

## **Press release: Colyton event to commemorate one of the worst natural disasters to hit East Devon**

In 1968 a summer storm flooded homes and businesses across Devon and Somerset, thousands were driven from their homes and tragically a number of lives were lost.

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The Environment Agency, together with Colyton Parish Council and Colyton History Society will commemorate the floods of July 1968 with a free exhibition of historic flood photographs and maps.

Residents and visitors are invited to come along and share their experiences or to simply view the photographs on display.

Date: Wednesday 27 March 2019

Opening: 2pm to 7pm

Location: Colyton Town Hall

Chris Khan, Flood Resilience Officer at the Environment Agency, said:

Over 750 people attended a similar event in Sidmouth last year – it was an amazing success with people coming from all over the country. The feedback was very positive and other communities have asked if we could hold another exhibition.

We are very excited to be working with Colyton Parish Council and Colyton History Society on this second event. The exhibition will include many historical flooding photographs and maps from our archive. We would like as many people as possible to come along, share memories and bring any photographs they have.

Devon Communities Together (DCT) will also be attending the event. DCT are working with parishes across Devon, helping communities write their emergency plans.

Colyton Parish Council are currently looking for volunteers to help out in the community in a number of different roles and will be there on the day to speak to anyone who may be interested.

The impacts of the flood in 1968 were immense; bridges collapsed causing roads to close. Sidmouth, Colyton, Honiton, Newton Poppleford, East Budleigh and Ottery St Mary all had significant flood damage whilst the Otterhead reservoir was completely washed away.

Chantry Bridge, Colyton, 1968

A lot has changed since 1968; similar storms still occur but people and businesses are better protected than ever before. In the last 10 years the government has invested more than £6.1 billion in flood risk management work including many flood alleviation schemes across the south west.

There are also tools to help you reduce your own risk of flooding. The Environment Agency send targeted flood warnings to over a million people in England – giving them vital time to prepare for flooding. You can sign up for free flood warnings [online](#) or by ringing 0345 988 1188.

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## **News story: Government pledge to ‘beat the cheats’ at university**

Online giants, including PayPal, have been called out by the Education Secretary to stop promoting and facilitating access to essay writing services, as the government signals its intention to ‘beat the cheats’ at university today (20 March).

In the first of a series of interventions across the higher education sector, Damian Hinds has challenged PayPal to stop processing payments for ‘essay mills’ as part of an accelerated drive to preserve and champion the quality of the UK’s world-leading higher education system.

Technology giants such as Google and YouTube have responded to these calls and are taking steps ‘beat the cheats’ by removing hundreds of advertisements for essay writing services and promotional content from their sites. Other platforms that have not acknowledged this issue are being told to follow suit.

As part of a range of action being taken by the department and the sector, the Education Secretary is also calling on universities to crackdown on those

found cheating at university and is calling on higher education providers to consider 'honour codes', which would see students sign a pledge not to use essay writing services for their own assignments.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Sadly there have always been some people who opt for the easy way and the internet has seen a black market in essay writing services spring up. However, no matter how easy it is to access these services now, it doesn't change the fact that this is cheating, and students must understand it is unacceptable.

It is simply unethical for these companies to profit from this dishonest business which is exploiting young people and it is time to stamp them out of our world-class higher education sector.

I am determined to beat the cheats who threaten the integrity of our system and am calling on online giants, such as PayPal, to block payments or end the advertisement of these services – it is their moral duty to do so.

There has been some positive progress made by some in the tech sector but it is vital that we all unite to clamp down on this practice and the companies that are feeding on it.

In 2016 the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) [found](#) there are approximately 17,000 instances of academic offences per year in the UK, however the number of students using essay writing services is thought to be much higher as plagiarised essays often go undetected. A [study](#) by Swansea University of students internationally, found the number of students outside the UK who admitted to paying for assignments since 2014 equates to one in seven.

Work is already underway across the sector to tackle the issue, with companies like Turnitin developing more sophisticated software to detect plagiarism. There are currently 10 universities globally that are trialling new software developed by Turnitin to identify cheating of this kind.

Universities Minister Chris Skidmore said:

Developing your knowledge and applying it at a high standard is at the very core of a university education, but these essay writing companies and the students paying for these services are undermining the foundations that our HE system is built upon.

Students work incredibly hard to get a place at university and those who choose to cheat risk throwing it all away for the sake of a shortcut. It is right that those who have the ability to limit access to these services, including online platforms, do everything within their power to do so – not only for students but our world-class reputation.

In January Mr Hinds announced that the department will be publishing an Education Technology strategy this spring to help the industry tackle some of the key challenges facing the education sector. This will include encouraging tech companies to identify how anti-cheating software can tackle the growth of essay mills and stay one step ahead of the cheats.

