

Magistrates to help tackle backlog as sentencing powers doubled

- Magistrates will now be able to issue prison sentences of 12 months for a single offence
- Up to 1,700 extra days of Crown Court time to be freed up annually
- Latest step to drive down the backlog in criminal courts which rose during the pandemic

This is the latest step to tackle the impact of the pandemic on the criminal justice system and is expected to free up around 1,700 extra days of Crown Court time each year.

Previously, magistrates could only issue a maximum of six months in prison, despite often hearing cases that warrant a longer jail term and they would need to be sent to a Crown Court for sentencing by a judge.

The move allows more cases to be sentenced in the Magistrates' Courts, meaning Crown Courts can focus resources on getting through more serious, complicated cases, delivering swifter justice for victims and tackling the backlog.

It follows the launch of the Ministry of Justice's national campaign to recruit 4,000 new magistrates from across all walks of life, as well as a new, streamlined recruitment process to specifically target young people in a bid to boost diversity. Launched in January, it has already resulted in over 34,000 people registering their interest in becoming a magistrate.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice Dominic Raab said:

We are doing everything in our power to bring down the court backlog, and doubling the sentencing powers of magistrates will create more capacity in the Crown Court to hear the most serious cases.

Together with an extra 30 Nightingale courtrooms currently open, digital hearings and allowing the Crown Court to hear as many cases as possible for another financial year, we will deliver swifter and more effective justice for victims.

The Judicial College has provided all magistrates and legal advisers with robust training ahead of the change in law to guarantee they know how to best use these new powers to deliver justice effectively.

Bev Higgs, National Chair of the Magistrates' Association, said:

The Magistrates' Association has long called for this measure; it will lead to more timely justice that can only benefit all court users – defendants, complainants and witnesses.

We are pleased that the government has placed its confidence in the magistracy and introduced this power, alongside other measures, to ease court delays.

These plans build on the significant action taken since the start of the pandemic to ensure courts can recover from the pandemic and tackle delays. This includes:

- Extending unlimited sitting days for the new financial year, ensuring Crown Courts can operate at maximum capacity.
- Increasing spending on criminal legal aid by £135 million a year, including a fee increase which will see a typical criminal barrister earning nearly £7,000 extra per year.
- Rolling out video technology to over 70 percent of all courtrooms and opening 3,265 virtual court rooms across all jurisdictions. These currently hold around 12,500 hearings per week, compared to just a handful before the pandemic.
- Investing almost £450 million over the next three years into victim and support services.
- Creating 2 'super courtrooms' which can accommodate up to 12 defendants simultaneously; increasing capacity for large, complex trials.
- Raising the statutory mandatory retirement age from 70 to 75 for judicial office holders, estimated to retain an extra 400 judges and tribunal members and 2,000 magistrates per year across all jurisdictions.

Notes to editors:

- In January we launched the largest recruitment campaign in the 650-year history of the magistracy. The 4,000 new magistrates we aim to recruit will play a crucial role in helping us to tackle court backlogs and restore swift justice.
 - The Magistrates' Association will be available for broadcast stories. Please contact Alexandra Chitty on media@magistrates-association.org.uk.
 - [The Magistrates' Association](#) is a national charity and the membership body for the magistracy. With more than 12,000 members across England and Wales, it is a unique source of information and insight, and the only independent voice of the magistracy.
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UK exposes sick Russian troll factory plaguing social media with Kremlin propaganda

- UK Government funded expert research unveils new tactics of the Kremlin's large-scale disinformation campaign.
- Troll factory is targeting politicians and baiting audiences across a number of countries including the UK, South Africa and India.
- The operation has suspected links to Yevgeniy Prigozhin, founder of infamous bot-farm the Internet Research Agency.

UK-funded expert research has exposed how the Kremlin is using a troll factory to spread lies on social media and in comment sections of popular websites.

The cyber soldiers are ruthlessly targeting politicians and audiences across a number of countries including the UK, South Africa and India.

The research exposes how the Kremlin's large-scale disinformation campaign is designed to manipulate international public opinion of Russia's illegitimate war in Ukraine, trying to grow support for their abhorrent war, and recruiting new Putin sympathisers.

Sick masterminds of the operation are believed to be working overtly from an old factory in St Petersburg, with paid employees, and internal working teams.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

We cannot allow the Kremlin and its shady troll farms to invade our online spaces with their lies about Putin's illegal war. The UK Government has alerted international partners and will continue to work closely with allies and media platforms to undermine Russian information operations.

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

These are insidious attempts by Putin and his propaganda machine to deceive the world about the brutality he's inflicting on the people of Ukraine. This evidence will help us to more effectively identify and remove Russian disinformation and follows our decisive action to block anyone from doing business with Kremlin-controlled outlets RT and Sputnik.

The evidence shows the troll factory is using Telegram to actively recruit

and co-ordinate new supporters who then target the social media profiles of Kremlin critics – spamming them with pro-Putin and pro-war comments. Targets include the senior UK ministers’ social media accounts, alongside other world leaders.

