the House would not vote on it until the Senate had dealt with both packages.

The major hurdle for a bipartisan agreement has been financing. Biden demanded no new taxes on anyone making less than \$400,000, while

Republican lawmakers were unwilling to raise taxes beyond such steps as indexing the gasoline tax to inflation.

Biden has sought \$1.7tn in his American Jobs Plan, part of nearly \$4tn in broad infrastructure spending on roads, bridges and broadband internet but also including the so-called care economy of child care centers, hospitals and elder care.

With Republicans opposed to Biden's proposed corporate tax rate increase, from 21% to 28%, the group has looked at other ways to raise revenue. Biden rejected their idea to allow gas taxes paid at the pump to rise with inflation, viewing it as a financial burden on American drivers.

The broad reconciliation bill would likely include tax increases on the wealthy and corporations, so a tension still exists over funding for some Republicans and business groups.

According to a White House readout of the Wednesday meeting with Schumer and Pelosi, the leaders talked with acting budget director Shalanda Young, National Economic Council director Brian Deese and Domestic Policy Council director Susan Rice, and they discussed the two-track approach – the smaller bipartisan deal now emerging and the more sweeping plan of Democratic priorities.

Schumer said the leaders “support the concepts” they have heard from the bipartisan negotiations.

The Democratic leaders also insisted on the two-part process ahead, starting with initial votes in July to consider the bipartisan deal and to launch the lengthy procedure for the Democrats' proposal, now drafted at nearly \$6tn t.

The Democrats' bigger proposal would run through the budget reconciliation process, which would allow passage of Biden's priorities by majority vote, without the need for support from Republicans to overcome the Senate's 60-vote threshold. It would require multiple rounds of voting that are likely to extend into fall.

Like Pelosi, Schumer said, “One can't be done without the other.”

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[Rudy Giuliani](#)

Rudy Giuliani barred from practicing law in New York over election lies

Court: Trump lawyer made ‘false and misleading’ statements

License suspended pending possible disciplinary action



The seriousness of Rudy Giuliani’s misconduct ‘can not be overstated’, the New York supreme court said. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA

The seriousness of Rudy Giuliani’s misconduct ‘can not be overstated’, the New York supreme court said. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA

[Sarah Betancourt](#)

[@sweetadelinevt](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 13.16 EDT

Rudy Giuliani is suspended from practicing law in New York state following disciplinary proceedings over his misleading statements to courts and the

public following the 2020 US presidential election.

The [New York](#) supreme court issued its decision on Thursday, saying that it had found “uncontroverted evidence” that Giuliani made “demonstrably false and misleading statements to courts, lawmakers and the public at large”, on behalf of his client, then-president Donald Trump, and created a “narrative that due to widespread voter fraud, victory in the 2020 United States presidential election was stolen from his client”.

[Audio shows how Giuliani pressured Ukraine officials to announce Biden inquiry.](#)
[Read more](#)

Giuliani, 77, helped lead Trump’s legal challenge of his election loss as his personal attorney. He argued without evidence that voter fraud was rampant in Georgia, and that voting machines in the state and others were rigged. He urged Georgia’s Republican electors to vote for Trump, despite the state’s Republican governor, Brian Kemp, and secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, countering there was no evidence of fraud.

The five-justice appellate division said Giuliani’s conduct threatened the public interest and warranted an interim suspension. The seriousness of the misconduct, the court said in a 33-page decision, “can not be overstated”.

Giuliani was admitted to New York’s state bar in 1969, and worked for the justice department under President Ronald Reagan. He was mayor of New York City from 1994 to 2001.

Giuliani’s license will be revoked while disciplinary action over his practices are considered.

Two of his attorneys, John M Leventhal and Barry Kamins, provided this statement to the Guardian: “We are disappointed with the Appellate Division, First Department’s decision suspending Mayor Giuliani prior to being afforded a hearing on the issues that are alleged. This is unprecedented as we believe that our client does not pose a present danger to the public interest. We believe that once the issues are fully explored at a hearing Mr

Giuliani will be reinstated as a valued member of the legal profession that he has served so well in his many capacities for so many years.”

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[European Union](#)

Fractionous EU summit rejects Franco-German plan for Putin talks

Bloc to explore sanctions instead, as gathering also holds ‘emotional’ debate over Hungary’s LGBT laws



Angela Merkel adjusts her mask on the second day of the EU summit. She said it had not been an easy discussion on Russia. Photograph: Olivier Hoslet/AFP/Getty Images

Angela Merkel adjusts her mask on the second day of the EU summit. She said it had not been an easy discussion on Russia. Photograph: Olivier Hoslet/AFP/Getty Images

[*Jennifer Rankin*](#) in Brussels

Fri 25 Jun 2021 10.21 EDT

A [Franco-German plan](#) to restart talks with Vladimir Putin has been rejected at a fractionous EU summit that resulted in a decision to explore economic

sanctions against Russia instead.

The two-day gathering in Brussels also included an “emotional” debate over LGBT rights in Hungary, as EU leaders confronted Viktor Orbán over a law that [will ban gay people from being shown](#) in educational and entertainment content for minors.

The two issues made what was meant to be a routine summit of the 27 EU leaders into a much more bruising encounter. Tensions were raised after France’s Emmanuel Macron and Germany’s Angela Merkel blindsided other leaders by proposing talks with Putin, following Joe Biden’s [summit with the Russian president](#) last week.

The move backfired, with Poland and the Baltic states leading the charge, arguing that talking to Putin was a concession that would not change the Kremlin’s behaviour. Lithuania’s president, Gitanas Nausėda, said it was like trying “to engage the bear to keep a pot of honey safe”.

Merkel, attending what is likely to be her [last Brussels summit as a sitting head of government](#), said it had not been an easy discussion on Russia. “Personally I would have liked to have taken a bolder step here,” she told reporters after the meeting finished in the small hours of Friday morning. “But it’s also good as it is, and we will continue to work on this.”

She challenged the view – held by Baltic countries – that a summit with Putin amounted to a reward that sat ill with Russia’s annexation of Crimea and backing for separatists in eastern Ukraine, saying the EU should not rely on the US to conduct face-to-face talks with the Russian president.

“It’s not sufficient ... that we are simply satisfied with a debrief by the president of the United States,” she said, casting the issue as one of sovereignty. “I think we should be independent enough to have our own position.”

Macron said it was “no tragedy” the union had failed to find consensus for a summit with Putin. “The most important thing is to remain united,” he said, adding: “I’ll be frank, I don’t need an EU summit to see [Vladimir Putin](#). I saw him several times as president and I’ll continue to see him.”

The last EU-Russia summit took place in January 2014, shortly before Russia's annexation of Crimea triggered EU sanctions, putting relations on a downward slide.

Instead of talks with Putin, the EU27 toughened their approach: in the final summit communique, EU leaders stressed “the need for a firm and coordinated response by the EU and its member states to any further malign, illegal and disruptive activity by Russia, making full use of all instruments at the EU's disposal”. The leaders tasked the EU institutions “to present options for additional restrictive measures including economic sanctions”.

The Russia debate came after EU leaders confronted Orbán over [LGBT rights](#) in Hungary, in what one official described as an “emotional” debate. Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister, who has clashed with Orbán over the rule of law in previous summits, made his feelings plain as he arrived at the summit: “For me, Hungary has no place in the EU any more.”

António Costa, the prime minister of Portugal, said: “You can't be a member of the [European Union](#) if you don't accept and respect the values that we have in the [European Union](#). No one is a member of the [European Union](#) because they are forced to [be].”

But the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, rejected the idea that [Hungary](#) should leave the EU: “In [Hungary](#) there are 10 million people and I am firmly convinced that there are 10 million good reasons for [Hungary](#) to be and remain part of the European Union.”

Luxembourg's prime minister, Xavier Bettel, the first EU leader to be married to a same-sex partner, said Orbán had crossed a red line. “I did not become gay. I am, it is not a choice,” he was reported to have said according to a diplomatic source. “Some years ago we had dinner in Budapest together with my husband. I don't recognise you [Orbán] any more.”

Defying his critics, the Hungarian leader rejected all charges of homophobia and said the law was meant to ensure parents had the choice over how to educate their children. Before the summit, Orbán said EU leaders had not read the Hungarian law and claimed he was “defending the rights of the homosexual guys”.

Leaving the summit, Belgium's prime minister, Alexander De Croo, who wore a rainbow pin in his lapel, described the discussion as "unprecedented". "This was not a diplomatic discussion, this was quite confrontational," he said.

Only Poland and Slovenia – the latter "a little bit" – had offered Hungary support, De Croo said.

Von der Leyen instructed her staff to issue a formal warning letter to the Hungarian government over the legislation banning LGBT content. "The outcome is open because it depends on how Hungary reacts," she said.

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[Miami condo collapse](#)

Miami building collapse: one dead as rescue crews say 99 unaccounted for

- Officials say about 55 of building's 130 apartments affected
- Reason for collapse in Surfside not yet known – authorities

01:21

Footage shows aftermath of Miami building collapse – video report

[Richard Luscombe](#) in Miami
[@richlusc](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 17.16 EDT

A large-scale rescue operation was continuing Thursday evening at the site of a collapsed condominium block in [Miami](#), where authorities said at least one person was killed, 10 injured and dozens more unaccounted for.

Crews reported hearing noises from inside the rubble as they searched for survivors at the Champlain Towers South condo in Surfside, a 12-storey apartment block that came crashing down at about 1.30am. Authorities said they expected the number of deaths to rise, but would not be drawn on the number.

[‘We’ve struck a deal’: Biden says agreement reached on infrastructure plan – live](#)
[Read more](#)

On Thursday afternoon the Miami-Dade police chief, Alfredo Ramirez, said that 99 people remained missing, and that 53 condo residents were rescued or otherwise accounted for. The cause of the collapse was not known, he said, but an estimated 55 of the 130 apartments were affected.

Police have launched a homicide inquiry, according to Sally Heyman, a county commissioner who represents Surfside.

Early on Friday, President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration in the state of [Florida](#) and ordered federal assistance to bolster the state and local response efforts. The White House said the move authorized the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency (Fema) to coordinate all disaster relief efforts.

“It’s the unimaginable,” Daniella Levine Cava, the Miami-Dade mayor, said. “A massive search and rescue mission is under way. We are going to do everything we can possibly [do] to identify and rescue those who have been trapped in the rubble.”



Fire rescue personnel conduct a search and rescue with dogs through the rubble of the Champlain Towers South condo. Photograph: David Santiago/AP

More than 80 fire-rescue crews attended the scene in Surfside, a small, oceanfront city just north of Miami Beach. Early video of the aftermath of the collapse showed a boy [being pulled from the wreckage](#), one of 35 people rescued alive, the Miami-Dade commission said.

“They brought dogs who can sniff for survivors in the rubble,” Eliana Salzhauer, a Surfside commissioner, [told the Miami Herald](#). “They aren’t turning up very much. No one is celebrating anyone being pulled out.”

Salzhauer confirmed earlier reports that recent construction work on the roof had taken place and said residents told her a building inspector had visited the property on Wednesday. But she said it was too soon to speculate on the likely cause.

Jimmy Patronis, a Florida cabinet member and the state’s fire marshal, told reporters that crews had heard noises as they sifted through the wreckage. “The rescuers are hearing sounds from the rubble. It’s kind of hit or miss. You get into the zone where you are so passionate and so focused and so determined to make sure you are doing everything possible to save a life in an event like this,” he said.



An aerial view showing the partially collapsed building in Surfside. Photograph: Marco Bello/Reuters

Earlier, Frank Rollason, the director of the county’s emergency management department, said workers believed that they had rescued all reachable survivors. “Everybody who is alive is out of the building,” he told the Herald.

In one of the first rescues, he said, workers saved a trapped mother and child, although the mother's leg had to be amputated to free her. Other terrified residents were plucked from their shattered balconies by rescue workers with cherry pickers, after finding escape routes blocked.

The [Florida](#) governor, Ron DeSantis, visited the scene and spoke with survivors and rescue teams after cutting short an event in Tampa.

“It’s a tragic day,” he said at an afternoon press briefing. “The TV doesn’t do it justice. It is really, really traumatic to see the collapse of a massive structure like that.”

The governor said state emergency management officials were present and that engineers would investigate the cause of the collapse when it was safe to enter the site. “You’re not going to have those answers immediately,” he said.

Levine Cava, the Miami-Dade mayor, [said in a tweet](#) that Biden had called to lend support. The US president, she said, “offered the full support of the federal gov[ernment] to help our community during this difficult time”.



Soriya Cohen shows a picture of her husband, Brad Cohen, who she said is missing after the collapse. Photograph: Joe Raedle/Getty Images

The Surfside mayor, Charles Burkett, said he understood from the building manager that the condo block was “substantially full” of residents mostly sleeping at the time of the collapse.

“The building is literally pancaked,” Burkett said at the press conference. “That’s heartbreaking because it doesn’t mean to me that we are going to be as successful as we wanted to be in finding people alive.”

Meanwhile, concerned friends of those unaccounted for [went on social media](#) to plead for information.

Witnesses gave harrowing accounts of the moments following the collapse. “I could hear somebody yelling, screaming. I could hear by the voice it was a little boy, I saw an arm sticking out of the debris,” Nicholas Balboa, who lives nearby, [told CNN](#).



People console each other near the site of the collapse. Photograph: Wilfredo Lee/AP

He said the boy and a person with him were trying to climb out but could not lift the heavy rubble. The boy was screaming, “Don’t leave me, don’t leave me,” Balboa said.

Families with children in pajamas were seen arriving at a Red Cross reunification facility set up for survivors at a nearby community center. The group was arranging hotels for displaced condo residents.

The building that collapsed was a southern tower of the condominium development, said Rollason, the director of the county's emergency management department.

Residents of the other towers were evacuated and engineers were inspecting the buildings for safety.

The collapse sent up a cloud of debris, coating cars up to two blocks away with a light layer of dust. Photos and video from the scene show the collapse affected half the tower. Piles of rubble and debris surrounded the area just outside the building.



A portion of the 12-story Champlain Towers South condo. Photograph: Joe Raedle/Getty Images

Unconfirmed reports said that maintenance work had been taking place on the roof of the building that collapsed.

The building's address is 8777 Collins Avenue, according to Surfside police. The sea-view condo development was built in 1981 in the south-east corner

of Surfside, on the beach and includes more than 100 units. It had a few two-bedroom units on the market, with asking prices of \$600,000 (£429,500) to \$700,000, an internet search shows.

The area is a mix of new and old apartments, houses, condominiums and hotels, with restaurants and stores serving an international combination of residents and tourists.

The Associated Press contributed to this report

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[Matt Hancock](#)

Pressure on Matt Hancock to quit after PM backs him over tryst with colleague

Boris Johnson ‘considers matter closed’ but MPs warn breach of social distancing rules could be as toxic as Cummings’ Durham trip

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Health secretary Matt Hancock and Gina Coladangelo outside BBC headquarters in June. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Health secretary Matt Hancock and Gina Coladangelo outside BBC headquarters in June. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

[Heather Stewart](#) , [Peter Walker](#) and [Robert Booth](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 13.50 EDT

Matt Hancock is coming under relentless pressure to quit as MPs warned that the health secretary's rule-breaking tryst with a colleague risked becoming as toxic to voters as Dominic Cummings' drive to Durham.

Hancock apologised for breaching social distancing guidelines after the Sun newspaper obtained footage from 6 May of him in a clinch with Gina Coladangelo, a non-executive director at the Department of Health and Social Care.

The health secretary appealed for "privacy" to deal with this "personal matter", and Downing Street said the prime minister had accepted Hancock's apology for breaking the rules, and "considers the matter closed".

Hancock, who has been married to his wife for 15 years, is facing fresh questions about how Coladangelo – a friend from his days at Oxford University – came to be hired, and whether they were already in an intimate relationship at that point. Labour's deputy leader, Angela Rayner, has written to Boris Johnson's independent adviser on ministerial interests, Lord Geidt, calling on him to investigate the apparent conflict of interest.

Families bereaved by Covid wrote to the prime minister, urging him to sack the health secretary. Hannah Brady, whose father, Shaun Brady, 55, died in May 2020, wrote: "To allow Matt Hancock to continue to hold the position of health secretary compounds the heartbreak of bereaved families who sacrificed so much whilst he broke the rules.

"It is not only an insult to bereaved families and all those who have obeyed the rules, but undermines the public's trust in measures designed to save others from the loss we have suffered."

She concluded: "If Matt Hancock is unable to find the decency to do the right thing and resign his position, it is paramount that you relieve him of it."

Conservative MPs said they were already beginning to receive angry messages from constituents about Hancock's public rule-breach, and expected more.

“Usually these things tend to build over the weekend,” one backbencher said, while several conceded that they were braced for something like the wave of public anger that followed the revelation of Cummings’ Barnard Castle jaunt. “There will be anger, because he broke his own rules,” said a former cabinet minister. Another MP said: “People can’t abide a double standard.”

A snap poll by YouGov found that 49% of those surveyed thought Hancock should step down, up from 36% in May.

Behavioural scientists advising the government warned that the health secretary’s public disregard for the social distancing rules could undermine public compliance.

“‘Do what I do’ can have a bigger impact than ‘Do what I say’, particularly when combined with public anger,” said John Drury, a professor of social psychology at the University of Sussex and a member of the Sage subcommittee advising on behavioural science, Spi-B. “We know from research [on the Cummings incident](#) that rule-breaking at the top undermines social cohesion and adherence.”

On Friday night the Sun released a video, apparently taken on CCTV and one minute 10 seconds long, showing Hancock looking out of a room, before closing the door, standing in front of it and kissing Coladangelo.

The photographs were apparently taken on 6 May, before social distancing rules were eased on 17 May to allow hugging. Indoor gatherings between members of different households remained illegal at that point, but Hancock’s aides insist no law was broken because the pair were in the department for legitimate work purposes.

The Metropolitan police said they would not investigate Hancock over any alleged Covid rule breaches. The force said it was “aware of the distribution of images alleged to have been obtained within an official government premises”.

It added: “No criminal investigation has been launched. At this time this remains a matter for the relevant government department.”

Coladangelo helped on Hancock's 2019 leadership campaign, attending meetings with the media alongside him. Parliamentary records [show](#) that in June 2019, he sponsored her for a parliamentary pass, allowing her to come and go at Westminster, which she received under her married name, Gina Tress. Her husband, Oliver Tress, is the founder and head of Oliver Bonas. She was formerly an executive for the PR and lobbying firm Luther Pendragon.

In November last year, Labour complained about apparent cronyism [after it emerged](#) that Coladangelo had first been made an unpaid adviser at the DHSC and then a non-executive director, a part-time role paid £15,000 a year.

[Has Matt Hancock breached any rules and why should we care?](#)
[Read more](#)

Answering questions from the media, Johnson's spokesperson declined to say whether No 10 was concerned whether their relationship constituted a conflict of interest, or if he broke the law on Covid rules.

Hancock said in a statement: "I accept that I breached the social distancing guidance in these circumstances. I have let people down and am very sorry. I remain focused on working to get the country out of this pandemic, and would be grateful for privacy for my family on this personal matter."

Johnson's spokesperson said: "You've seen the health secretary's statement, so I would point you to that. I don't really have anything to add. The health secretary set out that he accepted he breached the social distancing guidelines, and he has apologised for that. The prime minister has accepted the health secretary's apology and considers the matter closed."

01:41

Grant Shapps defends Matt Hancock over claims of affair with adviser – video

Rayner suggested Hancock may have broken the ministerial code by not declaring his relationship with Coladangelo, and urged the prime minister to sack him.

Hancock's predicament is an early test for Geidt, who was appointed after his predecessor, Alex Allan, [resigned because Johnson chose to ignore his finding](#) that Priti Patel had breached the ministerial code.

According to points 7.1 and 7.2 of the code, "ministers must ensure that no conflict arises, or could reasonably be perceived to arise, between their public duties and their private interests, financial or otherwise".

But some Conservative MPs said they were anxious. One said: "It just doesn't sit right. I thought that the moment I heard about it. It's not that we don't make mistakes in our personal lives, but it's very difficult if the minister telling people they can't visit their grandparents or go to sports days is then found snogging his non-executive director in the office.

"It's the sense of unfairness that makes it so bad. People can't abide a double standard."

Last year when Prof Neil Ferguson, the epidemiologist who has helped shape the government's response to coronavirus, quit his advisory role for breaking social distancing rules by having a woman visit him at his home, Hancock said he would [support the idea](#) of police taking action against him.

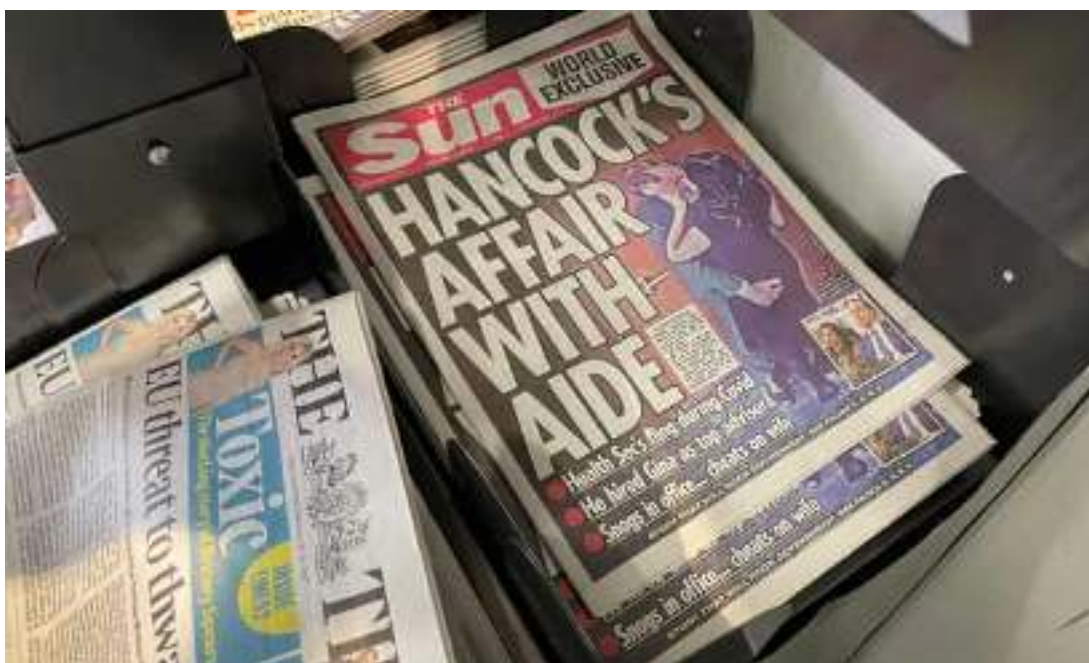
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[Matt Hancock](#)

Matt Hancock's breach could erode UK's adherence to Covid rules, scientists say

Health secretary admitted he broke social distancing guidelines after picture was published showing him in a 'clinch' with an adviser

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The Sun ran an exclusive on Thursday suggesting that Matt Hancock had an affair with his adviser Gina Coladangelo and broke Covid-19 social distancing rules. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

The Sun ran an exclusive on Thursday suggesting that Matt Hancock had an affair with his adviser Gina Coladangelo and broke Covid-19 social distancing rules. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

[Nicola Davis](#)

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 12.23 EDT

Behavioural scientists advising the government have warned that the breaking of social distancing rules by [Matt Hancock](#) could make others less likely to adhere to Covid restrictions.