The Education Secretary also wants universities to improve inductions to make it clear to students from day one that using essay writing services is unacceptable and make sure that students are assessed in a variety of ways to not overly rely on essays.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

When I was at university I was struck by American friends who talked about the honour code system.

They wouldn't consider even low-level plagiarism because it broke this code – an agreement as they saw it between themselves and the university, and their peers.

I also expect universities to do everything in their power to prevent students being tempted by these companies by introducing initiatives such as honour codes and making sure their students are aware of the severe consequences they face if they are caught cheating. Students should know that they face being thrown off their course if they are found to be cheating.

The Department for Education has worked with the QAA, Universities UK (UUK) and the National Union of Students to publish [guidance](#) for all universities on how best to tackle the use of essay mills. This includes educating students about the risks of using essay writing services and blocking advertisements of these services on campus.

The QAA, which campaigns against essay mills and contract cheating on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment, wrote to online platforms in November last year to ask them to join the drive to stop promoting these services. Google has since taken down hundreds of adverts and positive steps have also been taken by YouTube to remove promotional material on channels.

The Office for Students is responsible for taking action against universities if they are found to be complicit in cheating. The regulator has strong powers to take action where it finds providers are not working in students' interests including placing conditions on registration, financial penalties and ultimately deregistration in the most serious cases.

QAA Chief Executive Douglas Blackstock said:

The UK has a world-leading reputation for the standards and quality of its higher education and we are not going to let these companies undermine it. Companies that try to entice students to buy so-called plagiarism free essays pose a real threat to the academic integrity of our higher education. These unscrupulous operators, increasingly and falsely marketing themselves as providing legitimate study aids, must be stopped in their tracks.

Students need to understand that if they get caught their professional careers and personal reputations are at risk. More worryingly, we have recently heard stories of essay companies attempting to blackmail students by threatening to expose them unless they hand over greater sums of money.

Hundreds of essay companies across the world use online platforms to promote or transact their services to students. We applaud the government for putting pressure on these powerful platforms to stop doing business with essay cheat companies, making it increasingly difficult for them to find an audience for the unscrupulous services that damage reputations and lives.

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## **Press release: Brokenshire announces funding boost for homeless veterans**

- Communities Secretary announces £1 million fund to boost support for vulnerable veterans
- Investment for eleven local areas to fund access to housing advice or mental health support, reducing the risk of homelessness
- Move part of government commitment to tackle all forms of homelessness and end rough sleeping for good

Veterans who have become homeless, or at risk of it, will be supported through an extra £1 million boost, the Communities Secretary, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP announced today (20 March 2019).

The money will help ensure those who have served their country have a roof over their heads and have the support they need once leaving the Armed Forces.

The fund will be shared among the ten combined authorities and the Greater London Authority who will be able to use the funding to provide veterans with the bespoke support they need as they navigate civilian life.

Money could also be used to direct former soldiers to existing specialist support services on offer, such as access to supported housing and training

for staff on mental health issues, including PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and how to support those former service personnel who may initially be reluctant to receive help.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

Our veterans play a vital role in keeping our country safe and many have dedicated their lives to the services. For those who fall on hard times and end up on the street, it is only right that we give them all the support they need to put a roof over their head.

Local authorities across the country already provide much needed support for veterans, but this boost will allow them to go further and ensure that more people have access to valuable services, such as housing advice or mental health support.

This additional funding goes hand in hand with the £1.2 billion which has been set aside to tackle all forms of homelessness, including £100 million for rough sleeping, helping ensure everyone has a safe and secure home to call their own, regardless of their background.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The vast majority of those leaving the Armed Forces go on to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives, but it's right that we support those who struggle.

One veteran on the street is one too many and I welcome today's announcement on funding to address homelessness and rough sleeping.

This, along with the support we already provide through the Veteran Gateway, underlines our commitment to helping those who have served our country.

Last month, ministers confirmed over £19.5 million is to be shared among 54 projects across the country to help thousands of people who are homeless to secure their own home – through support such as paying deposits for a tenancy or putting down the first months' rent. This will help vulnerable people secure a home in a property they may otherwise not have been able to access.

This work supports the ongoing government commitment to put an end to rough sleeping for good, through a number of initiatives set out in the £100 million backed [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#). So far, over 1750 beds and 500 additional support staff jobs have been created, helping to get rough sleepers off the street and into a more permanent home. This will allow them access employment, benefits and the necessary mental health or addiction support services to rebuild their lives for good.

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## Press release: Investigation launched into potential for bias in algorithmic decision-making in society

- Centre will investigate how to maximise the benefits in the use of algorithms in recruitment, local government and financial services
- Comes as organisation publishes its first full-year work programme and strategy setting out its priorities for the year ahead

The potential for bias in the use of algorithms in crime and justice, financial services, recruitment and local government will be investigated by the [Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation \(CDEI\)](#).

