



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

UK Government Response to the Report by the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration

November 2025

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Government of the United Kingdom
Department for Culture, Media and Sport

UK Government Response to the Report by the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration

Presented to Parliament

by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

by Command of His Majesty

November 2025



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Ministerial foreword



Five years ago the world as we knew it came to a halt. COVID-19 affected everyone and in so many different ways, and for many those impacts continue to be felt today.

My thoughts are with the many families who suffered the loss of a loved one during this unprecedented time. The magnitude of their grief is profound. With friends and families unable to mark people's passing in the normal ways it felt as if people were disappearing. In bringing forward this programme of commemoration we recognise the importance of these lives - they were not erased, they mattered and we will not forget them.

I have had the privilege of meeting with a number of COVID-19 bereaved family groups and I have heard first hand the traumatic impact of not being able to be with their loved one, to hold their hand, to say goodbye. I am in awe of the strength and resilience they have shown and I am grateful for their work with both the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration and my department. We are committed to continuing to work together and their voices will continue to be heard.

In visiting the National Covid Memorial Wall I was struck by the scale of loss upon seeing nearly a quarter of a million hand-drawn hearts span as far as you can see, but also the power of the Wall as an expression of love created by the bereaved, for the bereaved. This memorial matters greatly to the whole country. I want to thank the Friends of the Wall for their tireless commitment and dedication to care for the Wall. As we commemorate the pandemic we are committed to working with the Friends of the Wall and local partners to preserve the Wall.

One of the first meetings I had on taking office last year was with Baroness Morgan of Cotes, the Chair of the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration. She spoke powerfully of the care and consideration the Commission had given to how we mark this distinctive period in our history. We need to both honour the lives lost and recognise the sacrifices made to support our public services and the efforts of our world-leading scientists. I am grateful to Baroness Morgan and all of the Commission members for their ongoing advice as we have carefully reflected on their recommendations.

The pandemic saw our communities come together in extraordinary ways to help and support each other in the most difficult of times. We saw acts of courage and dedication from those who worked on the frontline, and those who volunteered to support others. Whether it was our nurses, porters, and paramedics, train and bus drivers, police and fire officers, teachers, or shop and factory workers, we thank all those who worked so hard to keep our country going. These acts of service will be remembered as part of this commemorative programme.

In March, we marked the fifth anniversary of the pandemic with the COVID-19 Day of Reflection, with events held across the country allowing people to remember in a way that was meaningful to them. In contrast to the experiences of isolation and separation we felt during the pandemic, the Day of Reflection was a chance for us to come together to remember both the lives lost, the sacrifices made and the impacts that many continue to feel. We will come together again on Sunday 8 March 2026 for this important day.

Through this programme of commemoration we will ensure that those we lost are honoured, that we remember the sacrifices and resilience of so many during this unprecedented time in our history, and that as a country we do not forget.

Executive summary

This document sets out the UK government's response to the report of the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration and outlines further details of a programme of commemorative activity to mark the pandemic - the COVID-19 Commemoration programme.

The impact of COVID-19 on our society has been profound. It has led to a substantial loss of life, the economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic has been considerable, and it continues to affect the lives of many.

As a country, we will not forget the lives lost, the sacrifices made and the extraordinary acts of service and community spirit during this time.

This government's COVID-19 Commemoration programme will:

- continue to support the UK-wide COVID-19 Day of Reflection taking place in March every year as an opportunity to come together to remember the lives lost and the sacrifices made.
- launch a new UK-wide fellowship scheme on natural hazards to support future national resilience. These fellowships will be funded through our COVID-19 Commemoration programme as we have heard clearly from bereaved families that we must do all that we can to ensure others do not endure the same suffering they have experienced.
- work alongside the Friends of the Wall and local partners to support the long-term preservation of the National Covid Memorial Wall as a national memorial to the lives lost to COVID-19.
- recognise the importance of existing COVID-19 memorials and support the creation of new ones that reflect the importance of green spaces to the country during the pandemic through working with Forestry England and NHS Charities Together.
- recognise the importance of the community-created symbols that have emerged to represent the losses and experiences of the pandemic.
- publish COVID-19 commemoration information online to provide an accessible repository of commemorative activity, including Day of Reflection, oral and visual histories that tell the stories and experiences of the pandemic, education materials, and information about COVID-19 memorials across the country making it easier for the public to visit them.

Through the delivery of the COVID-19 Commemoration programme, we will continue to engage closely with those affected by the pandemic, particularly groups representing bereaved families.

Context

On 12 May 2021, the previous government made a commitment to establish the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration. The Commission was established in July 2022 and was asked to secure a broad consensus across the whole of the United Kingdom on how we could commemorate the lives lost as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and mark this distinctive period in our history.