The health secretary has [admitted he breached social distancing](#) guidelines after he was pictured in the Sun in a “clinch” with Gina Coladangelo, a university friend who he had appointed non-executive director at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

The photographs allegedly date from 6 May, and indoor contact with someone you do not live with was not allowed until 17 May.

Last year Hancock said he would back the police in any action they wished to take over Prof Neil Ferguson breaking social distancing rules by having his lover visit him at his home, adding that Ferguson was correct to step down from his position on the government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage). [Hancock told Sky News](#) that the social distancing rules “are there for everyone” and are “deadly serious”.

The prime minister’s spokesperson said on Friday he had accepted Hancock’s apology for his own rule-breaking and “considers the matter closed”.

But experts warned that the health secretary’s actions could undermine public adherence to ongoing restrictions, pointing to the impact of breaches by Boris Johnson’s former aide [Dominic Cummings](#) during the first lockdown, when he travelled to his family’s Durham farm and subsequently took a family trip to Barnard Castle.

“‘Do what I do’ can have a bigger impact than ‘Do what I say’, particularly when combined with public anger,” said John Drury, professor of social psychology at the University of Sussex and a member of the Sage subcommittee advising on behavioural science, Spi-B. “We know from

research [on the Cummings incident](#) that rule-breaking at the top undermines social cohesion and adherence.”

Dr Elise Paul, an investigator on the Covid-19 Social Study at University College London, said there were several similarities between the Cummings and Hancock situations. “Although Hancock has apologised for his transgression, the impact on public confidence may be just as bad or worse than that of the Cummings situation, given his particular role in government and that the other person involved appears to be someone whom he supervises,” she said.

Drury said it was positive that Hancock has apologised, but that may not be enough. “If the public are being fined for the same kinds of actions, will the health secretary also be fined, to communicate that he doesn’t have some kind of special dispensation?” he said.

Prof Susan Michie, director of UCL’s centre for behaviour change and also a member of Spi-B, said: “There is good evidence that perceived fairness and a sense of being part of a collective effort are important for supporting people to adhere to guidance such as restrictions which may be hard or aversive to stick to.”

As an example of perceived unfairness, Michie cited allowing large crowds at sporting events while banning parents from children’s sports days. “An elected government minister found to break distancing rules without appropriate consequence may become another example,” she said.

But Stephen Reicher, professor of psychology at the University of St Andrews, who is also on Spi-B, said Hancock should be judged on his performance as health secretary. “And on that, I agree with Boris Johnson as summarised in his WhatsApp exchanges with Dominic Cummings,” he said.

[According to messages released by Cummings](#), allegedly dating to March last year, the prime minister called his health minister “totally fucking hopeless”.

“But I also believe in due process,” said Reicher, “which is why we need – and urgently need – a full public inquiry rather than snippets of tittle-tattle so

we can have a proper evaluation of the performance of Hancock and his colleagues from which informed decisions about their future can be made.”

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[Matt Hancock](#)

No 10 won't launch inquiry into leaking of CCTV photo of Matt Hancock kissing aide

Whitehall sources rule out mole hunt to avoid whistleblowing claims from source of damaging images

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The health secretary Matt Hancock (centre, sitting) with (left) adviser Gina Coladangelo. Downing Street and DHSC have yet to confirm any inquiry into the leak of CCTV images showing the pair in an embrace. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

The health secretary Matt Hancock (centre, sitting) with (left) adviser Gina Coladangelo. Downing Street and DHSC have yet to confirm any inquiry

into the leak of CCTV images showing the pair in an embrace. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

[Denis Campbell](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 14.19 EDT

The government will not launch any inquiry into who leaked a photograph of Matt Hancock [kissing an aide](#), even though they believe they know who did it, the Guardian understands.

Downing Street and Hancock's Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) have decided not to instigate any hunt to try to identify who passed the image taken from a security camera in his ministerial office to the Sun.

The decision was taken at a meeting early on Friday morning involving Hancock, the DHSC's permanent secretary, Sir Chris Wormald, and the department's head of security, hours after the tabloid reported and provided evidence of Hancock's encounter in his office on the ninth floor of the department with an aide, Gina Coladangelo.

Sources say that they have ruled out a mole hunt because if the person were tracked down they could then claim that they were a whistleblower who was [exposing wrongdoing](#).

"Imagine if that person was dismissed for leaking what any employment tribunal that followed would be like for [Matt Hancock](#)," said a source. "It's hard to justify a leak inquiry when you've been caught brazenly doing something like this."

Another source familiar with the DHSC's handling of the fallout from Hancock's behaviour said: "They aren't going to do a leak inquiry. The thinking is that you could argue that whoever did it was a whistleblower. If someone was whistleblowing, putting sensitive information into the public domain, they deserve to be protected – that's good practice with whistleblowers."

The DHSC initially thought the photograph had been taken by someone using a long lens camera in a building opposite the DHSC's headquarters on

Victoria Street, a short walk from the Houses of Parliament. But it quickly discarded that theory and now believes that it came from a member of DHSC staff.

The DHSC believes the picture is a photograph of an image captured by the closed-circuit television camera in Hancock's office rather than a screengrab that has been taken from CCTV footage. However, it is bracing itself for the prospect of the Sun publishing further material, possibly including moving CCTV footage of Hancock with Coladangelo, who one source described as "Matt's style guru, someone to spruce up his image, as much as someone who advises him on what to say and how to say it in media interviews".

Downing Street and the DHSC were asked if any leak inquiry would be held. A No 10 spokesperson said: "The prime minister's spokesperson was asked about this at lobby [Friday's briefing with journalists] and he said we don't comment on security matters for obvious reasons, but he pointed journalists to DHSC for anything further on this matter." Boris Johnson's spokesperson declined at that briefing to say anything about an inquiry.

The DHSC had not responded by the time of publication.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jun/25/no-10-wont-launch-inquiry-into-leaking-of-cctv-photo-of-matt-hancock-kissing-aide>

[Matt Hancock](#)

‘Follow the rules’: what Matt Hancock told us – and what he did

The UK health secretary has been called a hypocrite for breaking guidelines while telling the public what to do

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Matt Hancock and Gina Coladangelo stand outside the BBC headquarters in London. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Matt Hancock and Gina Coladangelo stand outside the BBC headquarters in London. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@sloumarsh](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 13.00 EDT

Downing Street said the prime minister [had accepted Matt Hancock's apology](#) for breaching social distancing guidelines after he was accused of having an affair with an adviser to his department.

But others have called the health secretary a hypocrite for his actions, with the Liberal Democrats' spokesperson for health and social care, Munira Wilson MP, saying: "This latest episode of hypocrisy will break the trust with the British public. He was telling families not to hug loved ones, while doing whatever he liked in the workplace."

Below is a list of examples of when the health secretary has told others to stick by the coronavirus rules in place at various points during the pandemic.

30 March 2021

Hancock warned Britons: "don't blow it" as the weather heated up earlier in the year, amid concerns about the virus spreading.

Let's enjoy the sun but let's do it safely. We have come so far, don't blow it now.

— Matt Hancock (@MattHancock) [March 30, 2021](#)

23 February 2021

Hancock said it was vital that "everybody plays their part" to make sure that England's restrictions could be eased after the most recent lockdown. He said:

It depends on people's circumstances. We will be changing the rules to be far more about people taking personal responsibility, exercising common sense according to their circumstances.

We will set out really clearly the risks. People understand the risks – we know that – and we'll make that very, very plain and then people can exercise their own personal responsibility.

[Hancock says 'it's on all of us' to help ease Covid lockdown in England](#)
[Read more](#)

10 January 2021

A month earlier Hancock said that flexing the rules could be “fatal”. Speaking on the BBC’s The Andrew Marr Show, [Hancock was asked whether the rules at the time may need to be tightened.](#)

I don’t want to speculate because the most important message is not whether the government will further strengthen the rules ... The most important thing is that people stay at home and follow the rules that we have got. Every time you try to flex the rules that could be fatal ... [he said staying at home was the] most important thing we can do collectively as a society.

People need to not just follow the letter of the rules but follow the spirit as well and play their part.

8 September 2020

In September last year, Hancock blamed the “concerning” UK surge in Covid cases on people having “problems with social distancing”. He told LBC:

The rise in the number of cases we have seen in the last few days is concerning. It just reinforces the point that people must follow the social distancing rules, they are so important ... The whole country needs to following social distancing. We can only do this as a whole society – everybody has a role to play.

May 2020

Hancock said he had been left “speechless” by Prof Neil Ferguson’s “extraordinary” behaviour, and said it had been right for him to resign as a

government Sage adviser after he was caught breaking social distancing rules with a lover.

Prof Ferguson is a very eminent and impressive scientist and the science that he has done has been an important part of what we've listened to. I think he took the right decision to resign. I think the social distancing rules are very important and people should follow them.

24 March 2020

At the start of the pandemic, the health secretary strictly set out that there were only four reasons for people to leave their homes. He stressed that the measures were “not advice, they are rules”.

The spread of coronavirus is rapidly accelerating across the world and in the UK. The actions we took yesterday are not actions any UK government would want to take but they are necessary.

Our instruction is simple: stay at home, people will only be allowed to leave home for one of four reasons. First, shopping for basic necessities, for example food, which must be as infrequent as possible. Secondly, exercising. Third, for any medical need or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person ... And fourth, travelling to and from work where a job cannot be done from home ... These measures are not advice, they are rules.”

This article was amended on 26 June 2021. An earlier version said that Prof Neil Ferguson visited a lover in May 2020 in breach of lockdown rules. In fact, she travelled to visit him, and the text has been changed to reflect this.

2021.06.26 - Coronavirus

- [The Oxford vaccine The trials and tribulations of a world-saving jab](#)
- ['I don't have a choice' Russians scramble to get vaccine amid new restrictions](#)
- [Scotland Covid infection rates have risen steeply, ONS data reveals](#)
- [UK test and trace PM said system would be 'like whistling in the dark'](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

The Oxford vaccine: the trials and tribulations of a world-saving jab

Amid bemusement from scientists at the deluge of often undeserved criticism, the Guardian pieces together the story behind the vaccine's successes and failures

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A health worker prepares to inoculate a person with a dose of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine at a hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Photograph: Munir Uz Zaman/AFP/Getty

A health worker prepares to inoculate a person with a dose of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine at a hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Photograph: Munir Uz Zaman/AFP/Getty



[Sarah Boseley](#) *Health editor*

Sat 26 Jun 2021 02.00 EDT

In January 2020, when most of the world slept soundly in ignorance of the pandemic coming its way, a group of scientists at Oxford University got to work on a vaccine to save the planet. They wanted it to be highly effective, cheap, and easy to use in even the poorest countries.

Prof Sarah Gilbert, Prof Andrew Pollard and others pulled it off. With speed crucial, they designed it and launched into trials before bringing in a business partner. The giant Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical company [AstraZeneca](#) would manufacture it, license it around the world – and not make a profit until the pandemic was over.

It was an inspired, idealistic and philanthropic crusade – yet they have spent the last year being attacked from all sides.

As politicians, regulators, the public and the press have all weighed in, it is almost as if the vaccine has gone from hero to zero.

So much has gone wrong, and the well-intentioned folk at Oxford and AstraZeneca have taken so many blows, that it is hardly surprising that they

wonder whether they have been the victims of a deliberate disinformation campaign.

It seems they have. There is clear evidence that the Oxford vaccine, and other jabs, have been targeted by Russians peddling disinformation in order to promote their own version, Sputnik V.

At the university and the company, whose partnership has held firm under the extraordinary strain, there is bemusement at the disasters and deluge of criticism. “Everyone is ascribing this dark motive to everything we do,” said one company insider.

Sir John Bell, regius professor of medicine at Oxford and the government’s life sciences adviser, who has been involved with the vaccine from the beginning, says they have been singled out.

“Of course the vaccine is not perfect ... We were very clear that we understand that there are complications from the vaccine, as I think you’ll find there are with all the vaccines to be honest. But ours has had the bloody spotlight, and people just won’t let go.

“There’s a long history of trouble with this vaccine. And it’s hard to pin it on any one thing, and I think it would be fair to say maybe we haven’t handled the negative news as well as we might have. But we’re kind of new at this game [and] there was nothing deceitful about what we did. We just perhaps didn’t get in front of the dialogue.”

Speaking to experts and insiders, the Guardian has pieced together the inside story of the vaccine’s fall from grace.

There has been no single enemy with Oxford/AstraZeneca in its sights. Instead, it is a story of cultural and political differences, of misunderstandings and mistakes. It is a very human story, at heart, featuring people behaving badly, or with naked self-interest, in the midst of a terrifying pandemic.

The odd couple



A merger of minds and money, idealism and pragmatism. Photograph: Joel Saget/AFP/Getty

The coupling of Oxford University's scientific idealists with big pharma was an important contributory factor, and it was this merger of minds and money, idealism and pragmatism that set the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine off on the rockiest of roads.

"AstraZeneca isn't really known as a vaccine specialist company," said Dr Penny Ward, a visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King's College London, who has spent a lifetime in the industry. "Also, not long before, they had shut down their entire anti-infectives division." That meant AstraZeneca had hardly any involvement with infectious diseases.

A deal had been expected with the German giant Merck, which has a huge vaccine division, but the British health secretary, Matt Hancock, is said to have torpedoed it because there was no guarantee that the UK would get priority once doses were available.

By the time AstraZeneca got involved, Oxford's scientists had already set up the early trials. That meant, said Ward, that the studies were not tailored to the needs of regulators in the way that big drug companies would have done it.

“There are things that you can do as an academic and it all seems perfectly rational to an academic who thinks scientifically, but don’t actually make a great deal of sense in drug development terms,” she said. “There is in fact a difference between academic science and development of a product that you’re going to sell in the marketplace.”

Two things happened that would cause serious problems with regulators later on. Oxford had an extremely cautious approach to older people, and chose to recruit mostly under-60s for the earliest trials in the UK.

Second, there was a glitch in the production of vaccines for the studies. A contractor accidentally supplied half-doses, according to AstraZeneca’s Sir Mene Pangalos, who headed the research once the company was on board. When they found out, the academic researchers told the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA) in the UK, and got the go-ahead to continue with two dosing strengths to see what happened.

When the trials reported, it turned out that volunteers given a half-dose followed by a full dose got more protection – up to 90%, compared with 62%.

Pangalos described it as serendipity. Regulatory bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration in the US don’t like serendipity. They like predictability and no surprises. The oddity of the information sowed doubt at the FDA.

And the Oxford/AstraZeneca explanation of the 90% efficacy turned out to be wrong. Those who got the lower doses also had a bigger gap between the two shots. That, it turned out, was what improved the outcome. As we know now, a strategy of delaying the second dose paid off in the UK, but it was unorthodox.

The FDA looked askance. It had already been perturbed by the side-effects in the trials.

Regulators don’t like surprises



A volunteer receives an injection of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine at a hospital in Soweto, Johannesburg. Photograph: Siphwe Sibeko/AP

Last September, two people were reported to have suffered transverse myelitis – damage to the myelin sheath that protects the spinal cord. Nobody now thinks these were vaccine-related injuries. But the FDA did not believe it had been alerted soon enough. While other regulators suspended the trials for a few days, in the US they did not restart for two months while the agency demanded more information.

News of the setback had been leaked from within the US, where commentators attacked AstraZeneca. Ed Silverman at the influential Stat News wrote an open letter to Pascal Soriot, the CEO of AstraZeneca, in his Pharmed View column on 9 September. “I have concerns about your commitment to transparency,” he wrote, accusing the company of failing to come clean with the public.

“Whatever your reasons, I think you did the wrong thing,” he said. “In the middle of a pandemic – when the whole world, literally, is hoping a useful vaccine is on the horizon – everyone was left to guess what went wrong and what it might mean.”

The following day, the more widely read New York Times commented in its coverage that “many details about the trial’s suspension and the event that triggered it remain murky”.

At AstraZeneca, they were nonplussed. In all the cancer drug studies they had submitted to the FDA, they had never been called on to account to the public for what they were doing. This wasn’t how the pharmaceutical industry normally operated.

When the US trials eventually reported in March, AstraZeneca’s top executives thought they were home and dry. They reported good results: 79% efficacy against symptomatic illness and 100% against deaths. They had hardly had time to pop a champagne cork before the world turned upside down again. They were accused by experts in the US of massaging the data to give a more favourable result.

The data safety monitoring board issued a statement accusing them of putting out “potentially misleading” figures.

Vaccine nationalism



Dr Anthony Fauci: ‘This kind of thing does nothing but really cast some doubt.’ Photograph: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

It was unprecedented. Data safety monitoring boards don't normally go public. But they had, with no warning.

Then the National Institutes of Health, headed by Dr Anthony Fauci, weighed in. "We urge the company to work with the DSMB [Data and Safety Monitoring Board] to review the efficacy data and ensure the most accurate, up-to-date efficacy data be made public as quickly as possible," it said in a statement.

Fauci appeared on Good Morning America, describing the data issue as "an unforced error ... this kind of thing does nothing but really cast some doubt".

Oxford and AstraZeneca's scientists were astounded by the onslaught. They worked day and night to update the figures. Adding the very latest data pushed the overall efficacy down from 79% to 76%, which was barely a drop, and actually pushed up efficacy in the older age group from 80% to 85%. AstraZeneca's vaccine is still not licensed in the US.

Those close to the fray say nationalism may have played a part in the undermining of the Oxford vaccine.

But there's also a culture gap. The FDA expects the data to be cut and dried. The UK regulator was willing to think outside the box.

Production problems



The EU was unhappy with AstraZeneca reducing the amount of doses it said it was able to provide. Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

While the US trials were stalled, the new year did not bring AstraZeneca any better luck in Europe. In January, the company revealed it was having production problems at a factory in Belgium.

The European Union had ordered 400m doses, with the first 90m expected by March. AstraZeneca said it could only manage 40m – [and then 30m](#) – in the first quarter.

As European leaders watched the UK's steady rollout of vaccines, the problems quickly escalated into a full-blown row.

Soriot insisted that they had promised only their “best efforts” to deliver the doses on schedule. But the EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, went to war, insisting Europe had a right to doses made in the UK under its contract with AstraZeneca.

Some at Oxford and the pharmaceutical company believe the row was heightened by Brexit tensions and British bragging about its vaccination programme.

With anger rising, the commission threatened to block Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines made in Europe from being exported to the UK – and Italian police raided a pharmaceutical plant wrongly suspected of stockpiling vaccines destined for Britain.

Bruno Mações, Portugal’s former Europe minister, called it possibly “the most embarrassing day in EU history”.

Efficacy in over-65s



A woman in Germany receives a shot of the Oxford vaccine. Photograph: Lennart Preiss/AFP/Getty

Another huge issue had already rocked public confidence. On 25 January, a German-language business newspaper, Handelsblatt, ran a front-page story. “AstraZeneca vaccine apparently hardly effective in seniors,” said the headline. Efficacy in the over-65s, the age group most at risk of dying from Covid, was only 8%, the article claimed..

Handelsblatt’s sources were not in the German government. Its journalists had been speaking to regulators and vaccine advisers. The figure turned out to be inaccurate – and taken out of context.

There were too few elderly people in the early trials, because the Oxford academics did not want to expose them to risks. And if you have too few people in a trial, the results you get are not reliable. There was simply not enough evidence to prove how well the vaccine worked in the over-65s.

Handelsblatt acknowledged that there was too little data, but that was lost in the ensuing row.

Within days, Stiko, Germany's vaccination advisory panel, said it would not recommend the vaccine for the over-65s because of the lack of evidence that it worked for them. In France, President Macron said the jab was "quasi-ineffective" in the over-65s.

Within weeks, Macron was forced to say publicly that he would have the jab himself – and by early March it had been approved by France for the over-65s. But the damage had been done.

Bell says you can get only limited data from vaccine trials – you have to see what happens "in the real world. The studies are different, the clinical trial populations are different, the type of virus that people are being exposed to is different. The outcomes are all different".

"And yet throughout Europe we had lots of these little so-called expert committees saying: 'Oh God, you can't use it in the over-50s, oh God, you can't use it in the under-50s. You can't use it at all. Well, maybe you could use it if you're upside down, drinking a milkshake.' It was unbelievable."

Real-world data eventually proved that the vaccine worked very well in older people. But it also revealed a serious problem in a tiny minority of younger people. On 7 March, Austria suspended the use of a batch of the vaccine after a woman of 49 died and another aged 35 became seriously ill with blood disorders shortly after inoculation.

As Covid cases continued to surge, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said the benefits outweighed the risks, but launched an investigation.

Prof Marie Scully's first case was admitted to University College hospital, London, in the UK on the weekend of 6-7 March. A young, healthy woman

in her 30s had blood clots on the brain and low platelets. “It was most unusual,” said Scully, a consultant haematologist. “We use vaccines all our life. Why would the AZ vaccine suddenly cause this situation?”

But it did, the EMA and MHRA eventually ruled, albeit in only four in a million cases. It was enough for many European countries to restrict the vaccine’s use.

Russia wades in online



Russia was keen to promote its own Sputnik V vaccine. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The real-world problems were compounded by misinformation in the virtual world – seeded by pro-Russian state interests who had a vaccine of their own to promote.

Sputnik V was designed by the Gamaleya Research Institute, part of the health ministry and funded by the Russian Direct Investment Fund, a sovereign wealth fund, which is headed by Kirill Dmitriev.

Dmitriev christened the AstraZeneca product “the monkey vaccine” because it uses a chimpanzee virus as its delivery mechanism. Last October, memes,

videos and pictures of King Kong injecting a screaming woman and Boris Johnson as part of the cast of Planet of the Apes were posted from anonymous online accounts and went viral.

A report by the EU watchdog, the external action service, found that between December and April, the disinformation intensified. “Russia and China, in particular, continue to intensively promote their own state-produced vaccines around the world.”

It accused them of pursuing “a zero-sum game logic” designed to undermine trust in western-made vaccines, EU institutions and western vaccination strategies.