Algorithms have huge potential for preventing crime, protecting the public and improving the way services are delivered. But decisions made in these areas are likely to have a significant impact on people's lives and public trust is essential.

Professionals in these fields are increasingly using algorithms built from data to help them make decisions. But there is a risk that any human bias in that data will be reflected in recommendations made by the algorithm. The CDEI wants to ensure those using such technology can understand the potential for bias and have measures in place to address. It also aims to help guarantee fairer decisions and where possible improve processes.

In crime and justice, algorithms could be used to assess the likelihood of re-offending and inform decisions about policing, probation and parole. For example, some police forces have already started to use algorithms to feed into their decision-making – such as the Harm Assessment Risk Tool in Durham which is being used to assist officers in deciding whether an individual is eligible for deferred prosecution based on the future risk of offending.

The establishment of the CDEI supports the government's wider Industrial Strategy, and it was set up to make sure data-driven technologies and artificial intelligence are used for the benefit of society. It will partner with the Race Disparity Unit to explore the potential for bias based on ethnicity in decisions made in the crime and justice system.

Speaking ahead of a Downing Street event to mark the publication of the centre's first work programme and strategy setting out the CDEI's priorities, Digital Secretary Jeremy Wright said:

Technology is a force for good which has improved people's lives but we must make sure it is developed in a safe and secure way.

Our Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation has been set up to help us achieve this aim and keep Britain at the forefront of technological development.

I'm pleased its team of experts is undertaking an investigation into the potential for bias in algorithmic decision-making in areas including crime, justice and financial services. I look forward to seeing the Centre's recommendations to Government on any action we need to take to help make sure we maximise the benefits of these powerful technologies for society.

Roger Taylor, Chair of the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, is expected to say:

The Centre is focused on addressing the greatest challenges and opportunities posed by data driven technology. These are complex issues and we will need to take advantage of the expertise that exists across the UK and beyond. If we get this right, the UK can be the global leader in responsible innovation.

We want to work with organisations so they can maximise the benefits of data driven technology and use it to ensure the decisions they make are fair. As a first step we will be exploring the potential for bias in key sectors where the decisions made by algorithms can have a big impact on people's lives.

I am delighted that the Centre is today publishing its strategy setting out our priorities.

The CDEI will also explore the opportunities for data-driven technology to address the potential for bias in existing systems and to support fairer decision-making. This may include increasing opportunities for those in the job or credit markets in existing recruitment and financial services systems. It will also explore opportunities to boost innovation in the digital economy.

In recruitment, computer algorithms can be used to screen CVs and shortlist candidates. This could help potentially limit the impact of unconscious bias, where people discriminate against candidates because of their background. But there have also been reports of such technology inadvertently exacerbating gender bias.

And in financial services data analysis has long been used to inform decisions about whether people can be granted loans. But the rise of data and AI machine-learning presents increased issues about the transparency and fairness of such decisions.



The CDEI today sets out its priorities in its first [Work Programme](#) and [Strategy](#). This also includes plans for it to investigate how data is used to shape online experiences through personalisation and micro-targeting – for example where you search for a product and then adverts for similar products appear later in your browser.

This review will explore where, how and why online targeting approaches are used, and their impact on members of the public. The CDEI is launching a series of nationwide workshops to investigate public views on the acceptability of micro-targeting.

Both policy reviews will publish interim reports in the summer with final reports set to be published early next year.

An algorithm is a series of instructions for performing a calculation or solving a problem, usually with a computer. They are often built using historical data (collected, for example, by police officers, doctors) and the computer identifies patterns in previous decisions to make future decisions.

The government established the UK's pioneering Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation to ensure that people have confidence in how data and technologies, such as AI, are used. It is led by an independent board chaired by Roger Taylor. More details [here](#).

The Race Disparity Unit (RDU) was established in the Cabinet Office, following the Prime Minister's commission of a Race Disparity Audit in 2016. Using the latest published data available, the Audit continues to highlight disparities in outcomes that those from different ethnic and social backgrounds experience from the public services they use. For more information about the RDU, and how it has been working with Departments and stakeholders to address disparities found, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/race-disparity-unit>.

## **The AI and Data Grand Challenge**

The Industrial Strategy sets out Grand Challenges to put the UK at the forefront of the industries of the future, ensuring that the UK takes advantage of major global changes, improving people's lives and the country's productivity. Artificial intelligence and data is one of the 4 Grand Challenges which will see AI used across a variety of industries and put the UK at the forefront of the AI and data revolution.

Find out more about the [Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation](#).

Contact the DCMS Press Office on 0207 211 2210.