The Commission published its final report and recommendations in September 2023. A copy of the report, including further details of the Commission's structure, objectives, and the results of the public events and consultation can be found at **Annex A**.

This document is the UK government's response to the recommendations set out by the Commission. It summarises the activity that has already taken place since the Commission published its report and how, by working across the UK government and the devolved governments, we intend to continue to recognise this period in our history. We have considered and are supportive of the key themes highlighted throughout the Commission's report and have used these to set out our response to - the recommendations.

Both the UK Commission and this subsequent COVID-19 Commemoration programme are wholly separate from the COVID-19 Public Inquiry. The COVID-19 Inquiry is investigating the response to and impact of the pandemic, to learn lessons for the future. The government welcomes the Inquiry's investigations and is committed to learning lessons from the pandemic.

Delivery of COVID-19 commemoration

We have given careful consideration to the recommendation from the UK Commission on the delivery body for the COVID-19 Commemoration programme.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone in so many different ways, and the COVID-19 Commemoration programme is of national significance. We have concluded that due to its importance, it is fitting that this commemorative programme is co-ordinated and delivered by the government.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport will continue to lead the coordination and delivery of the COVID-19 Commemoration programme. We are therefore not establishing a new publicly-funded body (“the Covid Commemoration Trust”).

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport will continue to work closely with other government departments and the devolved governments, and with existing public bodies and charitable organisations, where strategic objectives align, to support and amplify the delivery of the programme across the UK.

This government has given careful consideration to the Commission’s recommendations and engaged with a number of those involved in the original consultation, particularly the groups representing those bereaved by COVID-19, as well as organisations representing bereavement and the healthcare and voluntary sectors.

We are grateful for the ongoing and continued engagement with the representatives of those bereaved and the time that they have spent with us as we have developed the COVID-19 Commemoration programme. We recognise the unique nature of their grief and loss, their voluntary work to provide support to others bereaved or impacted by the pandemic, and their tireless efforts to ensure that their loved ones are not forgotten. The UK government is committed to continuing this approach of dialogue and engagement as we deliver the COVID-19 Commemoration programme.

To further support our approach to continued engagement, we have established a COVID-19 Commemoration Stakeholder Advisory Group to provide independent advice through all stages of the delivery of the COVID-19 Commemoration programme to ensure the voices of those affected continue to be heard.

The Commission’s report highlighted the specific challenge of “*being bereaved during the pandemic and the impact of human contact not being allowed and the impact of the disruption to traditional bereavement rituals*”. Members of the UK Commission on Bereavement steering group are part of the COVID-19 Commemoration Stakeholder Advisory Group to ensure COVID-19 bereavement is considered as part of future policy making around bereavement more broadly.

Digital commemoration

The UK government recognises the importance of an online presence to tell the story of the pandemic and how communities are remembering and reflecting upon their experiences. The Commission's report found *"widespread support for a Covid commemoration website to act as a source of information on Covid memorials and commemoration activities"*.

We will collate COVID-19 commemorative activity in a central online space to ensure it is easily accessible. As per the Commission's recommendation this will include *"details of local memorials and commemorative spaces, Covid related collections in museums including collections of oral histories from a wide range of groups including bereaved families, frontline workers, volunteers, the scientific community and young people"*.

Since the publication of the Commission's report, a number of digital memorials have been established, including the St Paul's ['Remember Me' online book of remembrance](#) for all those who have died as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. The memorial is open to people of all faiths and none. Members of the public can register, for free, the details of a loved one lost, including their name, photograph, and a short tribute. We will signpost this and other similar digital memorials online as part of the collation of COVID-19 commemorative activity.

The COVID-19 Commemoration online presence will continue to evolve. The UK government will work with the devolved governments to ensure that activity across the whole of the UK is captured.

National and local remembrance

COVID-19 Day of Reflection

The Commission's report "*found there to be widespread support for an annual day of reflection, most notably amongst bereaved families*", further finding that a Day of Reflection rather than of remembrance felt most fitting "*as it would allow everyone to reflect on this unique period of our history as well as their own experiences*".

Since 2021, a dedicated Day of Reflection has been held each year - delivered by Marie Curie initially, and then, in 2025, by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

COVID-19 Day of Reflection 2025

2025 marked the fifth anniversary since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and represented a significant milestone as we continue to remember those that have died and all those affected.

In announcing the Day of Reflection 2025, The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, said "*The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on all of us. This Day of Reflection is an opportunity to remember the friends and loved ones that we lost, as well as the sacrifices that so many people made*". The Day was co-ordinated by the UK government and delivered in collaboration with the devolved governments, local authorities, bereaved families and the charity sector.