AstraZeneca was not the only target, but the catalogue of disasters provided Russian interests and their proxies with new opportunities to promote Sputnik V – and stoke social divisions. There are suggestions that Kremlin interests hoped to sow dissension across Europe, destabilising Germany and France in particular. Certainly, those behind Sputnik and RT, the Russian state television channel, have amplified the anti-vaccine and anti-mask voices in Europe and the US, gaining particular traction in France.

For the scientists at Oxford and AstraZeneca, seeking to make sense of all the troubles that have afflicted them, it feels personal.

Most critics and defenders of the vaccine agree on one thing: the developers, manufacturers and for that matter the British government should have come out fighting. Thinking they were saving the world, it didn’t occur to Oxford or AstraZeneca that they needed to be proactive.

They also agree that the world – particularly the developing world – needs this vaccine.

Dr Peter Hotez, co-director of the Texas Children’s Center for Vaccine Development, cited three issues that had gone badly wrong. “AstraZeneca is not a vaccine company. That’s probably one. Two, they’re trying to accelerate this in a public health emergency. Three, there is this rare complication, the cerebral thrombosis, happening in an environment of

intense anti-vaccine aggression. And you've now got reports from the Russian government trying to discredit their competitors' Covid vaccines.

“It's been a perfect storm ... They've got to figure out a way to communicate this to walk it back so we can get this fixed.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/26/the-oxford-vaccine-the-trials-and-tribulations-of-a-world-saving-jab>

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Russia

‘I don’t have a choice’: Russians scramble to get Covid vaccine amid new restrictions

With infections at highest since January, country is introducing curbs for non-vaccinated



A woman receives a shot of the EpiVacCorona vaccine in the village of Talovka, Kamyshin District, Russia. Photograph: Dmitry Rogulin/TASS

A woman receives a shot of the EpiVacCorona vaccine in the village of Talovka, Kamyshin District, Russia. Photograph: Dmitry Rogulin/TASS



[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Sat 26 Jun 2021 00.00 EDT

Russia has finally admitted it has a vaccination problem – but with an “explosion” of new cases driving the country’s daily toll to its highest since January, the question is whether that public realisation has come too late.

Just 11% of Russia’s 146 million population is fully vaccinated – whether due to [vaccine skepticism](#), doubts about [Sputnik](#) or other Russian-made vaccines, or “nihilism”, as a Kremlin spokesperson has suggested.

But with more than 20,000 new cases reported across Russia in the last two days, as well as tough new restrictions on those who have not received their jabs, lines at public vaccination centres are now stretching out the door.

At an emergency vaccination site in Moscow’s Metropolis mall, dozens of Russians were lined up on a recent morning for a shot of Sputnik.

“It’s three hours now, soon it will be four,” an attendant said as he ran among a mostly young crowd filling out forms with their medical data. I asked if it was always like this. “It’s just this week – just since Monday,” he replied.

What has changed are a series of strict new measures by Moscow and other cities that will target those who refuse to vaccinate. From Monday, Moscow cafes and restaurants will require vaccine QR codes for patrons to be seated. Hospitals will turn away patients seeking non-emergency surgeries. Public spaces, including outdoor playgrounds, have been closed. Government and service industries have been set a goal of vaccinating 60% of their employees.

“No, I don’t completely trust [the vaccine], but at this point I don’t believe that I have a choice,” said Anastasia Lavrentyeva, who works in human resources and also has a freelance event and training business for corporate clients. “It’s the vaccine or soon I won’t be able to work at all.” She hopes the harsh restrictions will be temporary, and that outdoor events will be allowed by the end of summer.

The Kremlin has denied that Russians are being forced to get their jobs. The new restrictions in Moscow were announced as [Putin flew to meet the US president, Joe Biden](#), last week; and the Russian president has said that getting the vaccine remains a personal choice. Putin, [who is regularly filmed shirtless](#), refused to release [photographs of him being vaccinated](#), despite the likelihood it would have boosted trust in the jobs.

But facing an onslaught of new cases driven by the highly contagious Delta variant, even the Kremlin has had to change its tone to provide back up for the regional leaders required to carry out the unpopular measures. Leaked videos of local hospitals overrun with coronavirus patients, or long ambulance queues, have returned after a months-long lull in which Russia claimed to have beaten back the disease.

“Overall, vaccination is indeed still voluntary,” said Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesperson. But he added: “If a Muscovite works in the service industry, they should get the vaccine. If they have decided not to get the vaccine, they should simply stop working in the service industry.”

The new requirements have reportedly boosted prices on Russia’s hidden market for vaccine certificates, where dealers on messaging apps claim they can provide not only doctored reports but can insert names directly into government registers of vaccinated patients. Similar services existed in the

past to provide fake university diplomas. The practice has now been adapted to the age of the pandemic.

Doctors see the coming weeks as critical in showing Russians that the vaccine drive is not being bungled and is being delivered efficiently and professionally.

“This is a big chance,” said a doctor at Moscow’s 62nd hospital, which has seen a boost in Russians seeking vaccinations this week. “We know it’s either [patients coming to] us or people finding a way around the restrictions, so our priority is to vaccinate as many people as are willing.”

[Why home-produced Covid vaccine hasn't helped India, Russia and China rollouts](#)

[Read more](#)

Asked why Russians had resisted getting Sputnik or the other Russian vaccines, CoviVac or EpiVacCorona, he smiled: “Sometimes we need a bit of a push.” Most of those surveyed by the Guardian at vaccination sites said they had been putting off getting vaccinated because they believed the threat from the disease in Moscow had receded.

A May [survey](#) by the independent Levada Centre reported that 62% of Russians said they were not ready to be vaccinated with Sputnik V, which was rolled out in December of last year and billed as “the first registered vaccine against Covid-19”.

Attention has been drawn to Russian anti-vax groups that have openly opposed all jabs, suggesting that the coronavirus epidemic is invented or spreading conspiracy theories that the vaccination drive is a cover for a more nefarious operation.

But more Russians appear to believe the vaccines have been rushed to market, or that the coronavirus epidemic is overblown. In the same Levada Centre survey, 55% of Russians said they were not particularly afraid of falling ill with the coronavirus.

Others have put off vaccinating, saying they are waiting to see what the long-term health side-effects were. A common refrain has been to “wait for the Chumakov vaccine”, which has received a PR-boost in part because it was produced in the laboratory named for a Soviet doctor who helped develop the oral polio vaccine in the 1950s.

“We should underline that there’s very little superstitious fear about the vaccine,” a researcher for Levada Centre told Sever Real, part of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. “It’s not the most important [factor] and the answer ‘I don’t trust any vaccines’ is that of a minority.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/26/i-dont-have-a-choice-russians-scramble-to-get-covid-vaccine-amid-new-restrictions>

[Coronavirus](#)

Covid infection rates have risen steeply in Scotland, ONS data reveals

Experts say next few weeks will be crucial in monitoring impact of Delta variant across Britain

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Members of the armed forces administer vaccinations at the vaccination centre at Ravenscraig regional sports facility in Motherwell, Scotland. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

Members of the armed forces administer vaccinations at the vaccination centre at Ravenscraig regional sports facility in Motherwell, Scotland. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

[Nicola Davis](#) *Science correspondent*
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 09.33 EDT

Covid infection levels have risen steeply in [Scotland](#) and experts say the next few weeks will be crucial in monitoring the impact of the Delta variant across the UK.

According to the [latest data](#) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) based on swabs collected from randomly selected households, an estimated one in 220 people in Scotland are thought to have had Covid last week – an increase from about one in 600 people in the week ending 12 June.

In [England](#) an estimated one in 440 people are thought to have had Covid in the week ending 19 June, up from about one in 520 people the week before.

The ONS data suggests infection levels have risen in the north-west and the north-east of England, and there are early signs of a rise in the east of England and the south-west.

Sarah Crofts, the head of analytical outputs for the Covid-19 Infection Survey, said the data showed increases in infections across Britain, most likely as a result of the Delta variant.

“Although the figures are still low compared to earlier in the year, the next few weeks will be crucial in monitoring the impact of the Delta variant on infection levels and the approaching end of restrictions,” she said.

According to [daily government figures](#), seven-day case rates for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly increased from 4.9 per 100,000 people on 3 June to 150.1 per 100,000 people on 19 June.

The latest estimate for [the R number in England](#) – the average number of people an infected person goes on to infect – is between 1.2 and 1.4, and the number of new infections is growing by between 3% and 5% a day. In the south-west, infections are growing between 6% and 11% a day. Owing to time lags in the data, these figures reflect the situation two to three weeks ago.

While Downing Street has denied that the recent G7 summit in Cornwall is to blame for the recent rise in cases, [others have said](#) the arrival of people linked to the event, as well as half-term visitors, could be among the factors at play.

Figures from [Public Health England](#) (PHE) show that to date in the UK there have been 111,157 confirmed and probable cases of the Delta variant, a rise of 35,204 – or 46% – since last week, with the variant now accounting for almost all new Covid cases. PHE said the latest variant counts could be an underestimate, as 12,000 samples had not been included due to a potential cross-contamination problem.

PHE said another variant, first documented in Peru and known as Lambda, had been designated as a variant under investigation (VUI). It is already classed as a variant of interest by the World [Health](#) Organization. So far, six cases have been found in the UK – four in London, one in the south-west and one in the West Midlands, and PHE said all were linked to overseas travel.

The variant has sparked interest due to its international spread and the presence of several potentially worrying mutations including L452Q, F490S and D614G, the latter of which is also present in the Delta variant, among others.

[Row over Scotland non-essential travel ban to Manchester escalates](#) [Read more](#)

According to [another report by PHE](#), of the 92,029 cases of the Delta variant from 1 February to 21 June, 82,458 were in people aged under 50, of whom 52,846 were unvaccinated. Of the 1,320 hospital admissions within that period, 902 were among under-50s, of whom 695 were unvaccinated.

The data supports findings that while two doses of the Covid jabs are [highly effective against hospitalisation and death](#), even with the Delta variant they do not offer 100% protection.

According to the figures for people who had received two doses of the jab, from 1 February to 21 June there were 190 hospital admissions, 163 of

which were in the over-50s, and 50 deaths, all of which were in this older age group.

One Spi-M member, who did not want to be named, said the vaccines were doing well at preventing symptomatic infection, but even among the vaccinated, proportionally more deaths would be expected among older people as they are more vulnerable to the disease.

Dr Adam Kucharski, of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and also a member of Spi-M, said the findings were not unexpected. “Obviously a small individual risk of hospitalisation can add up to a large number of admissions if epidemic grows big enough,” he said. “But I would say that these figures aren’t as concerning as they may seem at face value. If populations are highly vaccinated, we’d expect a higher proportion of cases to have been previously vaccinated because by definition, there aren’t as many non-vaccinated people around to be infected.”

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[Coronavirus](#)

PM said test and trace would be ‘like whistling in the dark’, says Cummings

Former adviser publishes contents of April 2020 email from Boris Johnson expressing concern over Matt Hancock’s plans for testing

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Johnson reportedly complained of ‘apps that don’t yet work’ and ‘above all no idea how to get new cases down to a manageable level or how long it will take’. Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

Johnson reportedly complained of ‘apps that don’t yet work’ and ‘above all no idea how to get new cases down to a manageable level or how long it will take’. Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

[Robert Booth](#) *Social affairs correspondent*

Fri 25 Jun 2021 14.28 EDT

Boris Johnson believed the national test-and-trace system was “like whistling in the dark” and that the UK was on course to achieve the “double distinction of being the European country with the most fatalities and the biggest economic hit”, he reportedly told [Dominic Cummings](#) at the height of the pandemic’s first wave.

The prime minister allegedly expressed his view in an email to his closest adviser in April 2020 amid concern in Downing Street over serious shortcomings in plans for mass testing by Matt Hancock’s Department of Health and Social Care.

Publishing what he said were Johnson’s words, Cummings said the prime minister confided that he feared the proposed system to track down Covid cases and stop transmission was like “legions of imaginary Clouseaus [fictional French detectives] and no plan to hire them”.

Johnson reportedly complained of “apps that don’t yet work” and “above all no idea how to get new cases down to a manageable level or how long it will take ... by which time [the] UK may have [the] secured double distinction of being the European country with the most fatalities and the biggest economic hit”. He concluded: “We GOTTA turn it round.”

The email, sent on 26 April 2020, was published on Friday by Cummings in a new blogpost entitled: “More evidence on how the PM’s & Hancock’s negligence killed people.”

His gloomy assessment contrasted strongly with the prime minister’s public statement the next day that “if this virus were a physical assailant, an unexpected and invisible mugger ... then this is the moment when we have begun together to wrestle it to the floor”.

Cummings also revealed that he warned Johnson the government was “negligently killing” care home residents in the first wave of pandemic due to a failure by Hancock’s department to organise Covid testing.

Cummings told the prime minister on 3 May 2020 by WhatsApp: “these goddam plans should already exists ... but I don’t think they do” and that “at

the moment I think we are negligently killing the most vulnerable who we're supposed to be shielding and I am extremely worried about it".

At the time of the warning there was desperation in care homes where more than 2,000 residents in England and Wales were still dying from Covid each week. Care operators [warned](#) on 5 May that more than three-quarters of care staff were not being tested despite a promise by Hancock three weeks earlier that there was capacity for all of them.

"He cannot claim 'nobody told me'," said Cummings in the [blogpost](#). The revelations came as Downing Street [gave its backing](#) to Hancock after he apologised for breaking social distancing guidelines when he kissed a colleague last month.

A few days after Cummings' warning about care home deaths, the Guardian [reported](#) care operators' anger that testing was "a complete system failure" even though Hancock had promised tests for all care residents from 28 April. With care staff unable to detect who had the virus, deaths of care home residents from the virus didn't drop below 1,000 until the end of the month.

Care operators responded to the revelations by noting that weeks later Johnson publicly [blamed care operators](#) for deaths, saying "too many care homes didn't really follow the procedures in the way that they could have".

"If these messages are accurate, it's clear that the PM was aware of the risk to vulnerable people due to a lack of testing capacity," said Nadra Ahmed, the executive chairman of the National Care Association, who recalled that it had been impossible to know who had the virus as testing was taking more than 10 days in some cases. "The tragedy of this is the potential that lives were lost unnecessarily because these problems weren't recognised or rectified."

According to his blog, Cummings told the PM on 7 May 2020 that Hancock was "unfit for this job" and that him staying in place was "killing god knows how many", although he didn't provide any documentary evidence to support that.

He said that after returning from illness with Covid on 13 April, the following couple of weeks of meetings with Hancock left “many people” concluding that on testing in care homes, “operational delivery was terrible” and “we were therefore killing people we claimed to be shielding”.

“The PM agreed that Hancock’s failures were a catastrophe but refused to fire him,” Cummings claimed.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/25/pm-said-test-and-trace-would-be-like-whistling-in-the-dark-says-cummings>

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Rivalry? England v Germany is more like a tale of unrequited love

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



When the two football teams meet on Tuesday, there will be 55 years of hurt on one side – and heartbreak on the other



England's World Cup victory over West Germany at Wembley in 1966: 'For decades, Germans accepted that their affection was not wholly reciprocated, but they understood it.' Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

England's World Cup victory over West Germany at Wembley in 1966: 'For decades, Germans accepted that their affection was not wholly reciprocated, but they understood it.' Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Fri 25 Jun 2021 11.46 EDT

On that fabled day in 1966, when [England](#) played West Germany at Wembley stadium, there was at least one German who desperately wanted his team to lose. Grim-faced, the Federal Republic's ambassador to London gathered his staff and told them: "If we win, all our work here will have been in vain."

He feared that for England to lose a World Cup final at home to the old enemy would reopen a wound that the diplomats had spent 20 years trying to heal. So when the BBC's Kenneth Wolstenholme uttered the words, "[They think it's all over](#). It is now!", the entire embassy went to the nearest pub and "drank itself senseless out of sheer relief".

That story was [recounted by the daughter](#) of one of those diplomats soon after we learned that next Tuesday will bring the two foes together yet again.

It was a useful reminder that international football is never just about football. When it comes to the recurring contests between England and Germany, it's a truism that these games were long seen, at least by the English, as reruns of the two epic conflicts of the last century. Rarely forgotten is the Daily Mirror's "[Achtung! Surrender](#)" front page to herald the Wembley semi-final of 1996. Those attitudes were outdated even then; but lest you thought they were buried, note the durable chant, "Two world wars and one World Cup", to which Nigel Farage lent an [approving nod](#) this very week.

I'd always suspected there was something unbalanced in the English attitude to all this, something unrequited. Given that Germany's footballing record is so much greater than ours – they've won the World Cup four times, England just the once – it is surely an act of delusional self-flattery for England to reckon itself a rival. BMW didn't lose sleep over the Morris Minor, so why would [Germany](#) care about England? Isn't imagining that we are locked in a unique footballing feud with [Germany](#) as self-regarding and needy as believing we have a "special relationship" with the US?

Maybe not. The truth, it turns out, is more complicated – and rather more poignant.

"This is as huge for Germany as for England," says Annette Dittert, the London bureau chief for the ARD TV network. The "lost final" – and what Germans see as the stolen World Cup of 1966 thanks to a still-disputed goal – remains an enduring myth in the German imagination. Partly because it was a landmark moment in what Dittert calls "the long restart" of Germany's relations with its neighbours after 1945; partly because Germans, like the English themselves, regard England as "the motherland of football". The German tabloids still feast more eagerly on a contest against England than against any other opponent, recognising a nation as consumed with the game as they are. That Tuesday's match is at Wembley – again – has made the anticipation all the more intense.

Much of this is purely [about football](#) and the bond of mutual respect that can be forged between two teams that have so often, if lopsidedly, been each other's nemesis. Even if the results have tended to go Germany's way, it's been a closer contest than we might think. Before 1966, Germany had never

beaten England; it was only afterwards that they won and won. “It’s been a rivalry of two halves,” says Sunder Katwala, the director of the British Future thinktank. For him, the legendary penalty shootouts of 1990 and 1996 have lodged in our national psyche in part because England went into those games expecting to lose, yet surprised everyone by playing on equal terms with the mighty Germans. Far from glorying in failure, he says, we take pride in how close we came.

But if there is an unrequitedness in this relationship, it might be in an unexpected direction – with the Germans more interested in us than we are in them. Two years ago the House of History museum in Bonn staged an exhibition, [Very British](#), on what it called the “special relationship” between the two countries (and perhaps not always making the distinctions between “British” and “English” that Wales and Scotland fans might insist on). It was a big hit, Germans lapping up a British pop culture – from the Beatles to Harry Potter – that they have adored for decades.

The organisers were not surprised by its success. English is compulsory in German schools; they live in a country where [After Eight mints](#) were sold as the epitome of “that refined English style”. The war is not outside that, but part of it. The museum’s vice-president, Prof Harald Biermann, told me that very rapidly after 1945 the British were seen less as occupiers than as “protectors” against the Soviet threat. (That said, the exhibition did not flourish in Leipzig: perhaps the old East Germany, with direct memories of the RAF bombing of Dresden and the cold war against the west, has rather less fondness for England or Britain.) Even the allied victory can be integrated into this story, with today’s Germans accepting that total defeat was necessary for the country’s transformation. That view casts Britons less as enemies than as liberators.

For decades, Germans accepted that their affection was not wholly reciprocated, but they understood it. And then, says, Biermann, “You left us.” The Germans were shocked by Brexit. “They took it personally,” says Katwala, viewing it as a rejection of a postwar project that the two countries had shared. Post-referendum polls show Germany [suddenly cooler](#) than most European countries towards Britain and markedly [less enthusiastic](#) for us than we are for them. Boris Johnson is seen as a nationalist, albeit of an

eccentric hue, in a country that still fears the demons that nationalism can unleash.

It means that, while England may go into next week's game seeing themselves as perennial underdogs trying to end 55 years of hurt, the fans on the other side have heartbreak of their own to heal. On Tuesday, that heartbreak's coming home.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist

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Life and style

People have told me I'm on the wrong side of history, but I still want to be their friend

[Hadley Freeman](#)



I don't drop people I disagree with from my life – but for many liberals, differences of opinion have become unacceptable



Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: 'People demand you denounce friends for flimsy reasons in order to remain a member of the chosen puritan class.'

Photograph: Stephane Cardinale/Corbis via Getty Images

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: 'People demand you denounce friends for flimsy reasons in order to remain a member of the chosen puritan class.'

Photograph: Stephane Cardinale/Corbis via Getty Images

Sat 26 Jun 2021 04.00 EDT

It's rare to see a woman really let her anger glitter, unhindered by any fear of accusations of hysteria or worse, so what a blast of delicious fire [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#) has given us. Her essay [It Is Obscene](#), published online last week, is ostensibly about two former students of hers who denounced her on social media after she gave [an interview](#) to Channel 4 in 2017 in which, when asked if she thought trans women were women, Adichie made the tautological but now highly controversial reply, "Trans women are trans women." Instead of just calling her, one of Adichie's students "went on social media to put on a public performance," she wrote. The other tweeted that people should "pick up machetes to protect us from transphobes like Adichie", and still assumed Adichie would endorse her book.

Really, the essay is about a strong current in modern culture. “There are many social media-savvy people who are choking on sanctimony and lacking in compassion... People who demand that you denounce your friends for flimsy reasons in order to remain a member of the chosen puritan class,” Adichie writes.

Anyone who has been on social media in the past decade has seen what Adichie is describing. Three years ago, [I wrote](#) about the fondness of a certain kind of man to police the way women talk about their lives, telling them they’re being exclusionary of trans women if they mention female biology. This so outraged someone I knew that they lost the ability to tell me directly and instead tweeted to their followers that, despite being my “friend”, they disagreed with what I wrote. Fair enough, but when someone feels it is more productive to tell the world how they feel about something you said rather than just tell you, it feels less like an honest disagreement and more like someone burnishing their own brand.

Adichie describes this performative rush towards public proof of purity as “American feminism”, and I’ve been thinking a lot about American puritanism recently. The US was originally colonised by the pilgrims, a group of people who believed Europe was too louche for their pure Calvinist ways, and so headed west. America thinks of itself as a very free country, and in many ways it is, but it has always maintained this strong strand of purer-than-thou-ism. You can see it in everything from American exceptionalism (“We’re better than all other countries!”) to Gwyneth Paltrow’s absurdly successful lifestyle website Goop, with its “clean” eating and “clean” cosmetics (“I’m cleaner than everyone!”).

It has become almost the norm in US publishing houses for staff to protest against books because they believe the author to be morally impure and this offends them, from [Woody Allen](#) to [Mike Pence](#). This demand for purity has now extended to [fictional characters](#). Earlier this month, author [Elin Hilderbrand apologised](#) after some readers objected to one of her teenage characters making a joke about Anne Frank, and she promised to remove it from future editions of her novel. Similarly, the novelist Casey McQuiston apologised and removed a character’s comment about Israel after a Twitter user complained it “normalized” the Palestinian occupation.