The operation has suspected links to Yevgeniy Prigozhin, the founder of the most infamous and wide-ranging bot-farm the Internet Research Agency, both of whom the UK has sanctioned.

The UK Government will share this latest research with major social media platforms. We are already working closely with them to ensure they swiftly remove disinformation and coordinated inauthentic or manipulated behaviour, as per their Terms of Service.

The UK has also created a Government Information Cell (GIC) to counter Russian disinformation. Made up of experts from across the UK Government, the Cell is focussed on identifying and assessing Russian disinformation and both advising on and delivering output to expose and challenge the Kremlin’s lies.

Through our unprecedented package of sanctions against Russia, we have already targeted peddlers of Russian disinformation, including Putin’s key political allies, regime spokespeople including Putin’s Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov and Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, and Kremlin-backed disinformation agencies.

The Government has also directly sanctioned state media organisations, targeting the Kremlin-funded TV-Novosti who owns RT, formerly Russia Today, and Rossiya Segodnya who control news agency Sputnik.

Key findings include

- A new troll farm that is seeking to guide and ‘brigade’ a wider network of supporters and sympathisers to engage in targeted trolling behaviours.
- This information operation and its associated targeted trolling activities are being directed at senior international politicians and international media outlets.
- Traces of the operation have been detected across eight social media platforms including Telegram, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok.
- Key tactical innovations of the operational methodology include the use of commenting behaviours, use of VPNs and deliberate amplification of ‘organic’ content supporting the Kremlin’s position. All of these methods help to avoid detection and interception by social media platforms.

Troll Tactics

- Calling on subscribers to target the social media profiles of opponents and Kremlin critics, including prominent politicians and world leaders, and spam them with pro-Kremlin comments.
- Asking them to turn on VPNs and spam the comments sections of specific links to Instagram, YouTube, and Telegram.

- Focusing activity on posting comments, rather than authoring original content – a tactic likely to decrease the risks of being detected by social media platforms for engaging in coordinated inauthentic behaviour and/or harmful content.
 - Searching for ‘organic content’ posted by genuine users coherent with the lines they want to push, and then working to amplify these messages, in order that such views are distorted as the norm. This means that, provided the content they post is not too offensive, they are unlikely to be subject to de-platforming interventions.
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[Platinum Jubilee book to arrive in primary schools from mid-May](#)

Children in state-funded primary schools across the United Kingdom will, from mid-May, begin to receive a free commemorative book to mark Queen Elizabeth’s Platinum Jubilee.

Designed as an official once-in-a-lifetime commemoration of the Platinum Jubilee and written in collaboration with royal experts and historians, the book will tell the story of a young girl, Isabella, visiting her Great Granny Joyce who tells her about the Queen and this year’s Jubilee.

In the story, Isabella sifts through Great Granny Joyce’s treasure box of souvenirs, which act as introductions to the contents of the book. These include recent and historical events across the United Kingdom and Commonwealth, inspirational people, landmark innovations and inventions, and a selection of the best art, design, and culture.

The book will also include famous quotes from the Queen, facts on the coronation ceremony, content on the lives of famous Commonwealth figures such as Nelson Mandela, notable kings and queens and a timeline of Queen Elizabeth’s life.

Children will be invited to personalise their individual copies of the illustrated reference book, by signing a ‘this book belongs to’ section at the beginning of the book. The page reads: ‘During [the Queen’s] reign, the world has changed in so many ways... [This book] will help you understand the amazing life and times of our Queen and the magic of the unique, unshakable bond she shares with the people she serves.’

The book will also help children understand how the four nations came together as one United Kingdom, including details such as Owain Glyndwr’s rebellion against the English in 1400 to take the title of ‘Prince of Wales’, on the journey to the Queen’s reign which continues to this day.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Queen Elizabeth II is the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee and Her Majesty's dignity, commitment and grace continues to inspire people all over the world.

Millions of children will soon receive their own commemorative Jubilee book, celebrating and showcasing the Queen's incredible living legacy. I hope all our pupils are as excited as I am to read about Her Majesty's amazing life and the people and events that have shaped history during the last 70 years.

On the request of the Scottish and Welsh Governments, schools in Scotland and Wales will be asked to opt-in to receive copies of the book, which will then be delivered in late September.

'Brilliant bookmarks' from the Reading Agency are to be distributed with every book, to support and encourage reading for pleasure amongst children at school and over the summer. The book is also featured within the National Literacy Trust's Platinum Jubilee Royal Reading Challenge.

The book goes on private sale from 23 June.

Schools can expect to hear from the Department for Education (in England) or DK Books (in Northern Ireland) in the coming days about delivery details, and those in Scotland and Wales should already have had information on how to place their book orders.

The book was commissioned by the UK Government and is being published by DK Books. It has been designed for a reading age of nine to 10 years, but will be accessible to all primary school age children, for example if parents, carers or teachers read with them.