On the Day itself and in the weeks prior, the public marked the Day both in person and online. Almost 300 events and places for reflection were submitted by organisers to the map of events on the [2025 Day of Reflection website](#).

Events, gatherings and commemorations that took place across the country included a procession along the National Covid Memorial Wall, followed by a ceremony and flowers being cast from London's Lambeth Bridge.

Local authorities up and down the country marked the Day in their town halls, town squares and at COVID-19 memorials created to mark the lives lost and sacrifices made in their community. In Liverpool, St George's Hall became the city's focal point for the Day's activities and in Sheffield the City Council partnered with a community-led, NHS-funded programme, Compassionate Sheffield, for commemoration, speeches and a screening of the 'Stories from the Pandemic' documentary.

Wider examples include:

Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru

In Treorchy, South Wales, families and friends bereaved by COVID-19 came together to honour and remember their loved ones at a moving gathering. One by one, they placed named flags at the yellow heart memorial on Bwlch Mountain - a symbol of love, loss, and remembrance. The memorial was created in 2021 by Bev Johnson, who built the giant, yellow stone heart on the steep slope in memory of her mother, lost to COVID-19. A place where she and others could come to grieve and reflect together.

Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru were privileged to be able to support the recreation of the memorial and reflective community event.

Memory Stones of Love

In Belfast, Northern Ireland, Memory Stones of Love, who are a group set up by bereaved families during the pandemic, marked the day by holding a remembrance concert with music, poems and readings, as well as displaying their stones with inscriptions of those who lost their lives during the pandemic.

Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK

On the Day of Reflection, the group Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK hosted commemorative events across the UK, including reflections, memorials, and creative remembrance activities. Events ranged from a wreath-laying and memory boards at Towneley Hall in Burnley, to interactive dedications and photo projections at Sunderland Minster, and a reflective service with displays and shared stories at Truro Methodist Church. Attendees were encouraged to participate through art, memory sharing, and community walks, fostering spaces for remembrance and connection.

Covid19 Families Scotland

Covid19 Families Scotland held a deeply moving event at Glasgow Green as part of the Day of Reflection 2025. The event, designed to honour those lost during the pandemic and support their bereaved families, brought together community members, dignitaries, and performers in a shared moment of remembrance. The event was attended by the First Minister, John Swinney MSP, who laid a wreath on behalf of the Scottish Government in official recognition of the ongoing impact of the

pandemic on individuals and families across the country. A procession was led by a piper before a reflective service that included a minute's silence and music performed by a local choir. Participants were invited to lay their own wreaths and individual yellow roses in personal remembrance of their lost loved ones. Organisers said *"We set out to gather, reflect and remember our loved ones and celebrate their lives on the 5th Anniversary since the pandemic. The Day was very emotional and poignant. Everyone including guests, family, friends and choir were all touched by how well the memorial service went"*. The event garnered national attention, with coverage featured on BBC News, helping to amplify the voices of those bereaved and highlighting the continuing importance of collective remembrance.

National Memorial Arboretum events

The National Memorial Arboretum was host to multiple Day of Reflection activities. Open to the public as usual on the Day itself, throughout the Day, visitors were able to select a single flower and lay it within the Trees of Life Glade in an act of their own remembrance. There were short moments of reflection throughout the Day, including a reading of the poem 'Blessed Alder' by Dan Simpson, the then Arboretum Poet-in-Residence.

Also on the Day, NHS Charities Together held a special commemorative event remembering those who lost their lives, the ongoing impact on communities, and the sacrifices of healthcare workers. Former Children's Laureate Michael Rosen and soprano Lesley Garrett CBE joined senior healthcare representatives, along with NHS staff, patients, and bereaved families, at a live broadcast event hosted by NHS Charities Together.

On 23 March, Covid-19 Bereaved Families For Justice West Midlands held a further event at the National Memorial Arboretum. The event included guest speakers, a memorial video, a reflective silence, floral tributes, readings, a choir and laying of memory stones. Tributes were paid at the site of the Trees of Life Glade, a living tribute to those who served throughout the pandemic, and remembers all those who died as a result of COVID-19 in the UK.



Healthcare staff, patients and families attend NHS Charities Together's event on the National Day of Reflection. Image credit: NHS Charities Together

Caribbean & African Health Network at Manchester Cathedral

On the evening of Sunday 9 March, a national service dedicated to Black Caribbean and African communities was held at Manchester Cathedral. It included moments of reflection and prayer, contributions from community and faith leaders, and stories of how COVID-19 impacted the community. Organisers remarked that there was an atmosphere of unity, remembrance, and hope and that *"we will never forget the people we have lost and the people who are living with Long Covid and the consequences of it. It's about hearing the experiences of the people"*.