[There's nothing guilty about the pleasure I get from TV shows by women, for women | Hadley Freeman](#)

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I'm of the old-fashioned belief that no legal belief should be suppressed, however much I may disagree with it, because the public can and should make their own choices. Donald Trump is allegedly having trouble finding [a publisher for his book](#), partly, [one literary agent told Politico](#), because "any editor bold enough to acquire the Trump memoir is looking at a factchecking nightmare, an exodus of other authors and a staff uprising." The factchecking, granted, would be onerous, but not to publish a memoir by a former president, especially one as historic as Trump, would be absurd. People talk a lot these days about the fear of being on the wrong side of history – a concern that can only be hypothesised – but pretending history didn't happen is never the right side of anything.

I know some people think I'm on the wrong side of history because I believe my gender is a feeling and my biology is a fact. This is known as a gender-critical belief and it is [protected under the Equality Act](#). Nonetheless, I've lost at least a dozen friends over this – mainly from the US, but also in the UK, friends who have told me my beliefs are transphobic, even when I tell them that I support everyone's right to live the way they want. It's always heartbreaking, but also bewildering. Most of us are in the same political tribe, so when did differences of opinion become so unacceptable to so many liberals and lefties? Many of my friends supported Jeremy Corbyn, and even though I found his frequent proximity to antisemites truly upsetting, I didn't drop them from my life. I'm old enough to know there's a difference between denouncing bigotry and demanding everyone march in lockstep with you. If you're more interested in performing your own purity than understanding people's plurality, you're not looking at progress, you're looking into a mirror.

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[Opinion](#) **Work & careers**

The pandemic was meant to change work, but what have we got so far? Free pizza

[Josie Cox](#)

The corporate world is turning to novelty perks to get us back to the office in an attempt to postpone the moment of reckoning



Commuters in London. Photograph: Johnny Greig/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Commuters in London. Photograph: Johnny Greig/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Sat 26 Jun 2021 04.00 EDT

Earlier this month in lower Manhattan's financial district, food carts lined what is otherwise a usually sterile stretch of pavement. Vendors doled out

free burritos and ice cream to the mingling sun-kissed bankers – folks who had begrudgingly traipsed back to their physical desks after a year of remote working, following the [stern orders of moneyed overlords](#).

Free lunch is entry-level when it comes to corporate perks, a trusted staple many businesses have fallen back on as a means of convincing workers to resume their pre-pandemic working habits and arduous commutes.

Elsewhere, on both sides of the Atlantic, some companies have demonstrated a little more creativity. From [Peloton bikes](#) to house-cleaning vouchers and meditative gong baths, the name of the game seems to be to conjure up the wackiest perk possible, to keep staff – forced to upend their working habits for the second time in two years – sweet. Companies, [most recently the dating app Bumble](#), have given workers paid time off as a thank you for their commitment and resilience during the past 15 or so months, and no doubt as a means of retaining the smartest minds amid headlines warning of [escalating talent wars](#) due to labour shortages.

But as we settle back into some sort of routine, having lived through an entirely traumatic period of pain, anxiety and loss, extra holiday, fair-to-middling Mexican food and even gong baths aren't going to cut it. The labour force in the UK and elsewhere is in crisis. Wealth inequality is staggering and getting worse by the minute. In January, researchers at the Resolution Foundation thinktank [published a report](#) showing that almost a quarter of all household wealth in the UK is held by the richest 1% of the population.

More recently, Credit Suisse [found](#) that more than [5 million people](#) became millionaires across the world in 2020. The tally of people plunged into poverty and destitution, meanwhile, is still rising. Minorities are the [worst off](#).

Experts have warned that the pandemic has wiped out years of [progress towards a more gender-equal](#) labour market. Constrained by limited childcare options, many women have left certain industries, such as finance, and even those who have stayed in jobs have never been more anxious and stressed.

Hybrid working, hailed by some as the perfect post-pandemic set-up, will quite feasibly create a two-tier workforce in which those who are physically present –predominantly able-bodied men who are not primary carers – are professionally favoured over their remote counterparts: women, disabled people and those with caring duties. Even the prospect of this trend materialising should keep every single business leader up at night and bathed in cold sweat.

So no, free sandwiches won't do the trick. Companies and their leaders have the immense privilege of being in a position in which they can use this moment in history – the pandemic pause after decades of great acceleration – to recalibrate and reconsider what being responsible truly means.

A real perk would be to alleviate financial worries for workers whose spouses lost their jobs on account of the pandemic. A real perk would be free on-site childcare for those who need to be back in their physical office full-time. A real perk would be knowing that taking advantage of a hybrid work model won't adversely impact your chances of getting promoted, winning a pay rise or generally being respected just as much as any physically present co-worker.

As we prepare to rethink how work actually works, businesses have a duty to understand, acknowledge and address the underlying systemic failings of the business world, not just paper over them with cheap headline-grabbing ping-pong tables , yoga classes and cold beer on tap.

Raising dividends for shareholders and executing massive stock buy-back programmes (in order to prop up their own stock prices) at a time when employees are worrying about how to stay physically healthy and mentally sane is entirely crass and ethically tone deaf.

And yet, so far this year, the volume of shares bought back by some of the world's biggest companies [is running at a record high](#) – up to mid-June, \$567bn, or more than £400bn, had been splashed by corporations. That's money that could have been channelled into much-needed pay rises. It could have averted the need for businesses to employ merciless “[fire-and-rehire](#)” tactics. Alternatively, the cash could have been spent on research and development, particularly in the case of healthcare companies, or it could

have been used to offer equity to more workers, beyond executives. At least that way the seemingly indelible culture of shareholder primacy that still permeates so many businesses could actually be a positive force for employees, because they, too, would be shareholders.

The [ESG hype](#), the popular corporate pledge to consider economic, social and governance factors when making business decisions, has been around for long enough for workers and consumers to hold those business people to account who parrot the empty claims enshrined in their corporate strategy.

In the decades to come, it's unlikely that most of us will witness another moment of such severe reckoning, a period of such extreme forced experimentation. Now is the time to capitalise on that opportunity, to rethink what an employee benefit really means and to understand what purpose it should truly serve.

- Josie Cox is a journalist and broadcaster specialising in business, finance and gender equality

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[Opinion](#)**Matt Hancock**

Matt Hancock, the one-time sex cop now busted for a dodgy clinch

[Marina Hyde](#)



The health secretary once described lockdown-breaking hookups as ‘a matter for the police’. Will he hand himself in?



‘If Hancock does end up being resigned for this, it would fit with the general twilight mood in the UK’s national story.’ Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

‘If Hancock does end up being resigned for this, it would fit with the general twilight mood in the UK’s national story.’ Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Fri 25 Jun 2021 09.27 EDT

Sorry, but the only thing I want to see Matt Hancock doing against the back of his office door is sliding down it with his head in his hands. But he can probably bank on not being sacked by Boris Johnson for [having an affair](#). It would be like being sacked by Stalin for being slightly arsey to work with.

Even so, Hancock will be glad that the [British Antarctic Territory](#) has been added to the green list, just as he’s been added to the shit list. The South Pole suddenly looks well worth packing his bags for. Temperatures are currently minus 87 but feel like minus 108, making it considerably less frosty than any of Matt’s current climes.

That said, if Hancock does end up being resigned for this, it would fit with the general twilight mood in the UK’s national story. Nothing says “country that’s going to make a massive success of itself” like a guy getting away with contributing to tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths but having to quit for a knee-trembler. It’s like getting Al Capone for snogging.

So, then, to the health secretary's "[steamy clinch](#)" with Gina Coladangelo, the lobbyist and long-term friend he took on as an aide last year (though initially did not declare it), and who was subsequently given a [paid non-executive directorship](#) at the Department of Health. Footage of this has somehow found its way from Hancock's office security cameras to the [front page of the Sun](#), in a WORLD EXCLUSIVE that feels like a major bollock-drop for the newsdesk of the [Matt Hancock app](#). Guys ... what happened?

Quite how the paper obtained the source material one can only speculate, though I'm suddenly reminded of a quote last April from a Downing Street official, who remarked [to the Sunday Times](#): "There is not much love for Matt Handjob here." Nor in the Department of Health, perhaps.

In some ways, the only thing you have to remember about Hancock – apart from the app and [the parkour](#) and the [crying on telly](#) – is that when Prof Neil Ferguson was discovered to have broken lockdown rules in the conduct of a relationship, Hancock [went on TV to fume](#): "You can imagine what my views are. It's a matter for the police." So, yes – a shame to see sex cop Matt Hancock busted for sex crimes. But a reminder that cancel culture always devours its children.

Anyway. To the many, many, many sentences your 2019 self would not have understood, do please add: "BUT THIS WAS TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE BAN ON HUGGING WAS LIFTED!" Absolutely devastating to think that a full 10 days *after* The Clinch occurred, Hancock went on telly specifically to warn people thinking of hugging a loved one that they "should do it carefully". Turns out we could have hugged people really hard, with tongues. Unless they were our relatives, I think?

"I'm really looking forward to hugging you as well, Dad," Hancock smiled into the camera [in that same interview](#). "But we'll probably do it outside and keep the ventilation going. Hands, face and space." Honestly, did you ever? How can I possibly trust a politician to lecture me on how to cuddle after this?

Back to the present day, though, and an early statement from another of the health secretary's aides – disguised as an unnamed "friend" of Matt Hancock – would only say of the sensational revelation that "no rules have been

broken”. Hancock himself has since said he accepts “that I breached the social distancing guidance”, which is one way of putting it; while this morning, he had his [honour defended by Grant Shapps](#). Which doesn’t exactly feel like the Kitemark. Arguably the only way this story could now be more dignified is if a “friend” suggested that the health secretary had – out of an abundance of caution – used a tongue condom.

As for the media maelstrom, I know a lot of your tears might struggle to liquefy, but we can at least remark mildly on quite what a category-five shocker Hancock is currently having. He’s being serially stalked by blog-to-kill sniper Dominic Cummings, who released WhatsApp messages from last year in which the prime minister is shown calling Hancock both “hopeless” and “fucking useless”. There followed a somewhat excruciating mention in dispatches from the Queen herself on Wednesday. “I’ve just been talking to your secretary of state for health,” Her Majesty was filmed [saying to Boris Johnson](#). “Poor man.”

And now all ... this. As suboptimal career patches go, this is the crap UK version of the one when news of Bill Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky broke. The very next day, the colonel charged with carrying the “nuclear football” briefcase asked the president where the codes to open it were, and Clinton was forced to admit [he’d lost them months ago](#). Tough week. Worse for Hillary and Mrs Hancock though, obviously.

According to his Downing Street spokesman, [Boris Johnson](#) considers the matter of his secretary of state for health breaking his own health advice closed, and has nothing more to add. Something for separated families to fume over as they read about Hancock pushing hard to delay double-jabbed people being able to treat amber countries as green. Meanwhile, I would say that however much the pictures may be amusing some, they probably ought to investigate the CCTV leak as a matter of urgency. It’s obviously not great that footage from inside government ministries is being given or sold to third parties.

As for Hancock, I read this morning that his job is now “hanging by a thread”. Luckily for him, that thread will probably turn out to be made of Spider-Man’s super-strength web fluid. After all, it’s difficult to escape the

suspicion that at some absolutely elemental level, this is what Johnson wants from his cabinet.

It's not just that the prime minister has had a lifelong hard-on for Ancient Times, where the Greek and Roman gods were grotesquely fallible and morally compromised, and where he could quite imagine a creature of his various infirmities and appetites sitting atop Mount Olympus. No, we can only conclude that Johnson wants [Matt Hancock](#) and Gavin Williamson and so on to be bad at their jobs, because it provides cover for his own professional inadequacies.

Why else would you keep someone you clearly kept describing as “[fucking useless](#)” as your actual health secretary at the time of an era-shattering pandemic? Why else would you keep someone who constantly and demonstrably fails children and young people as your education secretary at a time when they so desperately deserve better?

The answer, alas, is that by remaining in place, guys like them serve as useful human shields. And I don't see why it shouldn't be the same with these sorts of scandals. Johnson must be only too happy to be surrounded by the erring and the compromised, because now he has shag cover too.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

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[Guardian Opinion cartoon](#)
[George Osborne](#)

Martin Rowson: sordid appointments – cartoon

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2021.06.26 - Around the world

- ['Dragon man' Massive human head found in Chinese well forces scientists to rethink evolution](#)
- [Mali Car bomb injures 13 UN peacekeepers](#)
- [Miami building collapse Death toll rises to four with more than 150 unaccounted for](#)
- ['The truth is still out there' Internet shrugs at Pentagon's UFO findings](#)
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Massive human head in Chinese well forces scientists to rethink evolution

‘Dragon man’ skull reveals new branch of family tree more closely related to modern humans than Neanderthals



Chinese researchers have called the skull, found in Harbin in the north, *Homo longi*, or ‘Dragon man’, but other experts are more cautious about naming a new species. Photograph: Wei Gao

Chinese researchers have called the skull, found in Harbin in the north, *Homo longi*, or ‘Dragon man’, but other experts are more cautious about naming a new species. Photograph: Wei Gao

[Ian Sample](#) *Science editor*
[@iansample](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 11.00 EDT

The discovery of a huge fossilised skull that was wrapped up and hidden in a Chinese well nearly 90 years ago has forced scientists to rewrite the story of human evolution.

Analysis of the remains has revealed a new branch of the human family tree that points to a previously unknown sister group more closely related to modern humans than the Neanderthals.

The extraordinary fossil has been named a new human species, *Homo longi* or “Dragon man”, by Chinese researchers, although other experts are more cautious about the designation.

“I think this is one of the most important finds of the past 50 years,” said Prof Chris Stringer, research leader at the Natural History Museum in London, who worked on the project. “It’s a wonderfully preserved fossil.”

The skull appears to have a remarkable backstory. According to the researchers, it was originally found in 1933 by Chinese labourers building a bridge over the Songhua River in Harbin, in China’s northernmost province, Heilongjiang, during the Japanese occupation. To keep the skull from falling into Japanese hands it was wrapped and hidden in an abandoned well, resurfacing only in 2018 after the man who hid it told his grandson about it shortly before he died.



‘Dragon man’ in his habitat. Photograph: Chuang Zhao

An international team led by Prof Qiang Ji at the Hebei Geo University in China drew on geochemical techniques to narrow down when the skull came to rest in Harbin, dating the bones to at least 146,000 years old. The skull has a unique combination of primitive and more modern features, with the face, in particular, more closely resembling *Homo sapiens*. One huge molar remains.

The skull, which is 23cm long and more than 15cm wide, is substantially larger than a modern human’s and has ample room, at 1,420ml, for a modern human brain. Beneath the thick brow ridge, the face has large square eye sockets, but is delicate despite its size. “This guy had a huge head,” said Stringer.

The researchers believe the skull belonged to a male, about 50 years old, who would have been an impressive physical specimen. His wide, bulbous nose allowed him to breathe huge volumes of air, indicating a high-energy lifestyle, while sheer size would have helped him withstand the brutally cold winters in the region. “*Homo longi* is heavily built, very robust,” said Prof Xijun Ni, a paleoanthropologist at Hebei. “It is hard to estimate the height, but the massive head should match a height higher than the average of modern humans.”

To work out where the Harbin individual fitted into human history, the scientists fed measurements from the fossil and 95 other skulls into software that compiled the most likely family tree. To their surprise, the Harbin skull and a handful of others from China formed a new branch closer to modern humans than Neanderthals.

The Chinese researchers believe the Harbin skull is distinct enough to make it a new species, but Stringer is not convinced. He believes it is similar to another found in Dali county in China in 1978.

“I prefer to call it *Homo daliensis*, but it’s not a big deal,” he said. “The important thing is the third lineage of later humans that are separate from Neanderthals and separate from *Homo sapiens*.” Details are [published in three papers](#) in The Innovation.

Whatever the name, one possibility is that the Harbin skull is Denisovan, a [mysterious group of extinct humans](#) known largely from DNA and bone fragments recovered from Siberia. “Certainly this specimen could be Denisovan but we have to be cautious. What we need is much more complete skeletal material of the Denisovans alongside DNA,” Stringer said.

00:21

'Dragon Man': reconstruction shows skull of humans' closest cousin – video

Prof John Hawks, a paleoanthropologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said the idea of a new lineage of humans was “a provocative claim”, because skulls can look similar even among distant relatives. The skull being Denisovan was a good hypothesis, he added, though he was less keen on a new species name. “I think it’s a bad moment in science to be naming new species among these large-brained humans that all interbred with each other,” he said. “What we are repeatedly finding is that the differences in looks didn’t mean much to these ancient people when it comes to breeding.”

Mark Maslin, a professor of earth system science at UCL and the author of [The Cradle of Humanity](#), said: “The beautifully preserved Chinese Harbin archaic human skull adds even more evidence that human evolution was not a simple evolutionary tree but a dense intertwined bush. We now know that there were as many as 10 different species of hominins at the same time as our own species emerged.

“Genetic analysis shows that these species interacted and interbred – our own genetics contain the legacy of many of these ghost species. But what is a sobering thought, is that despite all this diversity, a new version of Homo sapiens emerged from Africa about 60,000 years ago which clearly out-competed, out-bred, and even out-fought these other closely related species, causing their extinction. It is only by painstaking searching and analysis of their fossils, such as the Harbin skull, do we know of their existence.”

[Mali](#)

Car bomb injures 13 UN peacekeepers in Mali

Attack occurs in Gao region where insurgents linked to al-Qaida and Islamic State are active



A German soldier from the UN mission in Mali, where a car bomb has wounded 13 peacekeepers. Photograph: SEYLOU/AFP/Getty Images

A German soldier from the UN mission in Mali, where a car bomb has wounded 13 peacekeepers. Photograph: SEYLOU/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Fri 25 Jun 2021 21.31 EDT

Thirteen UN peacekeepers have been wounded in northern [Mali](#) by a car bomb, the UN mission said, while Mali's army said six of its soldiers were killed in a separate attack in the centre of the country.

The attack on Friday in the north targeted a temporary base set up by the peacekeepers near the village of Ichagara in the Gao region, where Islamist insurgents linked to al-Qaida and Islamic State are active.

[Isis-linked groups open up new fronts across sub-Saharan Africa](#)
[Read more](#)

A UN mission spokesperson said 12 of the wounded were German and one was Belgian. The mission had earlier said that 15 peacekeepers were wounded but revised that number downward.

Three of the German soldiers were severely wounded, defence minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said in a statement. Two of them are in a stable condition and the third is still in surgery, she said.

At least six Malian soldiers were killed and one wounded in a separate attack in Boni in the neighbouring region of Mopti, the army said in a statement. It provided no further details.

Armed attacks by Islamist militants and other groups are rampant across vast swathes of Mali and its neighbours Burkina Faso and Niger, despite the presence of the peacekeepers and thousands of other international troops in the region.

The UN mission in Mali has deployed over 13,000 soldiers to contain violence by armed groups in the north and centre of the West African nation.

The UN has recorded about 230 fatalities since 2013, making it the deadliest of its more than a dozen peacekeeping missions.

Germany contributes up to 1,100 troops the UN mission in Mali. Most of them are based in Gao.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/26/car-bomb-injures-13-un-peacekeepers-in-mali>

[Miami condo collapse](#)

Miami condo collapse: death toll rises to four and more than 150 unaccounted for

- Biden releases federal funds after 12-storey building collapsed
- Rescue crews hampered overnight by heavy rain and lightning

01:42

'I'm not losing hope': loved ones await news of people missing in Miami building collapse – video

[Richard Luscombe](#) in Miami

[@richlusc](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 16.20 EDT

Rescue workers were on Friday preparing for a second night sifting the wreckage of a collapsed south [Florida](#) condominium block, as authorities raised the known death toll to four and announced a further 159 people whose whereabouts remain unknown.

[Miami building collapse: rescue operation under way – in pictures](#)

[Read more](#)

A painstaking search of the rubble of the Champlain Towers South building, by crews using sonar, sniffer dogs and specialist machinery, was hampered by summer thunderstorms common to the [Miami](#) area.

Relatives of those missing waited desperately at a community center in the tiny town of Surfside, on Florida's Atlantic coast, where the 12-storey condo building came crashing down in the early hours of Thursday.

“This has been an extraordinary day and a half,” Daniella Levine Cava, mayor of Miami-Dade county, said at an afternoon press conference.

“Our hearts are with our first responders who have been going in, desperately seeking people, motivated to find them, hopeful that they will find them and confident that their efforts will pay off.

“And to the families who are suffering and waiting and wondering, wanting news of their loved ones, our hearts are with you.”

She said 127 people had been accounted for, and the figure of 159 was for people “identified as being possibly on the site”.

Crews worked in shifts of 15 minutes through the night and into the daylight hours, delayed by thunderstorms and a series of fires that broke out in the 30ft pile of wreckage from the sudden collapse and destruction of about half of the building’s 130 apartments.

00:33

Video shows collapse of Miami-area condo building

Early on Friday, officials announced that the death toll had reached four and warned it was likely to climb far higher. The first identified victim was named as Stacie Fang, whose 15-year-old son was pulled alive from the debris on Thursday.

Joe Biden, who signed an emergency declaration for the area on Friday morning, freeing up federal funding and resources, sent condolences from the White House.

“It’s a tough, tough time,” the president said at an event to sign a bill designating a national memorial at the scene of another Florida tragedy, the [2016 Pulse nightclub massacre](#).

“There’s so many people waiting. Are they alive, will they be, what will happen? So our heart goes out to them.

“I promise you, the administration and Congress will do everything possible to be of assistance now and after this occurs, after they decide exactly what the state of play is.”



Search and rescue workers go through rubble hoping to detect any sounds coming from survivors. Photograph: Lynne Sladky/AP

Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor, spoke at the afternoon briefing and called for a prompt investigation.

“We need a definitive explanation for how this could have happened,” he said. “That’s an explanation that needs to be an accurate explanation, it’s an explanation that we don’t want to get wrong. At the same time I do think it’s important that it’s timely because you have a lot of families here that lost loved ones, you have other folks who were able to get out safely, but then lost their homes.”



A couple hugs near the scene of the collapse in Surfside. Photograph: Eva Marie Uzcategui/AFP/Getty Images

The Biden administration announced that six scientists and engineers were being sent from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), an agency set up after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center towers in New York to look into structural failures, building codes and emergency responses to such disasters.