It forms part of the wider programme of events and activities planned for The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, including a concert, street parties, and an extra bank holiday for the Jubilee weekend itself from Thursday 2 to Sunday 5 June 2022.

[PM call with President Zelenskyy: 30 April 2022](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as part of their regular dialogue.



The Prime Minister spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy today, as part of their regular dialogue.

President Zelenskyy updated on the fierce fighting in Eastern Ukraine and ongoing siege of Mariupol. He set out the equipment needed for the defence of Ukraine.

The Prime Minister reiterated that he is more committed than ever to reinforcing Ukraine and ensuring Putin fails, noting how hard the Ukrainians are fighting for their freedom.

He confirmed that the UK will continue to provide additional military aid to give the Ukrainians the equipment they needed to defend themselves.

The leaders also discussed progress of the UN-led effort to evacuate Mariupol and concern for the injured there. The Prime Minister offered the UK's continued economic and humanitarian support.

The Prime Minister and President Zelenskyy agreed to remain in close contact on next steps, in coordination with international allies and partners.

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[New trial to banish loud engines and exhausts on Britain's noisiest streets](#)

- competition launched for Britain's noisiest streets to benefit from innovative noise camera technology trials backed by £300,000 government investment
- Transport Secretary sets ambition to 'banish boy racers', encouraging MPs across England and Wales to apply to run trials in their local area
- disrespectful drivers could be hit with fine for revving engines and using illegal exhausts

A search for Britain's noisiest streets has been launched by the Department for Transport (DfT) with 4 areas across England and Wales set to trial new phase 2 technology to help stop rowdy motorists revving their engines unnecessarily or using illegal exhausts.

Since the technology is in design phase, MPs are being invited to submit applications to trial new innovative noise cameras in their local area, helping to ensure communities can enjoy their public and residential spaces peacefully.

The technology, backed by £300,000, can automatically detect when vehicles are breaking legal noise requirements, helping provide police and local authorities with the tools and evidence to take action against drivers who flout noise laws. Police have existing powers, including the ability to issue fines, but currently have trouble gathering evidence.

The latest phase of noise trials builds on a 3-year programme to perfect the technology. Research shows noise pollution can have significant impacts on physical and mental health for local residents – with heart attacks, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and stress all linked to long-term contact with loud environments.

Excessive noise pollution can mean children struggle to get a good night's sleep and hardworking people's lives are made more stressful. In England alone, the annual social cost of urban road noise was estimated to be up to £10 billion a decade ago. This is the total economic cost of exposure to noise pollution, including lost productivity from sleep disturbance and health costs from heart attacks, strokes and dementia.

As set out in the government's [Levelling Up white paper](#), complaints about noise are highest among the most economically deprived areas, with those in more disadvantaged areas as much as 3 times as likely to suffer from noise nuisance.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

We want those in Britain's noisiest streets, who are kept up at night by unbearable revving engines and noisy exhausts, to come forward with the help of volunteer areas to test and perfect the latest innovative technology.

For too long, rowdy drivers have been able to get away with disturbing our communities with illegal noisy vehicles. It's time we clamp down on this nuisance, banish the boy racer and restore peace and quiet to local streets.

The technology being used in the trial can provide real-time reports that police can use as evidence and may result in more targeted and efficient enforcement methods to crack down on noisy motorists. By testing this tech in rural and urban areas, the public can help develop the new road technology.

The trial led by the Atkins-Jacobs Joint Venture is formed by the 2 professional services firms to provide technical consultancy including acoustics expertise, design, modelling and asset management.

This follows commitments made by the government to ensure that all parts of Britain have the same powers to deal with noise complaints, including providing them with effective tools for tackling incidents that constitute crime and antisocial behaviour and which can make life a misery for others.

Atkins-Jacobs Joint Venture Practice Director Andrew Pearce said:

This scheme is a critical development for people living in areas affected by antisocial driving. It demonstrates how we can use technology to take a highly targeted approach to solving these problems.

Testing different noise measurement technologies with a range of vehicles in this controlled environment means we can ensure tickets are only sent to drivers with illegal and antisocial cars or bikes.

Highway authorities will be able to automate noise enforcement and get on top of the problem without using up valuable police resources.

Existing legislation requires exhausts and silencers to be maintained in good working order and not altered so as to increase noise. Under the Road Traffic Act 1988 (Section 42) the potential penalty for non-compliance with these requirements is a £50 on-the-spot fine.

The announcement today (30 April 2022) follows preliminary testing of a prototype noise camera by DfT back in 2019, which showed the technology can identify individual vehicles in certain circumstances and assign noise levels to them.

Noise Abatement Society chief executive Gloria Elliott OBE said:

Excessively noisy vehicles cause unnecessary disturbance, stress and anxiety to many and, in some cases, physical pain. They disrupt the environment and people's peaceful enjoyment of their homes and public places.

Communities across the UK are increasingly suffering from this entirely avoidable blight. The Noise Abatement Society applauds rigorous, evidence-based solutions to address this issue and protect the public.