COVID-19 Day of Reflection 2025 event, "Coming Together in Hope III," held at Manchester Cathedral on 9 March 2025. Image credit: Caribbean & African Health Network

Covid19families UK at the Willen Lake Peace Pagoda, Milton Keynes

Covid19families UK held an inclusive and poignant event on the Day of Reflection which featured diverse performances, including from the Satyam Indian School of Dance, Milton Keynes Collaboration choir, and a local performing arts school. Members of the community spoke and the founder of Covid19families UK shared letters of support that she had received from the Prime Minister and The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Future COVID-19 Days of Reflection

The UK government is committed to supporting the COVID-19 Day of Reflection in future years.

We acknowledge the UK Commission's finding that the experiences of the pandemic vary from one person and one community to another. The Day of Reflection has taken place for a number of years and we recognise the importance of it being inclusive in its approach. This approach provides an opportunity for people and communities to mark the many impacts of the pandemic from personal loss, to sacrifice or ongoing impacts, in the most appropriate way for them.

It will continue to be an opportunity to:

- remember and commemorate those who lost their lives since the pandemic began.
- reflect on the sacrifices made by many and the impact the pandemic had on the country and our daily lives.
- recognise that many are still feeling the impacts of the pandemic, for instance those with Long Covid or those who are immunocompromised.
- pay tribute and honour the work of health and social care staff, frontline workers, researchers and all those who volunteered and showed acts of kindness during this time.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, in consultation with the COVID-19 Commemoration Stakeholder Advisory Group, will determine the date of the Day of Reflection, and will communicate this widely to interested organisations and the general public.

Following consideration of the recommendations of the Commission, and noting the date of St David's Day and Mothering Sunday in each year, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is pleased to confirm the following dates:

- The COVID-19 Day of Reflection 2026 will take place on Sunday 8 March

- The COVID-19 Day of Reflection 2027 will take place on Sunday 14 March
- The COVID-19 Day of Reflection 2028 will take place on Sunday 12 March

We will work with representatives of bereaved families, devolved governments and the COVID-19 Commemoration Stakeholder Advisory Group on future dates beyond this.

COVID-19 memorials

The Commission set out the importance of memorialising the impact of the pandemic, and found that memorials can provide significant value in unifying communities and providing a lasting monument to the pandemic.

Memorials can act as hubs for community and social action, with public engagement and event programmes providing a platform for collective remembrance. We saw during the 2025 COVID-19 Day of Reflection how COVID-19 memorials acted as a focal point for many events and activities.

Since the publication of the Commission's report, significant activity has been undertaken to memorialise the impact of the pandemic. A large number of memorials to COVID-19 have been created. A number of local authorities have supported memorials within communities. Among these, a number of councils, including Enfield, Warwick, and Torbay, have developed outdoor memorials in green spaces. Others, including Barnsley, South Tyneside, and the London Borough of Havering have developed statues, plinths or plaques to commemorate the impact of the pandemic in the local area.

In Scotland, the '[Remembering Together](#)' COVID-19 Community Memorials programme has already been delivered by Greenspace Scotland, funded by the Scottish Government. The programme was delivered in phases over the period 2021 to 2024. It has supported the co-creation of 32 unique memorial projects across Scotland, involving over 150 artists, over 80 delivery partners and shaped by people's experiences.

[Hafod y Bwch Commemorative Woodland](#) is located on the National Trust Cymru's Erddig estate in Wrexham. It is one of three Commemorative Woodlands that the Welsh Government is developing across Wales as a living memorial to those who lost their lives to COVID-19 and also acts as a symbol of Wales' resilience during the pandemic. It has been developed in partnership with local community groups to create a new public space for remembrance, reflection and connection with nature.

Currently, no central directory exists of all COVID-19 memorials. As part of the COVID-19 Commemoration programme we will recognise these existing memorials and help ensure that they are accessible to the public. The COVID-19 Commemoration online

presence will provide this information and enable the public to find those memorials closest to them.

The UK Commission's report highlighted the importance of green spaces during the pandemic as the country sought to spend time in nature during lockdown. In recognition of this, DCMS will work with Forestry England on the creation of new COVID-19 community memorials across the country's forests. In addition, we are pleased to announce that DCMS will partner with NHS Charities Together on a scheme to create new COVID-19 memorial gardens in the grounds of NHS sites that will be available as community spaces of reflection.



Barnsley's [Covid memorial](#) and tribute to key workers. Photo credit: Barnsley Council



Newham's Covid memorial garden in Plaistow Park. Photo credit: Newham Council

The National Covid Memorial Wall

The Commission highlighted the significance of remembering the pandemic as a collective society, emphasising that it is essential to honour the profound impact it had on individuals, families and communities, and that national-level memorials can help to do that. The report found specifically that *“many of the bereaved families we spoke with felt that in order to keep the pandemic in the public consciousness as time moves on, there must be a prominent memorial. In almost every meeting and event we organised, we heard of the importance of preserving the National Covid Memorial Wall”*.