Miami-Dade fire rescue department structural engineers were also advising rescue workers

Raide Jadallah, an assistant Miami-Dade fire chief, said that while listening devices placed on and in the wreckage had picked up no voices, they had detected possible banging, giving rescuers hope some remained alive beneath the rubble. Rescuers were tunneling into the wreckage from below, going through the building's underground parking garage.

“We are listening for sounds, not specifically human sounds, it could be tapping, it could be steel kind of twisting, it could be some of the debris kind of raining down,” Jadallah said.



Flowers line a fence near the collapsed building. Photograph: Lynne Sladky/AP

“We have heavy machinery on scene to start pulling some of the superficial metal from above, as we start looking for additional voids from above.”

Levine Cava acknowledged the danger to the rescue workers.

“This work is being done at extreme risk to these individuals, debris is falling on them as they do their work,” she said.

“We have structural engineers on site to assure that they will not be injured, but they are proceeding because they are so motivated. They have to be pulled off the shift.”

Traumatized families huddled together at the Surfside reunification center, some increasingly frustrated by a lack of information. Relatives of the missing were asked to give DNA samples and provide details of tattoos or other possible identifying features.

The mayor promised better communication.



Emergency crews continue search and rescue operations. Photograph: Octavio Jones/Reuters

“We are providing briefings to the waiting families every four hours, they are getting detailed descriptions of the operation so they can really understand what’s at stake, and how critical it is that we proceed cautiously and that they have patience,” Levine Cava said.

Brian Logan, regional disaster officer for the Red Cross, said his agency was helping displaced families with immediate needs, including hotel accommodation and supplies. He said teams of counsellors were joining aid workers at the scene.

“We’re bringing in trained experts that have dealt with this type of situation from across the country because we want to make sure we’re truly providing the necessary support for not only those directly or indirectly impacted, but the community at large,” he said.

“This is a difficult time for everybody, whether you’re here locally or seeing these images 3,000 miles away. Take time for yourself.”

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US news

‘The truth is still out there’: internet shrugs at Pentagon’s UFO findings

Eagerly anticipated document lands with a thud as most incidents remain unexplained



The report was only able to explain one citing with a high degree of confidence. Photograph: KTSDESIGN/Science Photo Library/Getty Images/Science Photo Library RF

The report was only able to explain one citing with a high degree of confidence. Photograph: KTSDESIGN/Science Photo Library/Getty Images/Science Photo Library RF

[Gabrielle Canon](#)

[@GabrielleCanon](#)

Fri 25 Jun 2021 20.50 EDT

It was an afternoon of much anticipation and excitement – followed by the saddest trombone sound echoing across the internet.

The [long-awaited report](#) from US intelligence officials on unidentified flying objects dropped Friday afternoon, marking one of the first times the US government officially weighed in on strange sightings in the sky. Their big reveal, however, was seen by many as more of a shrug.

A summary of the government's UFO report
pic.twitter.com/FgDfTRU5i3

— Claydart (@TheClayDart) [June 25, 2021](#)

“The truth is still out there,” [several reporters who](#) covered the news wrote, after the report could only explain one of 144 reports of what the government calls “unidentified aerial phenomenon”.

“We were able to identify one reported UAP with high confidence,” the report says. “In that case, we identified the object as a large, deflating balloon. The others remain unexplained.”

I, too, have been identified as a large, deflating balloon.
pic.twitter.com/BEpcF4JMhg

— Ted Genoways (@TedGenoways) [June 25, 2021](#)

“Deflating Balloon” is the name of my next Jefferson Starship tribute band <https://t.co/oqfZtpAWBs>

— Ben Chang (@whoisbenchang) [June 25, 2021](#)

Some remarked it had taken a long time to produce a report that ran just nine pages and offered little in the way of concrete conclusions.

US Senate: You have 6 months to put out a full report on UFOs.

Pentagon: Um... We saw some stuff, one was for sure a balloon not sure about the rest. <https://t.co/BBfdiysDav> [pic.twitter.com/TQbn544qyP](https://t.co/TQbn544qyP)

— Jerry Gamblin (@JGamblin) [June 25, 2021](#)

Aliens weren't the only explanation being examined. Officials were also considering whether the aircraft belonged [to earthly adversaries](#) – an equally scary security situation – and the report was inconclusive on that front as well.

“If there are objects flying over military installations that could pose a security threat ... [it] needs to be declassified and revealed to American public,” the Democratic chair of the Senate foreign relations committee, Mark Warner, told [Fox 8 television](#). “If there’s something out there, let’s seek it out, and it is probably a foreign power.”

UFO □ report: TL;DR [pic.twitter.com/5YxzQqry6S](https://t.co/5YxzQqry6S)

— Cedric Dark, MD, MPH, FACEP (@RealCedricDark) [June 25, 2021](#)

Some don't seem especially worried.

Oreo used the report as a questionable opportunity to advertise with a [giant Oreo-shaped crop circle and an offering of cookies and milk](#).

The government's [#UFO](#) report finally went public today, and [@Oreo](#) was fully prepared with an offering to our future alien overlords: <https://t.co/JsRCfOWhes> [pic.twitter.com/H6TvPvJRDv](https://t.co/H6TvPvJRDv)

— David Griner (@griner) [June 25, 2021](#)

The report, which was commissioned by Congress last year, is still considered by others to be an important step even without strong conclusions.

Investigators listed five possible explanations, including naturally occurring events, but the Department of Defense plans to dig deeper and improve tracking systems to collect better intel.

“The defense department and intelligence community have a lot of work to do before we can actually understand whether these aerial threats present a serious national security concern,” Marco Rubio, the top Republican on the Senate intelligence committee, said in a statement.

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UFOs

They're real, but are they alien? – key takeaways from the Pentagon report

Whatever the 'unidentified aerial phenomena' are, they are real objects that may pose a national security risk



The Pentagon confirmed that the UAPs the military is encountering are real objects. Photograph: Joe McBride/Getty Images

The Pentagon confirmed that the UAPs the military is encountering are real objects. Photograph: Joe McBride/Getty Images

Guardian staff

Fri 25 Jun 2021 18.45 EDT

The long awaited [report](#) into UFOs issued by the US government was released on Friday, but for those wishing for confirmation that the Earth is being visited by alien intelligence, it did not provide much evidence.

Or indeed, any at all.

At just [nine pages](#) long the report – called Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) – was issued by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and described the run-ins that the US military has had with strange objects in the skies.

As expected it made no mention of aliens – though it did not dismiss the idea either – and did warn of the potential national security threat from the phenomenon, which was the main motivating factor behind the commissioning of the report.

Here are the key takeaways.

[It came out of the sky: US releases highly anticipated UFO report](#)
[Read more](#)

They are real – whatever ‘they’ are

Whatever the US military is encountering do seem to be real objects – in at least some of the incidents being [reported](#). “Most of the UAP reported probably do represent physical objects given that a majority of UAP were registered across multiple sensors, to include radar, infrared, electro-optical, weapon seekers, and visual observation,” the report said.

They are a threat

Forgetting little green aliens, the US military – as is its wont – is genuinely concerned that the encounters with UAPs are a national security risk, especially if they represent a hitherto unknown technology in use by rival states. “UAP clearly pose a safety of flight issue and may pose a challenge to US national security ... UAP would also represent a national security challenge if they are foreign adversary collection platforms or provide evidence a potential adversary has developed either a breakthrough or disruptive technology,” it said.

They are advanced

In a [section](#) headed “A Handful of UAP Appear to Demonstrate Advanced Technology” the report said that in 18 incidents, described in 21 reports, observers had spotted movements of UAPs that were puzzling. “Some UAP appeared to remain stationary in winds aloft, move against the wind, maneuver abruptly, or move at considerable speed, without discernable means of propulsion. In a small number of cases, military aircraft systems processed radio frequency (RF) energy associated with UAP sightings,” it said.

No mention of aliens

Sorry, folks, but [the report](#) makes no mention of aliens at all.

In fact, it says: “Our analysis of the data supports the construct that if and when individual UAP incidents are resolved they will fall into one of five potential explanatory categories: airborne clutter, natural atmospheric phenomena, USG or industry developmental programs, foreign adversary systems, and a catchall “other” bin.”

That “other” section is likely where alien hunters will seek to focus their attention.

More analysis is needed

The report [concludes](#) that much more study is needed.

“The majority of UAP data is from US navy reporting, but efforts are under way to standardize incident reporting across US military services and other government agencies to ensure all relevant data is captured with respect to particular incidents and any US activities that might be relevant,” the report said. “The UAPTF is currently working to acquire additional reporting, including from the US air force (USAF), and has begun receiving data from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).”

Headlines thursday 24 june 2021

- ['I regret having gone to the police' Child victims of sexual abuse often accused of lying to officers, survey finds](#)
- [Brexit Settled status enforcement notices are 'recipe for disaster' for EU citizens in UK](#)
- [Live UK Covid: ministers set to announce additions to green list for international travel](#)
- [Long Covid More than 2m adults in England sick for over 12 weeks](#)
- [Coronavirus Row over Scotland non-essential travel ban to Manchester escalates](#)

[UK child abuse inquiry](#)

Child victims of sexual abuse ‘often accused of lying to police’

Officers also mismanaged cases in a way that could lead to reprisals for victims, survivors tell England and Wales inquiry



A team for the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales spoke to 56 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. Photograph: Jack Sullivan/Alamy

A team for the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales spoke to 56 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. Photograph: Jack Sullivan/Alamy

[Haroon Siddique](#) *Legal affairs correspondent*

Thu 24 Jun 2021 05.00 EDT

Child sex abuse victims and survivors are often accused of lying when trying to report the abuse to police, according to a report by [the independent](#)

[inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales.](#)

The inquiry's team spoke to 56 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse between the ages of 11 and 21, and only "a small number" stated that they were satisfied with the police process.

The Engagement with Children and Young People report, [published on Thursday](#), says: "Many young victims and survivors told us about being accused of lying and ... one young person was referred to as a 'little bitch' by a police officer. Some young victims and survivors told us that the police had not managed their privacy and confidentiality concerns correctly. We heard that this could lead to reprisals from people associated with the abuser. We heard examples of police officers in uniform visiting children at their primary school and family home with no prior warning."

The team only spoke to victims and survivors who had reported their abuse to the police. The majority said there had been no conviction or prosecution in their case, leaving them wondering why they had gone through the traumatic process.

One young victim and survivor said: "Now I regret having gone to the police. If I had to give advice to someone, I would say, 'Get help but don't report.'"

However, some specialist child sexual abuse support workers told the inquiry that victims and survivors sometimes unfairly blamed police for delays and non-convictions, which were out of officers' hands. Many said the police did a good job given their resources. Seventy-seven support workers were interviewed for the report.

[An opportunity for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to finally be heard | Letter](#)
[Read more](#)

There were also complaints about not being kept informed throughout the police process, so victims and survivors felt disempowered, and found the interviewing traumatic.

The report also has criticism over schools not doing enough to recognise and respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation. [An Ofsted report](#) this June found that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse were a routine part of schoolchildren's daily lives and that teachers "consistently underestimated" the scale of the problem.

Many victims and survivors complained of insensitivity, with one saying a teacher stopped them midway through a disclosure to say: "Don't tell me because I will have to repeat this." Another had signposted the child to Childline rather than face the conversation.

One pupil reported an experience of peer-on-peer abuse to a headteacher, who shared the information with the perpetrator's parents before a police report was done. The pupil said it had serious consequences for the investigation. They also said the perpetrator continued to attend the same classes as them, which was "very traumatic".

The report also found that, in schools, education about relationships and sex had been largely inadequate, with some children receiving no lessons on the issues at all, echoing the [Ofsted](#) report.

Deputy Chief Constable Ian Critchley, the National [Police](#) Chiefs' Council lead for child protection, said: "Whilst it is deeply concerning to hear that some young victims and survivors of child sexual abuse have been accused of lying when coming forward to police, I know that we have dedicated, professional staff across the country who treat victims with compassion, respect and take reports of child abuse seriously.

"We will consider very seriously the views of young people within this report and use it to further develop the way we work together with our partners to protect children."

Immigration and asylum

Settled status enforcement notices are 'recipe for disaster' for EU citizens in UK

Campaigners fear for victims of trafficking, modern slavery and the elderly as 30 June deadline looms



The Home Office has said it will consider all late applications if there are reasonable grounds for missing the 30 June deadline. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

The Home Office has said it will consider all late applications if there are reasonable grounds for missing the 30 June deadline. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

[*Lisa O'Carroll*](#) *Brexit correspondent*

[*@lisaocarroll*](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Campaigners for EU citizens have warned that the Home Office's plan to send 28-day enforcement notices to anyone who has not applied for settled status by the 30 June cut-off date is a "recipe for disaster".

"We know the types of people who will not be making applications. They are the vulnerable, people like victims of trafficking, modern slavery, the elderly, children.

"That paints a pretty grim picture of potentially thousands of people who are already identified as in vulnerable categories by the Home Office who will miss the closing date and have to face potential life-changing consequences," said Luke Piper, the head of policy at the3million, the grassroots campaign group.

The immigration and future borders minister, Kevin Foster, has said all late applications will be considered if there are reasonable grounds for missing the deadline to apply for settled status, for those who have been in the country for five years or more, or pre-settled status, for those who have been in the UK for less than five years.

Officials say the reasonable grounds have been deliberately designed to be broad to catch as many people as possible as the default policy is to award people settled or pre-settled status.

But immigration lawyers including Piper have complained that the 28-day notices have added to the confusion because they imply that people will have rights, when in fact those who apply late automatically lose their right to live, work, rent or access the NHS on 1 July. "This is an act of deflection," said Piper.

"It is misleading," said Ilda de Sousa, a partner with City law firm Kingsley Napley, as those in work will also face a cliff-edge on 30 June whether vulnerable or not. She cited one client, a German commodity broker, who had been sent to Australia to set up an office for a British firm and could have lost out if he had not been advised in time that a permanent residency document he acquired after the referendum did not protect him.

Foster has pledged that benefits will not be stopped on 1 July and it will work with the department for work and pensions to establish a data set of those on benefits who have not applied by the deadline to avert scenarios such as homelessness.

The Home Office said it also has a mechanism that enables charities that encounter highly vulnerable people to have their applications fast-tracked. And it clarified that enforcement teams would not be knocking on doors or doing checks with business owners, advising all employers to urge citizens who are late applying to do so and to contact the Home Office for advice.

A spokesperson said: “Under our flexible and pragmatic approach to late applications, from 1 July 2021, where immigration enforcement encounter a person without status under the EU settlement scheme, they will provide them with a written notice giving them an opportunity to apply to the scheme, normally within 28 days.

“If after 28 days the individual has not applied to the scheme, they may be liable for enforcement action and will not be eligible for work, benefits or services. Whether such action is taken will be determined in accordance with immigration enforcement policy guidance relating to those in breach of immigration law and following a careful assessment of the individual’s circumstances.”

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[Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)
[Coronavirus](#)

UK removes quarantine requirement for arrivals from Balearics, Malta and some Caribbean islands – as it happened

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Long Covid

More than 2m adults in England have had long Covid for over 12 weeks – study

Research says people tend to fall into two categories: those with respiratory illness and those with fatigue-related symptoms

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Caring for a ventilated Coronavirus patient in an ICU. Between September and February, 508,707 participants were asked whether they thought they had had Covid and about the presence and duration of 29 different symptoms. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Caring for a ventilated Coronavirus patient in an ICU. Between September and February, 508,707 participants were asked whether they thought they

had had Covid and about the presence and duration of 29 different symptoms. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

[Linda Geddes](#)

Wed 23 Jun 2021 19.01 EDT

More than 2 million adults in England have experienced coronavirus symptoms lasting over 12 weeks, government data suggests – double the previous estimate for long Covid.

The study, one of the largest to date, found that people with ongoing symptoms tended to fall into two categories: those with respiratory symptoms, who often experienced more severe illness when they first got sick, and a second group with fatigue-related symptoms.

Like previous studies, it found that [women were more commonly affected](#) and that the prevalence of ongoing symptoms increased with age. Researchers described the findings as “alarming”.

The React-2 study is a government-funded population surveillance study that uses finger-prick antibody tests from randomly selected adults in England to assess how far coronavirus has spread. Between September and February, 508,707 participants were also asked whether they thought they had had Covid and about the presence and duration of 29 different symptoms.

The research, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, found that 37.7% of those who had symptomatic Covid experienced at least one symptom lasting 12 weeks or more – equivalent to 2 million people – while 14.8% experienced three or more persistent symptoms.

“The scale of the problem is quite alarming,” said Prof Kevin McConway, emeritus professor of applied statistics at the Open University. “The results can’t tell us clearly how serious those symptoms were in terms of their effects on the patients’ lives. Some may not be very serious, but some of them certainly are, and these results clearly point out how vital it is to understand them properly and to provide adequate treatment and support services for the people involved.”

In May the Office National Statistics (ONS) estimated that 1 million people in the UK were experiencing self-reported [long Covid](#). A key difference is that React-2 did not ask if people had long Covid, only about ongoing symptoms. “Many people may not consider they’ve got long Covid, they just have a persistent slight shortness of breath, or their loss of sense of taste has persisted for many, many months,” said Helen Ward, professor of public health at Imperial College London, who co-led the study.

[Some long Covid sufferers in England waiting months for treatment](#)
[Read more](#)

McConway said the ONS research estimated the number of people who had symptoms lasting at least 12 weeks on a particular date (2 May), while React-2 measured how many have ever had long Covid between September and February.

Meanwhile, a separate study of 312 Norwegian patients published in [Nature Medicine](#) on Wednesday found that 61% were still experiencing persistent symptoms at six months – including 52% of 16-30-year-olds. The most common symptoms they reported were loss of taste and/or smell and tiredness.

11:06

Inside a long Covid clinic: ‘I look normal, but my body is breaking down’ – video

McConway said: “The lack of clarity on exactly how many people are affected shouldn’t draw attention away from the fact that the lowest estimates still show a huge amount of largely unmet need.”

The React-2 study also found that the prevalence of persistent symptoms increased with age, with a 3.5% increase in the likelihood of developing long Covid for each decade of life. Women were 1.5 times more likely to experience ongoing symptoms than men, and people who were overweight, smoked, lived in deprived areas or had been admitted to hospital were also at greater risk. However, persistent symptoms were less common among Asian ethnic groups.

It also suggested that certain symptoms often cluster together. “About a third of people had what you might think of as more physiological symptoms, like shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, chest pain, and the others had a more post-viral type of syndrome dominated by tiredness,” said study co-leader Prof Paul Elliott, chair in epidemiology and public health medicine at Imperial College. “And it so happens that the people who reported more severe illness at the beginning, there were more of them in the respiratory-type cluster than in the post-viral tiredness-type cluster.”

Matt Hancock, the health secretary, said: “Long Covid can have a lasting and debilitating impact on the lives of those affected. Studies like this help us to rapidly build our understanding of the impact of the condition and we are using these findings and other new research to develop support and treatments.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jun/24/more-than-2m-adults-in-england-have-had-long-covid-for-over-12-weeks-study>.

[Coronavirus](#)

Row over Scotland non-essential travel ban to Manchester escalates

Scottish government briefing dismisses Andy Burnham's protests as 'incoherent and absurd'

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Nicola Sturgeon in Edinburgh, Scotland. Photograph: WPA/Getty

Nicola Sturgeon in Edinburgh, Scotland. Photograph: WPA/Getty

[Libby Brooks](#) *Scotland correspondent*

Thu 24 Jun 2021 04.33 EDT

A row over Scotland's ban on non-essential travel to Manchester has escalated after a Scottish government briefing dismissed the explanation of

the Manchester mayor, [Andy Burnham](#), for protesting against the restrictions as “incoherent and absurd” .

A spokesperson for Burnham later expressed surprise that Nicola Sturgeon’s team had briefed details of a discussion “in what we were told was a confidential meeting”.

Burnham and Sturgeon discussed the issue at a regular four nations meeting chaired by Michael Gove on Wednesday afternoon.

On Monday, the [Greater Manchester](#) mayor called on Sturgeon to justify her “totally disproportionate” travel ban between the north-west of England and Scotland in an open letter which he copied to all MSPs. He also criticised her government for failing to give advance warning of the ban to Manchester officials.

01:23

Sturgeon and Burnham in spat over north-west England travel ban – video

Sturgeon extended the ban already in place for Bolton and Blackburn with Darwen to [Manchester](#) and Salford last Friday, because of rising case rates in those areas. Burnham has said the case rate for Dundee was similarly high.

On Wednesday evening, a source close to the first minister said Sturgeon had pointed out the “stark contradiction” between what Burnham was saying and his own local authority’s advice to “minimise travel”.

She said: “Burnham had no proper answer to that and his attempted explanation was incoherent and absurd.”

It is understood that Sturgeon did concede she could have communicated her plans better, although previous bans on Scots travelling to Bolton and Blackburn with Darwen were not discussed with officials in those areas prior to their announcement either.

After the briefing, a spokesperson for Burnham said: “Given [this briefing] has happened, we need to be clear on what was said. The first minister accepted that she should have told the mayor before she announced her decision.”

“We also welcome her acceptance that the Scottish government needs to provide more information about how they reach their decisions on bringing in regulations and travel bans that affect other parts of the UK.”

[Burnham calls on Nicola Sturgeon to justify travel ban](#)
[Read more](#)

“We are, however, disappointed that the first minister completely dismissed the financial impact her decision has had on residents in Bolton, Manchester and Salford and the need for her government to consider providing compensation.”

The Scottish government previously dismissed this suggestion as “not appropriate”.

The meeting came after easyJet announced it was scrapping new routes from Manchester to Glasgow and Aberdeen because of the ban.

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2021.06.24 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: Merkel says Europe and Germany 'on thin ice' over Delta variant; Brazil sees record daily cases](#)
- [Uruguay Country accused of squandering early Covid success amid deadly surge](#)
- [Vaccine taskforce Legal action over Kate Bingham's role dropped](#)
- [England Key dates in timeline for lifting Covid restrictions](#)

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UK's approach to securing borders 'chaotic and dangerous', says Labour – as it happened

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Uruguay

Uruguay accused of squandering early Covid success amid deadly surge



Nurses and doctors look at morgue workers removing the corpse of one of the three patients who died of Covid-19 coronavirus in the same morning at an intensive care unit in a private hospital in Montevideo earlier this month. Photograph: Pablo Porciuncula/AFP/Getty Images

Nurses and doctors look at morgue workers removing the corpse of one of the three patients who died of Covid-19 coronavirus in the same morning at an intensive care unit in a private hospital in Montevideo earlier this month. Photograph: Pablo Porciuncula/AFP/Getty Images

Country has highest death rate in Latin America after centre-right government abandoned social restrictions



Quique Kirszenbaum and [Peter Beaumont](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 05.00 EDT

Enrique Soto, a senior cardiologist in [Uruguay](#) knew that, at the age of 65, he was at higher risk of Covid-19. His 40-year-old son Marcos had warned him as much but Soto replied he could not abandon his patients.