The UK government recognises that the [National Covid Memorial Wall](#) stands as a national tribute to the lives lost to COVID-19, and agrees that all efforts should be taken to secure the Wall’s future. Preserving the Wall will provide a space for reflection, remembrance and grieving for all those who lost a loved one and serve as a reminder to the country of the scale of loss.

Founded in 2021, the National Covid Memorial Wall stretches 500 metres alongside the River Thames opposite the Houses of Parliament, and includes approximately 250,000 hand-painted red hearts. The Wall marks the scale of loss to COVID-19 in the UK with each heart representing a person who died of COVID-19 as a direct cause of death.

The Wall is a unique memorial, created by the bereaved for the bereaved. The Wall is maintained by a group of volunteers, all bereaved by COVID-19, The Friends of the Wall, who in 2025 established a charity The National Covid Memorial Wall CIO with the purpose of maintaining and preserving the memorial. They also organise a number of events across the year to remember all who lost their life to COVID-19.

The government recognises the significance of the Wall and its role in providing a space for reflection, remembrance and grieving. We thank The Friends of the Wall team for their tireless efforts and dedication to create and maintain this important Memorial.

Since the publication of the UK Commission’s report, the UK government has been working with relevant partners: the Friends of the Wall volunteers; London Borough of Lambeth; Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust; Transport for London; and King’s College London to ensure this powerful and moving memorial is preserved.

To progress the preservation of the Wall, we will fund detailed feasibility studies to be undertaken by heritage experts as part of the COVID-19 Commemoration programme.

The partners will continue to work with the Friends of the Wall on the preservation of this important national memorial, and regular updates will be provided.



The National Covid Wall. Photo credit: Anne Grange

Remembering individual experiences

Symbols

The Commission's consultation sought views on whether there should be a symbol to commemorate COVID-19. The Commission's report says that *"it became apparent in our discussions with bereaved families groups, that there were several symbols that particularly resonated with bereaved families and also that this was a very emotive subject"*.

The UK government recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic is a deeply personal experience for individuals and communities and as such, those affected will reflect on their experiences in their own unique way. As we have considered our response to the UK Commission report we have listened further to the strong views held about symbols, and in particular the reaction to the proposal for a new symbol such as the Zinnia flower.

We are aware that community groups providing support to those bereaved or affected by COVID-19 have established symbols that represent their loss and experiences. We have heard first hand how important existing symbols are to individuals. We have decided that, rather than imposing a new symbol on people who already cherish their own, we will support groups and communities as they continue to find solace from these existing symbols. Where appropriate, for example for COVID-19 Days of Reflection, we will find ways to honour all existing symbols.

Oral histories

The Commission recommended that *"the UK government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive should encourage schools and colleges to teach about the COVID-19 pandemic"*. They also recommended that *"oral histories from a wide range of groups including bereaved families, frontline workers, volunteers, the scientific community and young people should be gathered in recognition of all the sacrifices and efforts made during the pandemic, and to serve as a historical record of this period of our time and as an educational tool for future generations"*.

The UK government agrees that it is vitally important that the experiences, stories, and reflections, from different parts of society affected by the pandemic, are recorded. We must not only look back and reflect upon them but also learn from them. We welcome the work that has already taken place in government arm's length bodies, museums, libraries, galleries, academia and the wider community to establish a full and rich body of information on the wide array of experiences seen across the pandemic.

A number of government-funded organisations have curated visual and oral histories, exhibitions, and other collections. These seek to tell the story of COVID-19 and put on record the medical, scientific, industrial, cultural, and personal responses to the pandemic, and its impact on society.

The Science Museum Group

The Science Museum Group's significant COVID-19 collecting project provides a permanent record of the pandemic for future generations. Highlights of the 900+ objects collected between 2020 to 2022 include the empty vials of the very first Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines used and the "Stay at Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives" lectern sign from the government's daily briefings. These objects are either on display in the museum or available to view online. Throughout the pandemic, the Science Museum hosted an NHS vaccination centre. There, among the 140,000 vaccines delivered, Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales received their first doses.

The project culminated in the free exhibition **Injecting Hope: The Race for a COVID-19 Vaccine**, which explores the global response to the pandemic and is part of a project with the National Council of Science Museums in India and the Guangdong Science Centre in China. Injecting Hope opened across the three countries simultaneously in November 2022 and over four million people visited between 2022 to 2025.

After its run at the Science Museum in London, it transferred to the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester and National Museums Scotland in Edinburgh. In two and a half years, Injecting Hope has been to 13 venues across three countries – and conversations are ongoing to extend the tour even further. The Science Museum Group is particularly proud of its 'Science Bus' which brought the exhibition to over 100,000 people in rural communities in India. Many of these communities have limited access to formal education and up to one in ten attendees are not functionally literate, so the opportunity for impact is exciting.

The UK government acknowledges the importance of remembering names and stories, not just numbers and statistics, and how oral histories can be powerful and poignant ways of capturing experiences and perspectives.

Examples of oral histories that have already been collated since the publication of the Commission's report include:

The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund is an organisation that distributes grants to communities - a role that did not change over the course of the pandemic. The Fund captured how grantholders reacted and adapted, sharing stories and insights through their website and events programme. They did this in recognition of how the Fund's grantholders responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic with agility, creativity, and determination.

Voices from the Pandemic is the Fund's series of in-depth interviews with organisations working on the frontline during the pandemic. It explores in detail what grantholders have done, what they have learned and how they would advise others, based on their experiences in this crisis.

The National Portrait Gallery

The National Portrait Gallery is dedicated to collecting and exhibiting portraits of historically significant individuals of the people who have shaped and are shaping British history.

Hold Still Gallery was the National Portrait Gallery's poignant reflection on the collective experience of the UK during the COVID-19 lockdown, capturing the emotional and social impact of the pandemic through the lens of photography. The community project, created in partnership with HRH The Princess of Wales, invited people of all ages to submit portraits that depicted their lives during the unprecedented lockdown during the period of May and June 2020. 31,000 submissions were reviewed and 100 portraits were selected for the digital display and a nationwide outdoor exhibition.

This digital archive remains available online for future generations to access.

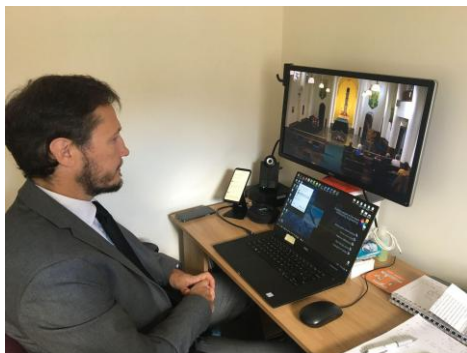


Photo credit: 'Funeral Heartbreak' by Bonnie Sapsford, and Fiona Grant-Macdonald, 2020 National Portrait Gallery, Hold Still © Bonnie Sapsford, and Fiona Grant-Macdonald



Photo credit: 'Over the Rainbow' (Students of Sheringham Primary School) by Chris Taylor, 2020 National Portrait Gallery, Hold Still © Chris Taylor

The COVID-19 Commemoration online presence will highlight COVID-19 oral history projects to ensure they are accessible to the public and that the voices, stories, and experiences of the pandemic are not forgotten.

Representatives of bereaved families and the COVID-19 Commemoration Stakeholder Advisory Group will be consulted and engaged about materials that appear online to ensure that the listings represent as wide a range of groups and experiences as possible.

Education

Early years education and pandemic recovery

The UK government recognises the profound effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on children and young people, in particular in early child development. Children's early years are crucial to their development, health and life chances but since the pandemic, we have seen more children starting primary school without having achieved basic development goals. That means teachers cannot focus on teaching, which impacts all children in the class. Ensuring children have the best start in life is the foundation of the [UK government's opportunity mission](#).

To target those affected by the pandemic, the government has set a milestone of a record proportion of children starting school ready to learn through accessible and integrated baby and early childhood services. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted children's learning and development, particularly among the youngest and most disadvantaged. The Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme was launched to support the workforce in delivering high-quality teaching, targeted at the most disadvantaged areas. It provided over 32,000 training opportunities at setting/school level and more than 68,000 to individual practitioners. As part of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme, nearly 48,000 pupils completed initial Language Screen assessments in 2024/25. You can read [evaluations](#)

[of the EYER programme](#) and [the final management information \(MI\) data](#).

Now that the programme has concluded as scheduled, we are considering all options for how best to support the sector to help children achieve the best start in life. We will continue to provide a [range of high-quality support and training](#) for early years educators and leaders, building a stronger, more expert workforce, to enable settings and childminders to deliver quality early education to boost children's learning and contribute to the 2028 Good Level of Development (GLD) target.

Education and understanding the impact of COVID-19

The UK government agrees with the Commission's recommendation that we should support the education of future generations to ensure they understand the impact of COVID-19 and the stories are not forgotten. A number of educational resources related to COVID-19 are already available for teachers in schools and colleges, as well as the wider public, with more in development.

Whilst governments in each part of the UK set the overall objective for their curriculums, in England the updated (July 2025) statutory [Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health education](#) guidance sets out that schools have significant freedom to implement the guidance, including choosing age appropriate materials in the context of a broad and balanced curriculum.