When Soto died at the beginning of Uruguay's devastating recent second wave of infections his death became emblematic of the disaster that has unfolded in recent months in the small South American country.

Uruguay was once [hailed for its model response to the pandemic](#), but its recent policies have delivered one of the world's worst infection rates, with its government single-minded in avoiding new restrictions.

All of which has left the nation of 3.5 million – which last June was toying with the idea of declaring itself Covid-19-free – asking how things went so wrong – and offering grim lessons for other countries.

According to experts, the situation is the fruit of a decision by the government of Luis Lacalle Pou to abandon a successful policy of social restrictions in favour of a much more permissive regime that has instead relied almost exclusively on vaccination.

The result has been an outbreak that saw the country record cases of almost one in every 100 citizens, and a death rate of 50 a day – and continues at high levels.

That has represented the world's fifth-highest death rate, with 20.64 per 100,000 people over two weeks – as well as the highest in Latin America.

['The heart of darkness': neighbors shun Brazil over Covid response](#)
[Read more](#)

The cause, say experts, has been a combination of factors, from overconfidence to recent political missteps around vaccination, as well as the country's proximity to Brazil, which has seen the development of [a more contagious variant](#).

What has been striking for many has been the contrast in the response by the centre-right government during the early parts of the pandemic and during the disastrous recent wave.

Last March, after the first case of coronavirus was detected, the newly elected president announced the closure of some borders.

Lacalle Pou also cancelled public events, shuttered the education system, closed bars, malls and professional sports matches and prohibited collective worship. Uruguayans were asked to stay at home, and a test-and-trace system initiated.

By June Uruguay was marking [several days in a row without infections](#).

During the most recent wave, however, the president has rejected calls for a national lockdown, making veiled allusions to the “police state” in a country in which the military dictatorship ended only in 1985.

Instead Lacalle Pou, like some Republicans in the US and British Conservative politicians, has insisted on the importance of “responsible freedom” – insisting that a strategy of vaccination, which began only in March, would be enough, while rejecting calls by the country's scientific advisory group for the reintroduction of social distancing requirements.

All of which has baffled many of the country's health professionals who have been working on the frontline. After his shift at a Montevideo hospital, intensive care doctor Gustavo Grecco summarized the problem: "The government stopped listening to science, to its scientific advisory group, to its doctors, to the universities. Since February the government has been entirely divorced from the recommendations of the scientific community."



Students leave the classroom for a break on their first day back to in-person class in Montevideo in March. Photograph: Matilde Campodonico/AP

That analysis, however, is rejected by the health minister, Daniel Salinas, who insisted that rather than look at the horrific figures from the recent outbreak observers should focus on Uruguay's experience throughout the pandemic.

"When people worry about the mortality rate in Uruguay," he told the Guardian, "they should look at the whole picture and not just a fragment of it, which says we're the worst in the world for 14 days."

While Salinas insists that the vaccination campaign has been going well, with 60% having received one dose, other observers note that the country's ambition to fully vaccinate 80% will not be achievable before October at the earliest.

“We have 43% people vaccinated with two doses,” says Dr Alvaro Niggemeyer, who works at an intensive care unit in Montevideo with Covid-19 patients.

“That’s about 1,490,000 people out of 3.6 million at a time we have the P1 strain circulating that is widely contagious.

“We have borders through which the Delta strain can also sneak in and we are behaving as if the problem is already solved because we are already vaccinating.

“My message is we have 2,100,000 unimmunised Uruguayans. We have high viral circulation and we have a circulating strain that has higher mortality in young people.”

Inevitably, perhaps, Lacalle Pou’s handling of the crisis has drawn criticism from political rivals.

“The president told us in a meeting that he did not believe in reducing social mobility. He said that he did not believe that these measures would be respected,” said Senator Mario Bergara, a member of the leftwing Frente Amplio party and a former minister of finance.

“That’s despite the fact that according to the scientific community three weeks of significant restrictions would have led to a major reduction in infections and deaths – all of which leads us to say that there are preventable deaths in Uruguay today.”

[A silent decimation: South America’s losing battle against Covid](#)
[Read more](#)

Among those who appear to have lost confidence in the government’s approach are members of the GACH, a scientific advisory group which says the country’s president increasingly ignored their advice – prompting the group to be wound up.

“The proportion of our recommendations that government takes into account has changed [since early in the pandemic],” said Arturo Briva, a professor of

critical care medicine and a member of the group.

“We have to assume that the government is taking into account other issues when making its decisions, but I’m telling you the painful truth that looking at the clinical results I believe that we can have better results with decreased mobility.”

For Enrique Soto’s son Marcos, an academic, the government’s rejection of scientific and medical advice is doubly painful following his father’s death.

‘In my own professional life I trust and defer to those with specialist knowledge in decision-making. It’s hard to believe that there is nothing more that we can do to avoid more deaths. Are we sure that we have done everything? These are the questions that need to be asked.’

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Conservatives

Legal action over Kate Bingham's role in UK Covid vaccine taskforce dropped

Good Law Project maintains challenge over Dido Harding and Mike Coupe appointments

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Kate Bingham's appointment to the role of chair of the UK Covid vaccines taskforce was formally made by Johnson last May. Photograph: Mike Coppola/Getty Images for AARP

Kate Bingham's appointment to the role of chair of the UK Covid vaccines taskforce was formally made by Johnson last May. Photograph: Mike Coppola/Getty Images for AARP

[David Conn](#)

Wed 23 Jun 2021 14.33 EDT

The Good Law Project has dropped its [legal challenge](#) to the government's recruitment of Kate Bingham as chair of the vaccines taskforce, which had alleged it failed to follow a valid process and gave key roles in the pandemic to people well-connected to the Conservative party.

In the same legal action, the GLP is maintaining its challenge to the appointments of Dido Harding as head of NHS test and trace, and of Mike Coupe, who formerly worked with Harding at Sainsbury's, as director of testing.

The government has defended the legal action, maintaining the appointments were all fair and lawful, and recently issued a detailed defence setting out the circumstances of the recruitment process, which led to the GLP dropping its action in relation to Bingham.

The government's detailed defence document will not be made public until the case is heard – no date has yet been scheduled – but Jolyon Maugham, director of the GLP, said the process for appointing Bingham, while it did not follow an open advertising process, had been better than expected.

“We are not dropping the challenge or the point of principle that fair, open and transparent recruitment processes deliver better outcomes for the public,” Maugham said. “None of these recruitment processes during the pandemic were optimal; we are still unhappy with the government's explanations relating to Dido Harding and Mike Coupe, but they have provided a better explanation regarding Kate Bingham, and it is responsible for us not to pursue that further.”

Bingham is managing partner of the venture capital firm SV Health Investments. Her appointment to the unpaid role of heading the UK's efforts to secure Covid-19 vaccines was formally made by Johnson last May, and she reported directly to the prime minister.

Along with Harding, who was made a Conservative peer by David Cameron in 2014, her appointment led to claims they were part of a “chumocracy”.

The government has emphatically defended all its appointments, and praised Bingham for her achievements in investing in the manufacture of Covid-19

vaccines and securing 350m doses, saying in [a public statement](#) in November:

“Kate Bingham is uniquely qualified for the role of chair, having worked in the biotech and life sciences sectors for 30 years. While not specifically a vaccines expert, she is a proven drugs discovery expert with superb deal-making skills and an excellent global reputation, recently appearing alongside Bill Gates at the Gates Grand Challenge Conference.”

Earlier this month Bingham was [given a damehood](#) for her work on the vaccines operation in the Queen’s birthday honours list.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jun/23/legal-action-over-kate-bingham-role-in-uk-covid-vaccine-taskforce-dropped>

[Coronavirus](#)

Key dates in England's timeline for lifting Covid restrictions

Series of decisions are due in next five weeks about potential lifting of Covid restrictions

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Representatives from tour operators and travel agencies attend the 'Travel Day of Action' demonstration at Westminster. Photograph: Ben Queenborough/PinPep/REX/Shutterstock

Representatives from tour operators and travel agencies attend the 'Travel Day of Action' demonstration at Westminster. Photograph: Ben Queenborough/PinPep/REX/Shutterstock

[Peter Walker](#) *Political correspondent*
[@peterwalker99](#)

Wed 23 Jun 2021 11.02 EDT

A series of decisions are due in the next five weeks about the potential lifting of Covid restrictions in [England](#). Here are the key dates to look out for:

24 June – travel corridors update

The Department for Transport (DfT) will announce any changes to the “traffic light” system by which people coming into the UK (decisions are devolved, but the countries on each list are currently the same UK-wide) from certain destinations have to follow different quarantine rules. Currently, only 11 places are [on the green list](#), which allow a return without quarantine, none of which are major destinations for UK tourists, and the travel industry hopes more might be added.

28 June – notice of changes on 5 July

When Boris Johnson [announced a four-week delay](#) to phase four of the relaxation of Covid restrictions, which would have ended the bulk of them, due to the rapid spread of the more transmissible Delta variant, he promised a mid-point at which the decision could be reassessed. There is little to suggest the situation has improved enough for this to happen, but Downing Street has promised to give a week’s notice to any changes, so this is when people will be told either way.

5 July – mid-point review date

If there is a sudden positive change in the Covid statistics, this would be the new date for what several tabloids have called “freedom day”. But it seems very unlikely.

12 July – notice of changes on 19 July

This is the expected date for an announcement that stage four of unlocking will happen a week later. Precisely how much extra freedom this will

involve will depend on a number of factors, not least the findings of reviews into longer-term Covid priorities, also due before the 19th (see below).

15 July – travel corridors update

These happen every three weeks. But by this point, what could be much more significant than changes to the green list is the [promise from ministers](#) to allow people who have been double-vaccinated, and children, to avoid any quarantine if they return from an amber list country, rather than the current 10-day period. This policy, plus a removal of the advice to not travel to amber list destinations beyond urgent reasons, would open up the bulk of destinations for holidays, even if the need for tests would add considerably to costs.

Shortly before 19 July – reviews published

The government has commissioned detailed studies into future social distancing rules and the use of “Covid certification schemes”, and has run a series of pilot events with mass crowds, including sporting matches, and having people without any isolation in nightclubs and festivals. All these are due to be published before stage four of reopening happens, and could be very significant. While the extent of vaccination means certification schemes, which would restrict entry to some places without proof of vaccination or a negative Covid test, are unlikely to happen, the other two could spell a longer-term future of, for example, mask use in certain situations.

19 July – reopening

Barring something significant, such as the arrival of a particularly virulent or vaccine-resistant Covid variant, this seems set to be the final stage of reopening, albeit within the limits of whatever the reviews recommend. Johnson has promised this, and if he changed his mind without a pressing reason, the prime minister would face fury from many of his backbenchers.

2021.06.24 - Spotlight

- [Magic Johnson NBA superstar who smashed HIV stigma – then built a huge fortune](#)
- [Striking images The 20th century, as told by Guardian photographers](#)
- [The revolt against liberalism What's driving Poland and Hungary's nativist turn?](#)
- [Burnout breaks Is extra holiday time the answer for tired, traumatised workers?](#)

[Black livesSociety](#)

Magic Johnson: the NBA superstar who smashed HIV stigma – then built a huge fortune



‘They told me that the three-drug combination was going to save my life, and they were right’ ... Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson Jr at his offices in Los Angeles. Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

‘They told me that the three-drug combination was going to save my life, and they were right’ ... Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson Jr at his offices in Los Angeles. Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

He stunned basketball fans and transformed HIV awareness by announcing his diagnosis in 1991. Thirty years on, he discusses his relationship with Anthony Fauci, the meaning of money and why he’s still optimistic



[Oliver Laughland](#)

[@oliverlaughland](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 01.22 EDT

On 7 November 1991, a [press conference in Inglewood, California](#), brought America to a standstill. Against a black-draped backdrop, dressed in a black suit, white shirt and multicoloured tie, Earvin “Magic” Johnson, spoke calmly into a single microphone and told the world that he had been diagnosed with HIV.

Cameras flashed and reporters clamoured to ask questions, but [Johnson, National Basketball Association \(NBA\) superstar](#) and one of the world’s most revered athletes, appeared unfazed as he announced his immediate retirement. Had he grappled with his own mortality? When had he found out? How had he acquired the virus? What would he do next?

“I plan on going on living for a long time, bugging you guys like I always have,” he told reporters, his optimism surprising those who viewed his condition as a death sentence. “I guess now I get to enjoy some of the other sides of living.”



Tall order ... Johnson shoots for Michigan State Spartans against the Kentucky Wildcats in c 1977 in East Lansing, Michigan. Photograph: Dale Tait/NBAE/Getty Images

Today, sitting in his offices in California, in a brown executive chair, that famous, dimpled smile beaming down the camera over Zoom, Johnson finds it hard to fathom that this year marks three decades since his diagnosis. Now 61, he is one of those rare public figures who has redefined his purpose at different stages in life: first as an athlete, then as a public health advocate, and later as a successful businessman and philanthropist.

“As we talk today, right now, I’m thinking, ‘Wow’ – it’s been 30 years and I’m still here, healthy. Everything has gone right. There was one drug then, now we have 30-something drugs,” he says.

It was a seismic moment, not only in the history of basketball, but in the continuing war on HIV and Aids, as an athlete of Johnson’s stature vowed in public to raise awareness about the virus. And it has interesting parallels for today, when the world continues to battle another public health crisis.

Dr Ho and Dr Fauci calmed me down, because I was thinking I was going to die

Johnson has never watched a recording of that press conference. It was one of the hardest days of his life; he later disclosed he contracted HIV from unprotected sex. “I’m not a go-back person. I don’t live in the past,” he says. “I always live now and in the future. That’s who I am.”

But, as he remembers the period shortly after the diagnosis, he thinks of those he relied on. There was, of course, his wife, Cookie – the love of his life, whom he had met at college and had recently married. There were his teammates at the Los Angeles Lakers, who embraced him, and would go on to support him when he returned to play again, first as part of the 1992 Olympics “dream team” and then during another stint at the Lakers. The late actor Elizabeth Glaser, who herself contracted HIV after receiving a contaminated blood transfusion, encouraged his public advocacy. And the medical experts Dr David Ho and Dr Anthony Fauci assured him that he could go on to live a healthy life.

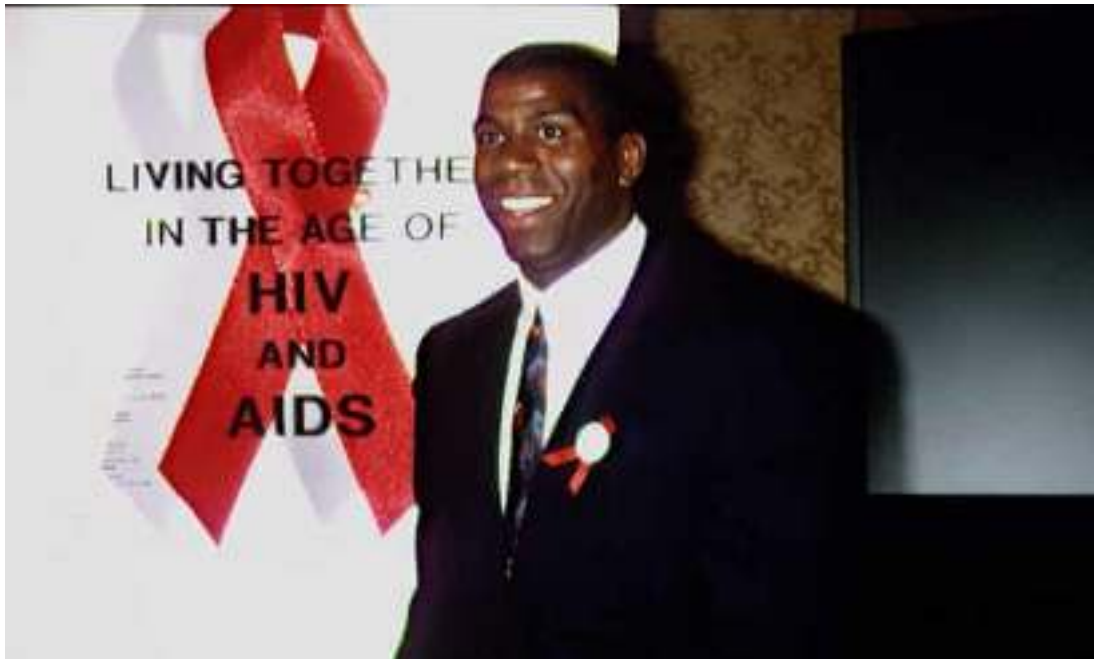


Game-changer ... Clients wait for a free HIV test at a mobile testing centre as part of the I Stand with Magic programme in Los Angeles in 2006. Photograph: Matt Brown/NBAE/Getty Images

“Without those two,” he says. “I probably wouldn’t be here.

“At that time, when you got something like HIV, there were so many things I didn’t know, so they had to educate me about how the virus was going to act in my body, what I could expect. They calmed me down, because I was thinking I was going to die,” he says.

“They told me that the three-drug combination was going to save my life, and they were right.”



Johnson at an international symposium on HIV and Aids in Tokyo in 1993. Photograph: Noboru Hashimoto/Corbis/Getty Images

It was partly realising the public’s general ignorance about the virus that spurred him into a career of advocacy work. Johnson joined president George W Bush’s national Aids commission and then [publicly quit](#) after eight months, lambasting the president’s inaction.

It was sobering, says Johnson, to see Dr Fauci out front and centre again, during the Covid-19 pandemic. His public appearances always make Johnson smile, but his treatment by former president Donald Trump, who often [outwardly shunned the country’s foremost infectious disease expert](#), was infuriating.

“A guy like myself swears by him,” he says. “But man, just to see him being disrespected and really just put over to the side ... I felt bad for him. He was

put in a bad situation.”

For Johnson, seeing Fauci speak about a new epidemic while reflecting on the HIV crisis of the 1980s has been sobering – the racial disparities in American healthcare are stark. Just as Black Americans [are disproportionately affected by HIV](#) and Aids, so has Covid-19 [killed at a racially disproportionate rate](#).



‘We’ve lost too many lives that we shouldn’t have lost with both Aids and Covid-19’ ... Johnson. Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

[Johnson, who was vaccinated in public in April](#) to help combat hesitancy over the jab, feels history repeating itself with a sense of personal sadness. “We’ve lost too many lives that we shouldn’t have lost with both Aids and Covid-19,” he says, but then he returns to that same sense of optimism. “I hope we can turn a corner.

“Are we where we’re supposed to be? No. We have a long way to go. Let’s just hope we get this one right, in the black and brown community, because we never really got HIV and Aids right.”

Johnson grew up in the midwestern city of Lansing, the state capital of Michigan. As a boy, he practised basketball relentlessly, encouraged by his

father, who worked grinding shifts at a local General Motors plant. He taught him the art of aggressive, fast-paced basketball, and how to read the game. At that time, in the 1970s, he idolised players such as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who was playing for the Milwaukee Bucks, and Dave Bing, the Detroit Pistons' point guard, who went on to become the city's mayor in 2009. He dreamed of the NBA from a young age.

Aged 15, and with his talent being noticed locally, Johnson faced one of the first big crossroads in his life. Lansing, like most large cities in the midwest, was de facto segregated. He had always expected to go to his local high school on the city's west side with its renowned basketball team. But instead, he was among Lansing's first students to be bussed across the city to a majority white high school, Everett, on the south side.



High times ... as guard for Michigan State, Johnson cuts down the net after winning a championship game in Salt Lake City in 1979. Photograph: NCAA Photos/Getty Images

Initially opposed to the idea, Johnson reflects on it now as one of the most important experiences of his life. "It taught me how to work alongside somebody who doesn't look like me," he says. "And what I would find out later is that is the way America is. That's the country. Everything I've done in my lifetime after that involved whites. No matter where you turned,

whether I was coached by one, whether they owned the team I played for, or the partnerships I was trying to create in business ... everywhere you turned, it was somebody white in charge.”

The state-mandated integration of education brought its own tensions: playground fights and bullying. Tensions were also felt on the basketball court: Johnson recalls, in his 1992 autobiography, *My Life*, that some of his white teammates were initially reluctant to even pass him the ball. But sport also became a vessel to bring students together. And Johnson’s unique talent (it was while he was at high school that a local newspaper reporter coined his nickname), eventually brought the team a state championship in his final year.



Celebrity traction ... Johnson and Elizabeth Taylor at a 20 Years of Aids, 20 Years of Hope event in Santa Monica in 2001. Photograph: Jim Smeal/Ron Galella Collection/Getty Images

His most virulent experiences with racism during childhood, however, came on trips down south to visit his grandparents in Mississippi. Johnson’s father didn’t fly, so the family would drive 900 miles (1,450km) on a two-day trip. He remembers in detail how his parents would pack food for the entire drive and eat on the side of the road rather than risk entering an unknown

restaurant. His father would send his children in groups of three to use the bathroom at truck stops “to watch each other’s backs”.

Even after he joined the NBA, Johnson remembers entering a Mississippi diner on a family trip and being approached by a white server.

“We sit down and this guy says: ‘Boy, what you want?’” he recalls. “I was about to say something back, and my father grabbed me. He said to me: ‘Earvin, you’ve got to remember you’re in the south and that’s how they’re used to talking to Blacks.’ It was a real eye-opener.”

The Trump presidency made even more stark the entrenched legacy of racism and white supremacy all over the country, including in Michigan, where Johnson’s parents still live. Lansing itself has become a hotbed of extremist militia activity and Johnson watched in horror as armed conservative groups stormed into the state Capitol in April last year, [protesting against Covid-19 lockdown laws](#). It was preceded by the 6 January insurrection in Washington DC, after which the FBI [charged a number of militiamen](#) with plotting to kidnap Michigan’s Democratic governor, Gretchen Whitmer.

As the Lansing protests unfolded last year Johnson found himself sending messages to his parents and siblings to make sure they were OK: “To stay away and stay safe.”

I still can’t believe all the events that happened within a year. It’s just ... it’s not America

“I think what it did was make people quiet about who they were going to actually vote for,” he says. “Even today, as we’re talking about it right now, I still can’t believe all the events that happened within a year. It’s just ... it’s not America.”

It’s certainly not the America that Magic Johnson came to embody during his heyday with the LA Lakers throughout the 80s.

This was the “Showtime” era when the Lakers reignited the NBA with a brand of fast-paced, flamboyant ball play that won them five championships.

At the centre was Johnson, the tallest point guard in NBA history (2.06 metres; 6ft 9ins), whose adaptability, court vision and creativity fundamentally transformed the position.