The updated RSHE guidance has the wellbeing of children at its heart and was informed by the consultation which took place in 2024 and relevant evidence. The guidance seeks to provide a practical framework that enables schools to teach RSHE in a way that is preventative and protective. The guidance strengthens content on healthy relationships, and mental health, with updated content to reflect some of the biggest challenges facing young people today.

Bereavement Education

We look forward to working with members of the UK Commission on Bereavement through the COVID-19 Commemoration Stakeholder Advisory Group to hear views on how COVID-19 bereavement can be considered in future policymaking.

The updated RSHE guidance will be implemented in schools from September 2026 and now includes content on bereavement.

Curriculum for Wales

The wellbeing goals of the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales – in particular to develop ‘healthy, confident individuals’ and ‘ethical, informed citizens’ - support learning on the COVID-19 pandemic across the curriculum. For example, the Health and Well-being Area of learning provides a holistic structure for developing positive health and wellbeing life-long; and supports the capacity of learners to navigate life's opportunities and challenges; including consideration of their social and emotional wellbeing, building personal resilience and empathy and knowledge of different health conditions. Aligned to the Areas of Science and Technology and the Humanities - there are purposeful learning opportunities around the role of science and data; the prevention and treatment of diseases; as well as discussion of personal experiences within local communities.

Youth voice and engagement

Finally, we agree with the Commission that it is vitally important that young people's voices and ideas are heard directly. As well as our ongoing engagement with representatives of bereaved families and the COVID-19 Commemoration Stakeholder Advisory Group, we will seek the views of young people through the #iwill movement and the National Youth Agency.

Volunteering and community spirit

The Commission rightly celebrated *“the solidarity felt amongst many communities and the volunteering spirit that served as a lifeline to so many individuals during this challenging period of our history”*.

Volunteers, including those who came together in communities to support each other, played a vital role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated 12.4 million people in the UK volunteered in some way. 4.6 million of those were first-time volunteers, 3.8 million of whom were interested in volunteering again.¹ This includes NHS Volunteer Responders, Vaccine Volunteers, befriending services, food delivery, supporting people who were critically extremely vulnerable, and a multitude of other essential roles.

Following the pandemic many people also continued their volunteering. 28 million people volunteered at least once between April 2020 and March 2021,² including charity retail roles, uniformed youth groups, and community volunteering roles.

¹ Talk/Together, [‘Our chance to reconnect: final report of the Talk/Together project’](#), (March 2021).

² DCMS, [Community Life Survey 2020/21](#) (published July 2021).

The UK government agrees with the Commission's view that "*long term volunteering strategies across the UK should be maintained and developed, to ensure that the spirit of volunteering that was evident throughout the pandemic continues to be supported*".

Volunteering and social action remain a cornerstone of society, with more than half of England's adult population still volunteering at least once a year.³ We want to empower and champion as many people as possible, including more young people, to be involved in delivering positive change.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the unique and essential contribution of civil society and volunteers to local and national emergency responses. By understanding, expressing and meeting community needs, volunteers can help to strengthen community resilience. The UK government has continued its investment in the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership, a network of almost 300 local, regional and national voluntary and community sector organisations. The partnership aims to strengthen and support the role of the volunteers and civil society organisations in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies.

The UK government also recognises the voluntary efforts of the bereaved families, who through their own grief, set up networks offering support, friendship, understanding and advice to other bereaved families and individuals.

³ 54% of adults (24.8 million people) in England volunteered last year. DCMS, [Community Life Survey 2023/24](#)

Forward-looking initiatives

Funding for research into future natural hazards

The UK government recognises the significant contributions made by the scientific community in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaborative efforts across the science, research and innovation sector were pivotal to the pandemic response and vaccine development, and are testament to the brilliant scientists, researchers, and innovators in the UK.

The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 also sets us a clear challenge: to learn from the pandemic to improve how government and science can work together and deliver a step-change in innovation across the country. The UK must focus on enhancing resilience in its economy, infrastructure, and public services, and leverage science and technology to tackle the next crises.

The Commission recommended that the UK government, working with the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive, should support a *“prestigious postdoctoral fellowship programme that will enable early and mid-career researchers to work closely with policy makers to support preparedness for risks posed by natural hazards”*.

As part of the COVID-19 Commemoration programme, we have launched a new fellowship programme focussing on natural hazards and pandemic preparedness as part of the [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\) Policy Fellowship programme](#). As recommended by the Commission, the Natural Hazards and Resilience Fellowships will help solve critical national and global challenges and work to guarantee the UK’s future resilience to *“situations that could cause or threaten serious harm to human welfare or the environment”*.