Showtime ... Johnson on court for the Los Angeles Lakers against the Boston Celtics at The Forum, LA, in 1988. Photograph: Andrew D. Bernstein/NBAE/Getty Images

He lights up describing the buzz of it. The trick shots, the no-look passing, the celebrity fans and the Playboy bunnies. “Everybody who was somebody during the 80s had to be at the Forum for a Lakers game, because it was the place to be,” he says. “It was everything rolled into one. That’s what made Showtime.”

But his professional career was [also defined](#) by a bitter rivalry with the Boston Celtics’ star player Larry Bird, who had been his competitor since college. The two contested back-to-back NBA finals in 1984 and 1985, their differing personas – Bird, the insular, precision shotmaker and Johnson the flamboyant superstar – making the rivalry all the more intense.



Professional rivalry and racial dynamics ... Larry Bird of Boston Celtics and Magic Johnson during the 1984 NBA Finals at the Forum in Los Angeles. Photograph: NBA Photos/NBAE/Getty Images

Racial dynamics also played a part in the way some viewed their opposition (Bird is white). “It was right in front of our faces, you couldn’t miss it,” Johnson says, laughing. When the Lakers would travel to Boston, Johnson recalls, some Black residents of the city would approach him and say they were backing the Lakers over their local team. “We can’t be cheering for Boston, those white guys,” he recalls them saying.

Yet despite the rivalry, Johnson and Bird eventually became close friends, [so the story goes](#), after Bird’s mother cooked Johnson lunch during the filming of a 1985 Converse shoe advert starring them both. Bird was one of the first NBA players Johnson called to inform him of his HIV diagnosis.

So, are they still in touch? “We don’t have to stay in touch with each other, that’s not what we do,” he says, describing a friendship forged in unique circumstances. “We see each other at events. Larry is a quiet guy and wants a quiet life. And I’m this guy who is completely the opposite. But we have this incredible relationship that when we see each other you’d think we’d been talking every day.”

During his 1991 press conference Johnson also made clear that his aspirations in business meant he simply had to go on living. He wanted to own his own NBA franchise and had harboured a desire to make and create wealth from a young age.

His career in business did not begin in earnest until his second retirement in the mid-90s. He started comparatively small, with a minor investment in the LA Lakers that has since ballooned into a large investment portfolio, centred around sport teams in Los Angeles.

He now holds stakes in the LA Dodgers baseball team, the women's basketball team LA Sparks and the Major League Soccer club Los Angeles FC.

We, as Black people, had never really understood generational wealth and passing that wealth on. We're finally starting to understand that

Johnson was instrumental in bringing LeBron James to the Lakers in 2018, and part of his pitch to James was that James would be able [to use the city as a base to further his business interests](#), which now include his own media company and investments in sports clubs, including [Liverpool Football Club](#).

Rumours swirl that Johnson's wealth now exceeds \$1bn. He is bashful, however, when I ask about this and says only: "I'm happy I've got a great life and that my kids are going to be fine."

[Magic Johnson: 20 years on from an All-Star game that changed basketball](#)
[Read more](#)

He is less coy, though, when describing the reason he sought wealth, and was not content with the riches of his earnings as a player.

"We, as Black people, had never really understood generational wealth and passing that wealth on," he says. "We're finally starting to understand that.

"It empowers our community ... now these kids dream that they can become not only a basketball player or a football player, but they can become a

businessman. So that's what's important, that we have power and that we have a seat at the table.”

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[Self and wellbeing](#)[Health & wellbeing](#)

Burnout breaks: is extra holiday time the answer for tired, traumatised workers?

All employees at dating app Bumble are being given a paid week off work at the same time – and other companies are following suit



Burnout is caused by chronic overwork, and being stressed and sleep-deprived. Photograph: Maskot/Getty Images/Posed by model

Burnout is caused by chronic overwork, and being stressed and sleep-deprived. Photograph: Maskot/Getty Images/Posed by model

[Zoe Williams](#)

[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

The dating app Bumble has [given all its staff a paid week off in its battle against burnout](#). According to [Rahaf Harfoush](#), a digital anthropologist based in Paris, and the author of *Hustle and Float*, this is really the only way to do it. “A couple of years ago, the thing was unlimited paid vacation. It was huge in the UK corporate wellness market, until it was discovered that a lot of people do not take their vacation days, and when they do, they’re still connected to the office by email. The only way that we can get a decent break is when we’re forced into it: when the company says: ‘Guess what, everything’s shutting down, nobody’s allowed to work.’”

But what exactly is burnout, and are businesses right to be worried? The psychotherapist [Hilda Burke](#) says it isn’t recognised as a condition but reels off the symptoms that she associates with overwork: “Extreme exhaustion, insomnia, crippling self-doubt, extreme despondency and feeling ‘what’s the point?’” At work, that is often the giveaway for colleagues: that you’re finding it uncharacteristically hard to make decisions, as well as displaying confusion and irritability.

Harfoush is pretty clear on what causes it: “Chronic overwork; being consistently sleep-deprived and hyper-stressed over a period of weeks or months.” Rebecca Seal, who wrote [Solo: How to Work Alone \(And Not Lose Your Mind\)](#), after suffering burnout herself, adds something else to the mix: precariousness. Citing the work of Anne Helen Petersen, author of [Can’t Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation](#), she says: “The modern workforce is a constant tension for anybody under 50. There is this sense that it could all go to hell at any moment.” The experience is on a spectrum – some people describe long periods of being basically incapacitated, unable to see a way back to functioning normally, and Harfoush even lost her hair through stress – but to Seal, “the most overwhelming feeling was loneliness, a really profound sense that I had let work take over everything in my life. In this hamster wheel attempt to establish myself [she was and remains a freelance writer], I never said ‘no’ and, as a result, neglected all the good things in my life: relationships, friends, family, wellbeing and self-care.”

Allied to that precariousness, of course, is what drives so many of us to overwork in the first place: the sense that our worth comes from our work, the “productivity propaganda cult”, Harfoush calls it. “It’s screwed at the

level of linguistics,” Seal says. “We say: ‘I am a writer’, ‘I am an accountant’. In reality, we’re really not our jobs. We merely do them.”

She also talks about the “commodification of wellness”, so we think we can buy our way out of stress with a massage or a holiday, but “there’s so much that pushes us in the direction of being burnt out, a massage isn’t going to cut it”. While corporate culture has to take some collective responsibility for this, Burke says: “I see codependency as an even bigger driver. At its core, it means putting our own happiness into the hands of others and conversely assuming we are responsible for making those around us happy. What it looks like in practice is letting our boss’s inability to switch off dictate our own working practices or not being able to say no to work when we’re totally exhausted for fear that our boss might think ill of us.”

All companies should take Bumble’s approach, and [LinkedIn already has](#). But some of the answers are at the level of the self. That is my slightly burnt-out way of telling you to chill.

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[Opinion](#)Metropolitan police

What's happened at the BBC and the Met police shows the perils of groupthink

[Martin Kettle](#)



When facing scrutiny the institutions reacted in a rigid, defensive manner. It's a common theme across Britain



Metropolitan police commissioner Cressida Dick at Downing Street. ‘As Baroness O’Loan put it: ‘The Metropolitan police’s first objective was to protect itself.’” Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Metropolitan police commissioner Cressida Dick at Downing Street. ‘As Baroness O’Loan put it: ‘The Metropolitan police’s first objective was to protect itself.’” Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Thu 24 Jun 2021 04.00 EDT

[Doris Lessing](#) always asked awkward questions. She posed them in her novels on subjects such as sex, politics and illusion. She posed them in her journalism about nuclear weapons and migration. And she posed them in her table talk, as I know from occasional meetings in the 1990s in a West Hampstead cafe that also appeared in some of her fiction.

At one such lunch, Lessing – whose life and work take up the entire new issue of [Critical Quarterly](#) magazine – recounted the story, which she later wrote about in her [autobiography](#), of one of the most enduringly awkward questions that even she ever asked. In 1952 she joined a group of leftwing British writers, including my father, on a cold war visit to Stalin’s Soviet Union. During the visit, she grew frustrated by the endless official Marxist rhetoric from her hosts. So she and my father devised a question they hoped would produce a more honest and human discussion.

They came up with this: “Always, in every society, even in the most rigid, new ideas appear, are usually regarded as reprehensible or even seditious, but then become accepted, only to be swept aside in their turn by ideas at first considered heretical. How does the Soviet Union allow for this inevitable process, which prevents cultures going rotten, or stultifying?”

Their minder said it was a good question. He would give them an answer tomorrow. The next day, during a visit to Tolstoy’s house, the minder delivered his response. It was a deadening rebuff: “The Soviet Union under the guidance of the great leader Comrade Joseph Stalin will always make the correct decisions, based on Marxist principles.”

It had been a brave try, though a naive one. Doris would draw the lesson before my dad did. But the question endures. How does a society or its institutions listen and respond to facts and ideas that challenge its basic assumptions? It is a huge historical question, and it applies with particular explosiveness in revolutionary or religious regimes that imagine themselves on the side of history or God.

The selfsame question could be asked in present-day China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria – but it would not get a straight answer in any of them. Yet it applies in western societies too. Established liberal democratic orthodoxies and institutions are not good at dealing with challenging and changing ideas either, as Britain has discovered to its great cost.

In a refracted way, a version of Lessing’s question cuts to the heart of many failings of Britain’s public and private institutions. When the BBC commissioned Lord Dyson to examine its handling of Martin Bashir’s 1995 interview with Diana, Princess of Wales, for example, my initial reaction was that it was a fairly pointless historical exercise. Yet the [Dyson report](#) proved me wrong.

By casting a clearer light on the facts behind the Bashir interview, the report exposed the deeper [inadequacy](#) of the BBC’s response. It highlighted larger cultural and governance faults, some of which may still exist. The supposed triumph of the Diana exclusive, the princess’s handwritten approval of it, and the need to defend their scoop, were all that had counted for the BBC.

Last week's [report](#) by Baroness Nuala O'Loan's independent panel on the 1987 [Daniel Morgan](#) murder investigation triggers similar concerns. The core issue is that the killing was not investigated properly and that the Metropolitan police service covered up its failings. It did so in part because some of its officers were corrupt, and in part for reasons of institutional self-interest that, in effect, licensed the corruption.

This shaped the Met's approach to the panel itself. It took 15 months for the police even to agree the terms of their cooperation. And it took seven years before, in September 2020, the Met finally allowed the panel's vetted staff to have independent and unsupervised access to the computerised records on the case. In short, as O'Loan put it: "The Metropolitan police's first objective was to protect itself."

If the Soviet minders of 1952 had been in charge of the press releases, they would doubtless have said that the [BBC](#), under the guidance of Comrade John Birt, would always make the correct decisions; and that the Met police, led by Comrade Cressida Dick, would continue to apply correct Marxist principles in its work as usual.

Yet the BBC and the Met are not bad apples, as police chiefs like to call corrupt cops. Under pressure, they simply acted in defensive ways that have proved extraordinarily familiar in large and small institutions alike. The institutional self-defence reflex – blocking timely interventions that could have protected lives, prevented further abuses and saved enormous amounts of money – is widely shared.

Examples range from hospital inquiries to the [Iraq war](#). And they are not confined to public bodies. High-profile charities (think [Oxfam](#)) and businesses (think [Lehman Brothers](#) or the [News of the World](#)) were brought low by similar false priorities. Today we are living through an egregious example of it in the shape of the deliberately delayed official inquiry into the UK's Covid response failures.

Is there a way of answering Lessing's question more effectively? In his marathon [evidence session](#) with MPs last month, Dominic Cummings defined the issue trenchantly. The delayed response to Covid, Johnson's former chief adviser said, "was literally a classic historical example of

groupthink in action. The process was closed, and that is what happens in closed groupthink bubbles: everyone just reinforced themselves. The more that people from the outside attacked, the more people internally said, ‘Well, they don’t understand, and they haven’t got access to all this information’ and whatnot. It was this classic groupthink bubble.”

Yet Cummings’ own answer will not do. His default approach is to be a disrupter, bringing in “[assorted weirdos](#)” to challenge the system. His problem is that this aggressive approach doesn’t actually work, as his own demise shows. Even more importantly, when he was confronted with a real crisis, as Covid loomed at the start of 2020, he too failed to act. If he had relied instead on the three Ts – tell the truth, be transparent, trust the public – he might still be in his job.

Groupthink comes in many forms. It can be physically enforced in a police state, as it was in Stalin’s Russia. Or it can infest an organisation that believes it is wholly engaged in virtuous work for the public good. Both the BBC and the Met proved vulnerable to that. In the event, each turned its back on the questioners and refused to engage with complexity.

Lessing’s question may not be easy to answer. But it really matters. And it needs to be asked more urgently than ever.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist

OpinionPsychology.

Psychology is a powerful tool, but Britain's Covid response has given it a bad name

[Stephen Reicher](#)

There is huge potential in an approach that tackles crises not by dominating or manipulating people, but by working with them



‘Although our society and popular culture are endlessly obsessed with the psychological, this is generally limited to how we act alone or in personal relationships.’ Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

‘Although our society and popular culture are endlessly obsessed with the psychological, this is generally limited to how we act alone or in personal relationships.’ Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

Thu 24 Jun 2021 05.00 EDT

For many years, psychology has largely been relegated to the “and finally ...” section of the news, down there with dogs on surfboards and siblings reuniting after a lifetime apart. I recall, for instance, during the Scottish independence referendum, being asked to comment on how political differences within families might lead to marital discord. Significant to those involved, no doubt, but hardly central to the story. Although issues that were central to the story – national identity, trust in government, decision-making under conditions of uncertainty – did involve a core psychological dimension, psychologists and behavioural scientists more generally were never invited to comment on these.

The problem is that, although our society and popular culture are endlessly obsessed with the psychological, this is generally limited to how we act alone or in personal relationships. It rarely extends to how we act together, how we combine collectively and hence how we constitute a force that can alter the whole of society. So, when it comes to public policy, the discipline is irrelevant. Fine for the Big Brother House, less so for No. 10.

This has changed over the last year. At the beginning of the pandemic, it became quickly obvious that if we wished to control the virus, people would need to change their behaviours. As the UK government slowly lifts formal restrictions on what people can do, it becomes ever more important that people are able to identify what risks remain, and to act on them.

But before we can dream of a glorious new dawn for psychology and the behavioural sciences, a couple of key objections need to be dealt with. The first is that, though behaviour may well be important, the sciences and scientists who purport to study it have got things so disastrously wrong that they have proved more of a liability than an asset. The most obvious example of this is the sad history of “behavioural fatigue”: [the notion repeated](#), at the start of the pandemic, that people would not be psychologically equipped to deal with restrictions on their behaviours and [would only adhere](#) for just so long. This argument was used to delay lockdown last spring. It was used to relax restrictions at Christmas ([as the Sun put it](#), otherwise there would be a “mutiny of mums”). It has been used in recent weeks to advocate loosening restrictions as a third wave takes hold. It has probably cost many thousands of lives.

Not far behind in terms of destructiveness were more specific assumptions about exactly what restrictions a British public would or wouldn't wear. For instance, it was argued that, unlike east Asian populations, British people would never accept [a rigorous testing regime](#) with the need to self-isolate if infected. This led to more fatal delays in the introduction of measures that are of critical importance – most notably in building an effective test and trace system.

These were indeed catastrophic errors based on catastrophic misunderstandings of behaviour. But, critically, they didn't come from psychologists and indeed were [opposed by most psychologists](#) and other behavioural scientists. I well recall the horror in a meeting when we first heard about “behavioural fatigue” being used to oppose early action – we felt it was wrong, it was dangerous and it would end up being used to try to discredit our disciplines. How right we were.

As for the orientalist fantasy that independent westerners won't abide that which is accepted by passive Asians: this represents precisely what the [study of prejudice](#) has been critiquing since the second world war. The errors derived from the fact that decisions were made on the basis of “folk psychology”: assumptions about human behaviour by non-psychologists. The harm caused by these errors is not an argument against psychology. To the contrary. It is an argument for having trained psychologists present when the key decisions are made.

The second objection is the polar opposite of the first. It isn't that psychology and other behavioural sciences are ineffective and hence useless, it is that that these disciplines are far too effective, which is precisely what makes them dangerous. Psychologists become [svengali-like figures able to manipulate people](#) to do anything and hence are enemies of democracy who must be kept at bay.

Certainly, there are some behavioural models concerned with manipulating people without their awareness – “[nudge theory](#)” being a case in point. The core argument is that people don't have access to the drivers of their behaviour so, rather than reasoning with them to do the right thing, the emphasis is on altering the “choice architecture” to make them do the easy thing. It is an approach that has considerable traction inside government –

not least because it suggests that people can't look after themselves and need an authority to look after them.

However, this behavioural economics approach was at odds with the approach of government advisers in the SPI-B [behavioural advisory group](#) during the pandemic. Our emphasis was on the need to avoid a top-down approach, to root policy in a partnership with the public based on respect and trust – in other words to create the conditions in which people will listen to reason. It is summed up in the mantra that effective policymaking is a [process of co-production](#) with the public.

So, clearly, it isn't right to simply call for more behavioural science and psychology in the formation of government policy. We also have to ask what [sort of behavioural science](#) and what sort of psychology. There is huge potential in [an approach](#) that understands how the power to address the pandemic (and future social problems) is not achieved by domination over people but rather by working with and through people.

In sum, if we learn from this time about the role that psychology (and the behavioural sciences more generally) could and should play in policy development, if we employ these sciences to facilitate the democratic involvement of the public in policy initiatives, we will be better prepared to handle the next crisis.

- Stephen Reicher is a member of the Sage subcommittee advising on behavioural science

OpinionCoronavirus

During Covid, to be ‘vulnerable’ is to be told your life doesn’t matter

[Frances Ryan](#)



The tragic death toll was all too predictable, in a system that decided old and disabled people weren’t worth keeping safe



Nursing staff at the Langholme care home in Falmouth, England, mark a year since the beginning of the pandemic on 23 March 2021. Photograph: Hugh R Hastings/Getty Images

Nursing staff at the Langholme care home in Falmouth, England, mark a year since the beginning of the pandemic on 23 March 2021. Photograph: Hugh R Hastings/Getty Images

Thu 24 Jun 2021 02.00 EDT

“Who do we *not* save?” In marker pen brainstormed on a whiteboard, these five words – from a government meeting in the early days of the pandemic and [leaked](#) last month by Dominic Cummings – say much about this government’s catastrophic handling of the pandemic and the real value it places on the so-called most vulnerable people.

Think back to last spring, when ministers declared that their priority was to keep disabled and older people safe. Matt Hancock promised to throw a [ring of protection](#) around care homes. Boris Johnson thanked disabled people for their “sacrifice” of shielding for months. In reality, these were the very people who would disproportionately go on to die. About 42,000 care home residents in England and Wales have died of Covid, [according to](#) the Office for National Statistics (ONS), although the true number is thought to be

higher. As of [February 2021](#), 61,000 disabled people had lost their lives to the virus – accounting for almost 60% of total Covid-19 deaths in England.

It would be easy to assume these deaths were largely owing to pre-existing health conditions, but they were as much a matter of pre-existing inequalities. Analysis by the ONS shows disabled people's deaths from Covid are linked to poverty and cramped housing, as well as unequal access to healthcare, a reality that has been [even more deadly](#) for black and Asian disabled people.

High-risk people who hoped ministers would protect them ended up becoming victims of inaction and indifference. A [shielding programme](#) in England so inept that nearly two million people were missed off it. Staff sent into care homes without adequate PPE. Shielding workers with no financial support forced into workplaces to pay their bills. This is what [institutional neglect](#) looks like: a perfect storm of systematic injustice and old-fashioned disregard.

“Vulnerable” has become a key word in the pandemic lexicon, but it is one that has often done more harm than good. It implies that the mass deaths of disabled and old people were inevitable, and conveniently exonerates the state from responsibility. It suggests that the decision to send untested residents back to care homes was not to blame for subsequent deaths, but rather it was the faulty bodies of the individuals in question.

The truth is, disabled and older people were not “vulnerable” to the virus simply because of their health or age: they were vulnerable because the government did not bother to keep them safe. What happened to our “most vulnerable” during the pandemic was not some terrible tragedy. It was the all too predictable consequence of a system that decided the lives of disabled and older people mattered less than those of the rest.

When deaths start to mount, it becomes remarkably easy to lose sight of the value of a life. In April last year, as hospitals buckled under rising cases, the British Medical Association set out guidance – later withdrawn – to [ration treatment](#) away from Covid patients with certain disabilities. By the second wave, people with learning disabilities who had fallen sick with the virus were having “do not resuscitate” orders imposed on them. These moments

were shocking, but ultimately they barely registered as a scandal. It is remarkable how easily injustice can be accepted if it is being inflicted on the right set of people.

In the shadows of the second world war, the philosopher Hannah Arendt described how the most immoral acts are often perpetrated not by evil monsters, but by officials carrying out their jobs. Eight decades after the conflict, we find ourselves in a very different global crisis, but Arendt's theory remains relevant. The worst horrors do not need to be calculated. Callousness does not come for us from a villain in a black hat. Sometimes it is just pen scribbled on a whiteboard.

Nothing will bring back the disabled people who have lost their lives to Covid-19, but the least they deserve is that we learn lessons from their deaths. The first is that these matters are bigger than just the pandemic. [Coronavirus](#) may have laid them bare, but it did not invent them.

During the past decade, the British state has adopted an increasingly brazen, utilitarian approach that views some citizens as useful and others as too costly. Years of framing disabled people as “scroungers”, and those out of work as “skivers”, has allowed politicians to put a price tag on decency. It has normalised causing harm to the very people who need help.

The same society that left tens of thousands of people to die in care homes has a benefits system that routinely makes disabled people destitute, and a social care system that leaves elderly people sitting in soiled sheets. One cannot be tackled without confronting the other.

If we are to have any chance of changing this, the second lesson will require reflecting on how such a society has developed in the first place. Institutions and the people within them hold power and responsibility, but they do not exist in a vacuum. Careless politicians have the chance to cause more harm only because we re-elect them. Hate-filled newspapers survive only because we buy them.

There is a dearth of empathy and respect for disabled and marginalised people. Addressing this surely relies on listening to those actually affected; it is not a coincidence that disabled people, who suffer unequal hardship, are

underrepresented in the media and politics. It gives a hint at where we are that, in the current debate about care workers being [unvaccinated](#), we've heard barely a word from the care users who would be put at risk.

The belief that disabled lives – or, for that matter, those of poor or black or older people – are disposable is a deep-seated and complex prejudice that will not be easily shifted. But the crux is surely simple enough: those who are different from ourselves deserve the same rights, dignities and protections as we have. As tens of thousands of “vulnerable” people lie in early graves, it is achingly clear how far we have departed from this ideal. They don't need our pity – they need justice.

- Frances Ryan is a Guardian columnist and author of *Crippled: Austerity and the Demonisation of Disabled People* (now in audiobook)

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OpinionCoronavirus

Johnson loves science when he can crow about Britain. When it demands facts, he's less keen

Rafael Behr



He claims he wanted to be a scientist. One shudders to think what his fraudulent character might have unleashed in a lab



Illustration: Bill Bragg/The Guardian

Illustration: Bill Bragg/The Guardian

Wed 23 Jun 2021 09.55 EDT

This time last year there was no Covid vaccine and none was imminent. Today, about [43 million Britons](#) – 80% of the UK adult population – have had a dose. The ordeal is far from over, but this will be the crux of the story when future generations narrate Britain's pandemic: the virus brought fear and death; science replied with vaccines and hope.

The associated political debates will go on in the margins. The jabs may have transformed Boris Johnson's [poll ratings](#), but that reflects a feelgood factor, which is not bankable. It cannot be deployed later in the year if voters feel bad about something else. The significance of the smooth vaccine rollout to the prime minister's longer-term reputation depends on whether it is a late bloom of sustained administrative competence or, as seems likelier, a fluke, to be followed by a resumption of 2020-style disarray and prevarication.

For now, the prime minister knows that science is his alibi and his salvation. He uses the claim to have followed its dictates whenever his mistakes are raised. In televised press conferences with medical and scientific advisers,

he is unusually coy for a man with an unlimited appetite for the limelight. He makes a public show of deference to experts whose counsel he has been [reluctant to heed](#) in private.

This week the prime minister donned a white coat to announce the creation of a new [Office for Science and Technology Strategy](#). This body, based in the Cabinet Office, will direct resources to auspicious projects that will “reinforce the position of the UK as a science superpower”.

There are worse ambitions for a government to have. Scientists will be glad of the attention if sustained new funding matches the boast (which it rarely does with Johnson), and if they are spared political meddling (which the current government cannot resist and is surely the whole point of the thing).

There is a tension between Johnson’s romantic notion of science as the heroic endeavour by which a nation aggrandises itself and science as conducted by actual scientists. It shows when he talks about the vaccines, as this week when he said: “There can’t have been a time in modern memory where every family has owed so much to British scientists.”

The debt is real, and many of those involved work in UK institutions. But they are not all British, nor would the British ones claim exclusive national credit for achievements made possible by international collaborations and immigration. The Oxford-based team that produced the AstraZeneca jab included [scientists](#) from Ireland, France, Italy, Germany, China, India, Nepal and New Zealand. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, the first to be rolled out in the UK, was a German-US collaboration led by two scientists of Turkish background.

Johnson also claimed that he “always wanted to be a scientist” but was diverted towards the humanities at school. One shudders to imagine the quackery that his fraudulent character might have unleashed in a laboratory. This is the man who was sacked from his first job in journalism for fabricating a quote. His career is built on the belief that awkward facts can be circumnavigated with a well-turned phrase and that disputing the existence of obstacles makes them disappear.

His first instinct when confronted with news of the coronavirus in early 2020 was to belittle the threat, because that was his preferred scenario. In fairness, he did not then follow Donald Trump down the road of wacko denialism. Unlike many radical American conservatives, Johnson accepts that climate change is real, although he has [published doubts](#) about it. He is not irrationally anti-scientific in the way of religious fundamentalists or new-age mystics. He has a relationship with facts, but it is not monogamous.

The prime minister's beliefs are hard to pin down because they are not a fixed property of his mind but a synthesis of ideological impulse and the prejudices of his immediate audience. They are conjured into being by circumstance and sincerely held for the duration of their expedient lives. Such is the nature of his commitment to science. He means it when he is wearing the white coat or making speeches about Britain as the global capital of quantum computing, gene editing, or space exploration. He just doesn't like the part of science that insists on statements being proved in observable reality.

That is not new to politics. New ministers often promise to be guided by evidence but the commitment fades once enough personal reputation and budget is already invested in a policy that isn't working. Vanity drives the machine deeper into failure; bullying ensures that failure is dressed as success. Ambition, fear and ideology provide the apparatus with reasons to go along with the pretence.

It is a dynamic that sustains regimes of left and right. It is especially prevalent where there is a capricious, charismatic leader on whose favour all advancement depends. No one volunteers to bring awkward truth to a boss who rewards messengers of comforting fiction.

Scientists, being human, are not immune to those foibles. But the scientific method does contain, in principle, a duty to look for the flaws in their hypotheses; to test predictions against outcomes. Failure is not humiliating if it generates new information to improve the experiment.

In theory, politics could import that principle. In practice, it is hard to imagine ministers announcing that their solution to a problem actually made it worse, but the money was not wasted because the new policy would be

better as a result. It usually takes a change of government to flush out the old mistakes so new ones can be made.

The credible threat of election defeat can also make governments more careful, but Johnson is not subject to that discipline yet. Without it, he can inhabit a reality of his own narration, in preference to one that stands up to empirical rigour. He can put on a lab coat and imagine all kinds of superpower alchemy. But it is fancy dress on a government that likes everything about science apart from its duty to truth.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

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[OpinionLabour](#)

Why does Keir Starmer keep telling voters that Labour deserves to lose?

[Matt Zarb-Cousin](#)

The opposition leader's misguided attempt to 'win the right to be heard' has only driven away his own base



Keir Starmer 'has alienated Labour members and shied away from big political ideas'. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Keir Starmer 'has alienated Labour members and shied away from big political ideas'. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Wed 23 Jun 2021 07.11 EDT

The news this week that Keir Starmer is [parting ways](#) with his director of communications, deputy director of communications, chief of staff, and his political director may bring an end to an unusual experiment in political communications that has been under way inside Labour. This innovative

approach to messaging has attracted some attention for its lack of memorable policies (remember “[British Recovery Bonds](#)”?). But its main feature has been the unconventional insistence, from Starmer and his top team, that voters are right to shun Labour, who deserve to lose, in favour of the Tories, who are frankly doing such an excellent job that they will naturally keep winning.

The seeds of this approach were first sown by the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, in the aftermath of the 2019 election defeat, when he said [the British public got it right by voting Tory](#). The baton was soon picked up by the shadow foreign secretary, Lisa Nandy, who was keen to stress in her leadership campaign that Labour must “change or die”.

What started as a useful campaigning tool in the leadership elections – a bit of tough love for the party faithful – soon became a national communications strategy. Starmer himself parroted these sentiments in his first conference speech as Labour leader, saying the party he campaigned for as a prominent member of its shadow cabinet “[deserved to lose the 2019 election](#)”. These days, every subsequent setback brings [new lines to explain why Labour should not get your vote](#): “Labour doesn’t listen to voters”; “Labour has lost the trust of working people”; “Labour are talking to ourselves instead of the country”; and on and on.

This over-the-top self-flagellation has its roots in the repeated insistence from frontbenchers that Labour needed first of all to “earn the right to be heard” – the belief that in order to win back Tory voters, Labour needed to analyse its own failings in a way that would resonate with hostile media and its audiences. As a result, prominent figures repeatedly imply that the 10 million people who voted for their party in 2017 and 2019 were mad to do so, or delusional for believing the manifestos that they backed could ever be delivered. (This attitude is all the more bemusing given the policies of its 2019 manifesto [continue to poll extremely well](#) and are finding [more resonance](#) in a context where political imaginations have been expanded by a pandemic.)

Instead of mobilising the energy of the party’s base and amalgamating some of the popular policy ideas – as Joe Biden has successfully done with the insurgent left in the Democratic party – Starmer has alienated Labour

members and shied away from big political ideas, unless you count the announcement in February that he would soon launch a “[policy blitz](#)” that still hasn’t arrived. Even if one takes a cynical view of the motivations for Biden’s leftward shift, his agreement to pursue big-ticket policies like the [Green New Deal](#) secured the support of his leftwing primary opponents and helped unite the party behind him.

But for Starmer’s [Labour](#) there are no political gains to be made from appealing to progressive voters, who seem to be defecting in droves to the Greens and even the Liberal Democrats, or simply abstaining. There appears to be a reluctance in the leader’s office to test their crude tabloid narrative of why [Labour](#) “lost the working class” against the actual data.

According to figures from the latest round of the British Election Study, [most low-income workers actually voted](#) for Labour in 2019; if we leave aside retirees, the only income group where the Conservatives led Labour was [those earning over £100k](#). Without the votes of pensioners, Labour would have led the Conservatives by [three percentage points](#).

This is a different challenge than the 1990s, when New Labour identified and targeted what it saw as an aspirational section of the electorate that had been drawn to Thatcherism but which could be won over. Today’s version of Mondeo Man – a self-employed worker who is far from retirement age and “not rich” – is already likely to vote for Labour. So the party’s issue is not that it has “lost the working class” or failed to appeal to aspirational voters; it has lost pensioners whose material circumstances, alongside [demographic shifts](#), have created an almost impenetrable Tory base.

The Tories do not insult their core supporters, but unapologetically set political priorities that they know will appeal to their key voters, and build political projects around those issues. Labour, on the other hand, has caused disillusionment among its base. Young voters are shifting their allegiance from Labour to the Greens, while the Lib Dem victory in [Chesham and Amersham](#) punctured Starmer’s claim that a “vaccine bounce” had made the Tories invincible.

Now the leadership risks losing the Batley and Spen byelection as Muslim voters also [desert their longstanding political home](#). Party officials have only

made matters worse by briefing [Islamophobic lines to the rightwing press](#).

It is difficult to see a way back for Labour while their own MPs lack the political sense to draw on the party's strengths while addressing its real weaknesses – rather than those conjured for internal political gains. Labour must rediscover its radical edge quickly or it will continue to lose support. Otherwise, despite all the criticism, Corbyn's leadership will be seen as a post-2005 high-water mark for a party in [perpetual decline](#).

- Matt Zarb-Cousin is a former Labour media spokesman and director of Clean Up Gambling

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2021.06.24 - Around the world

- [John McAfee Antivirus entrepreneur found dead in Spanish prison](#)
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[John McAfee](#)

John McAfee: antivirus entrepreneur found dead in Spanish prison

McAfee's extradition to the US on tax charges had been approved hours earlier

01:35

Antivirus entrepreneur John McAfee found dead in Spanish prison – video

[Sam Jones](#) in Madrid, [Kari Paul](#) in San Francisco and agencies

Wed 23 Jun 2021 18.39 EDT

The antivirus software entrepreneur [John McAfee](#) has been found dead in his cell in Spain from an apparent suicide, hours after the country's highest court approved his extradition to the United States, where he was wanted on tax-related criminal charges that carry a prison sentence of up to 30 years.

Catalonia's regional police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra, [confirmed a report in El País](#) that McAfee, 75, had been found dead in the Brians 2 prison near Barcelona, late on Wednesday.

In a statement, the Catalan justice department said that prison officers and medics had tried to save the life of a 75-year-old man but had been unsuccessful.

“Judicial staff have been dispatched to the prison and are investigating the causes of death,” the statement said, adding: “Everything points to death by suicide.”

McAfee's lawyer told the Reuters news agency on Wednesday evening that McAfee had apparently hanged himself in his prison cell.

Tax offenses

McAfee, the creator of the McAfee virus software, was [arrested last October at Barcelona's international airport](#) as he was about to board a flight to Istanbul.

The arrest of the entrepreneur came a day after authorities had made public a US indictment stemming from alleged tax offenses. [Tennessee](#) prosecutors had charged McAfee with evading taxes after failing to report income made from promoting cryptocurrencies while he did consultancy work, as well as income from speaking engagements and selling the rights to his life story for a documentary.

On Wednesday, Spain's highest court had approved McAfee's extradition to the United States, although the decision could be appealed and the extradition would have had to be approved by the Spanish cabinet.

"The court agrees to grant the extradition of John David McAfee as requested by the American judicial authorities for the crimes referred to in the tax offense indictments for years 2016 to 2018," read the 16-page ruling.

Erratic behavior

Since making a fortune in the 1980s with the software that still bears his name, McAfee had engaged in increasingly erratic behavior, most recently as a self-styled cryptocurrency guru claiming to make \$2,000 a day.

His namesake company ultimately became a household entity in antivirus security, but tried to distance itself from its controversial founder after he resigned in 1994.

McAfee was purchased by the computer chip maker Intel in 2010 for \$7.7bn and was folded into Intel's larger cybersecurity division. The rebranding was short-lived, and Intel in 2016 spun out the cybersecurity unit into a new company called McAfee.

McAfee's personal life often drew as much interest as his professional achievements. He twice made long-shot runs for the US presidency and was a participant in Libertarian party presidential debates in 2016. He dabbled in yoga, ultra-light aircraft and producing herbal medications.

He frequently touted conspiracy theories on social media, and became the subject of frenzied media scrutiny following the [unsolved 2012 murder of a neighbor in Belize](#).



John McAfee on his yacht anchored at the Marina Hemingway in Havana, on 26 June 2019. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

When the police found him living with a 17-year-old girl and discovered a large arsenal of weapons in his home in the Central American country, McAfee disappeared on a month-long flight that drew breathless media coverage. McAfee said he knew nothing about the murder, but was worried he might have been the attacker's intended target.

The dead neighbor's family later filed a wrongful death suit against McAfee and last year a court in Florida ruled against him, ordering him to pay the family more than \$25m.

In 2015, McAfee was [arrested in the US](#) for driving under the influence and possession of a gun while under the influence.

In July 2019, he was released from detention in the Dominican Republic after he and five others were suspected of traveling on a yacht [carrying high-calibre weapons, ammunition and military-style gear](#), officials in the Caribbean country said at the time.

In March, he was charged in a Manhattan federal court over a pump and dump scheme involving cryptocurrencies he was promoting to his large social media following.

In a hearing held via video link earlier this month in Spain, McAfee had argued that the charges against him were politically motivated and said he would spend the rest of his life in prison if he was returned to the US.

In an interview with British newspaper the Independent, McAfee said his experience of being in a Spanish prison was a “fascinating adventure” and he planned never to return to the US.

His main point of contact outside the prison, McAfee said, was his wife, Janice. The last post from his Twitter account was a retweet of a Father’s Day message from her.

“These eight months John has spent in prison in Spain have been especially hard on his overall health both mentally and physically, as well as financially, but he is undeterred from continuing to speak truth to power,” it said.

Conspiracy theorists have already seized on McAfee’s death, editing his Wikipedia page to state he was murdered. McAfee’s apparent suicide [comes after](#) he shared tweets about the poor conditions in prison, stating “there is much sorrow in prison, disguised as hostility”.

Hours after his death, a post featuring the letter Q [was shared](#) to McAfee’s Instagram account. The image is probably a reference to QAnon – the baseless conspiracy theory that there exists a secret world order of satanic pedophiles being battled in secret by Donald Trump.

- In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is at 800-273-8255 and [online chat is also available](#). You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. In the UK and Ireland, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13

11 14. Other international helplines can be found at
www.befrienders.org

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John McAfee

John McAfee: the tech pioneer turned fugitive

Founder of McAfee Associates went on the run in 2012 after his Belize neighbour was shot dead

- [John McAfee: antivirus entrepreneur found dead in Spanish prison](#)



John McAfee announces his candidacy for president in Opelika, Alabama in 2015. McAfee was found dead in his jail cell near Barcelona, Spain, on Wednesday. Photograph: Todd J Van Emst/AP

John McAfee announces his candidacy for president in Opelika, Alabama in 2015. McAfee was found dead in his jail cell near Barcelona, Spain, on Wednesday. Photograph: Todd J Van Emst/AP

[Helen Sullivan](#)
[@helenrsullivan](#)

Thu 24 Jun 2021 00.57 EDT

John McAfee, the creator of a programme that is among the most-used virus protection programmes worldwide, was a controversial figure, cryptocurrency promoter, tax opponent and fugitive who twice made [long-shot runs for the US presidency](#).

He publicly embraced drugs, guns and sex, and had a history of legal woes spanning from Tennessee to Central America to the Caribbean.

Born in the UK in 1945 as John David McAfee, he moved to the US as a child and grew up in Virginia with a father who “beat him mercilessly” and killed himself when the boy was 15, according to Steve Morgan, who spent time with McAfee in Alabama in 2016 to talk about his life for a biography he’d been contracted to write. Morgan said talking about his father’s death was the only time during their long meeting that McAfee cried.

[Gringo: The Dangerous Life of John McAfee review – proto-Trump figure chills the blood](#)

[Read more](#)

McAfee earned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics in 1967 from Roanoke College, Virginia and two decades later founded his eponymous company. At the time, Morgan said, he was operating a BBS, a bulletin board system that served as a precursor to the world wide web, and working with his brother-in-law.

When the first major computer virus, called “Brain”, hit in 1986, “John instantly dialled up a programmer he knew and said, ‘There’s a big opportunity. We need to do something. You know, we want to write some code to combat this virus,’” Morgan said. He called the program VirusScan and the company McAfee Associates.

“He was a true pioneer, not just as a security technologist but as one of the first companies to distribute software over the internet,” Morgan said.

McAfee lost a fortune in the global financial crash in 2008 and emigrated to Belize, where he cultivated the image of a shirtless, highly kidnappable new-age medicines kingpin, complete with armed bodyguards and payrolled gangsters. He also made a number of donations to local police.

Nonetheless, California chipmaker Intel bought McAfee's company in 2011 for \$7.68bn. For a time, Intel sought to dissociate the brand from its controversial founder by folding it into its larger cybersecurity division. But the rebranding was short-lived, and Intel in 2016 spun out the cybersecurity unit into a new company called McAfee.

In 2012 he was wanted for questioning in connection with the death of Gregory Viant Faull, who was [shot to death in early November](#) that year on the island in Belize where both men lived. McAfee was living with a 17-year-old girl. "I do have teenage girlfriends and many at a time," he said in an interview included in a 2016 documentary.

In 2019 a Florida court ordered McAfee to pay \$25m to Faull's estate in a wrongful death claim. He refused to pay it, writing in a statement posted on Twitter that he has "not responded to a single one of my 37 lawsuits for the past 11 years". He claimed to have no assets.

A Wired Magazine reporter who spent six months investigating his life that year recounted an incident in which McAfee played Russian roulette – repeatedly pulling the trigger on what he claimed was a loaded pistol, pointed at his head – to illustrate a point.

[John McAfee: 'Bad people are still after me'](#)

[Read more](#)

Somewhat incongruously, McAfee remained an ardent defender of digital security. He was particularly concerned by Google, telling the Guardian [in a 2015 interview](#) that the company "would have you believe if you have nothing to hide, why should you care if people know everything."

"When you first meet someone, you don't divulge your deepest secrets. If privacy doesn't matter, would you be willing to give your wallet to a total stranger and let them go through it and write down everything they find inside? Then why on earth would we believe that if we're not doing anything wrong, we shouldn't care if someone has our information?"

- In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is at 800-273-8255 and [online chat is also available](#). You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. In the UK and Ireland, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org

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US justice system

House investigates possible shadow operation in Trump justice department

Judiciary committee wants to know if officials violated policies in issuing secret subpoenas against congressional Democrats



The former attorney general Jeff Sessions, along with his successor William Barr, have denied knowledge of the subpoenas but congressional Democrats will examine their accuracy. Photograph: Dan Anderson/EPA

The former attorney general Jeff Sessions, along with his successor William Barr, have denied knowledge of the subpoenas but congressional Democrats will examine their accuracy. Photograph: Dan Anderson/EPA

[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington

Thu 24 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Top [Democrats](#) in the House are investigating whether Trump justice department officials ran an unlawful shadow operation to target political

enemies of the former president to hunt down leaks of classified information, according to a source familiar with the matter.

The House judiciary committee chairman, Jerry Nadler, is centering his investigation on the apparent violation of internal policies by the justice department, when it issued subpoenas against Democrats Adam Schiff and Eric Swalwell in 2018.

[Watchdog investigates seizure of Democrats' phone data by Trump DoJ](#)
[Read more](#)

The use of subpoenas to secretly seize data from the two Democrats on the House intelligence committee – and fierce critics of Donald Trump – would ordinarily require authorization from the highest levels of the justice department and notably, the attorney general.

But with the former Trump attorneys general Bill Barr and [Jeff Sessions](#) denying any knowledge of the subpoenas, Democrats are focused on whether rogue officials abused the vast power of the federal government to target Trump's perceived political opponents, the source said.

That kind of shadow operation – reminiscent of the shadow foreign policy in Ukraine that led to Trump's first impeachment – would be significant because it could render the subpoenas unlawful, the source said.

And if the subpoenas were issued without proper authorization from the attorney general level, it could also leave the officials involved in the effort open to prosecution for falsely operating with the imprimatur of law enforcement.

The sharpening contours of the House judiciary committee's investigation into the Trump justice department reflects Democrats' determination to uncover potential politicization at the department.

Current and former justice department officials have [described](#) the subpoenas as part of a fact-gathering effort that ensnared Schiff and Swalwell because they had been in contact with congressional aides suspected of leaking classified information.

As the justice department investigated leaks, they obtained records of House intelligence committee staffers, as well as the records of their contacts. Schiff and Swalwell were not the target of the investigation, the [Wall Street Journal reported](#).

But Democrats are also concerned about the denials from Barr and Sessions and are set to look at whether they made publicly misleading representations to obfuscate the extent of their involvement.

The two former attorneys general appeared to issue very carefully worded denials, the source said, which raised the prospect that they may have been at least aware of the leak inquiries into Schiff and Swalwell.

Barr said in an interview with Politico that while he was attorney general, he was “not aware of any congressman’s records being sought in a leak case”, while Sessions also told associates he was never briefed on the subpoenas.

In examining the denials, Democrats could demand testimony from Barr and Sessions, as well as other Trump justice department officials. Nadler told the Guardian he would also consider deposing the former deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein.

But the committee is not expected to issue subpoenas for their testimony for some time, in large part because Democrats and counsel on the committee are not yet certain what information they need to compel.

The committee took its first step in trying to establish what testimony it needed for its investigation last week, when Nadler sent a lengthy document request to the attorney general, Merrick Garland, and demanded a briefing before 25 June.

Democrats on the House judiciary committee are not likely to receive a briefing until next month, the source said. But the House inquiry is sure to be the most potent investigation into the data seizure after Republicans vowed to stymie a parallel inquiry in the Senate.

Although justice department investigations into leaks of classified information are routine, the use of subpoenas to seize data belonging to the

accounts of sitting members of Congress with gag orders to keep their existence secret remain near-unprecedented.

Justice department investigators gained access to, among others, the records of Schiff, then the top Democrat on the House intelligence committee and now its chairman, Swalwell and the family members of lawmakers and aides.

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