This new, UK-wide, postdoctoral fellowship programme connects research and policy, putting some of the UK’s brightest researchers at the heart of government. Hosted by government departments or devolved governments, new fellowship awardees will be placed across the UK to help build evidence, provide scientific expertise, and inform policy making in the field of natural hazards.

The UKRI Policy Fellowship programme is a well-established and prestigious scheme with a proven track record of delivering meaningful results. It has already supported research in bioscience including analysis of how we might tackle infectious diseases.

The first cohort of the Natural Hazards and Resilience Fellowships will formally start in February 2026. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport will work with the

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and UKRI to fund future cohorts of policy fellowships focused on research in natural hazards.

Dr Nicola Holden - UKRI Policy Fellowships

In 2023 molecular bacteriologist, Dr Nicola Holden, Professor in Food Safety at the Scottish Rural College, was awarded a UKRI Policy Fellowship to look at tackling infectious diseases.

Many organisations across Scotland undertake surveillance and sampling of infectious organisms and pathogens. However, information from this activity is fragmented and not always easily accessible to researchers. The SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic highlighted the critical importance of being able to access such information quickly.

Through the fellowship programme, Dr Holden was seconded to the Scottish Government where she worked with the Chief Science Advisor for Scotland to design and implement a project to address this challenge. Dr Holden is building a single, central register which will, for the first time, bring together information on Scottish expertise and biological resources on pathogens that could have potential use in future genomic studies. Once complete, the register will facilitate greater collaboration and allow researchers to make better use of existing biobanks to identify and tackle infections in multiple species, while also helping to inform policymakers, academics and industry in preparation for future pandemics.

As a result of the fellowship, Dr Holden has already published a peer-reviewed paper on data sharing to maximise the use of pathogen and genomics data for public health, and been invited to participate in a World Health Organisation working group. The relationships developed during the fellowship with the Scottish Government have also contributed to a further [successful collaborative UKRI funding bid](#) with the Scottish Government and other national and international partners which focuses on helping improve future pandemic responses by tackling health and environmental risks, and making sure researchers and policymakers keep working closely together to protect the public.

Wider national resilience

The Natural Hazards and Resilience Fellowships, delivered as a result of the recommendation of the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration, are just one part of the story of how the UK government and the Research and Development sector can build national resilience. Notable examples of collaboration between scientific research and public policy include:

- **Established the Biosecurity Leadership Council:** The establishment of the Biosecurity Leadership Council marks a significant step in shaping responsible innovation. Our focus extends to critical policy priorities, including gene synthesis screening and the convergence of engineering biology with emerging technologies like AI, automation, and cyber-biosecurity. Through strategic efforts, we aim to foster a safer and more sustainable future.
- **More investment to support UK Biobank:** A public-philanthropic consortium provided £32 million for the world's leading biomedical database. This large-scale biomedical database has enabled a range of medical breakthroughs and the reforms will speed up the process of approving new research projects, making it simpler to access data that is essential to carrying out this life-saving research.
- **RNA Centre of Excellence:** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vaccine Taskforce undertook significant investment to develop UK manufacturing capabilities to build UK health resilience. This included funding to develop and equip the RNA Centre of Excellence in Darlington which supports the development and manufacture of RNA vaccines and therapies.
- **The Office for Life Sciences (OLS) Grants:** The OLS is continuing to work alongside the sector to build resilience for future health emergencies and capitalise on the UK's world-leading research and development capabilities. OLS has delivered three capital grants incentive programmes and is building on this with the launch of a new £520 million fund. All of these programmes help the UK to secure the capacity and capabilities needed to support domestic health resilience and ensure a robust response to potential future health emergencies.

Annexes

Annex A: [The UK Commission on Covid Commemoration: final report](#)

Annex B: Covid Commemoration - visual and oral histories, exhibitions, and other collections

Below is a list of examples of visual and oral histories, exhibitions, and other collections related to COVID-19. The COVID-19 Commemoration online presence will include a more comprehensive list.

Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales, [Covid Stories](#)

A project conducted by Amgueddfa Cymru-Museum Wales which invited the public to share their personal stories, photographs, and meaningful objects to create a collective record of life in Wales during the COVID-19 pandemic.

British Film Institute, [Britain on Lockdown](#)

A campaign launched by the British Film Institute in April 2020 to crowdsource online videos that captured the UK's collective experience of the COVID-19 lockdown.

British Film Institute, [These Are the Hands](#)

A short film directed by Tim Langford, created in partnership with the British Film Institute and Event & Visual Communications Association to support the NHS Charities Together appeal, blending archive footage with contemporary scenes of NHS workers during COVID-19.

British Library, [COVID-19 Testimony Projects Database](#)

A database of testimony projects in the UK that collected material during the COVID-19 pandemic, compiled by the British Library's Oral History team.

Historic England, [Picturing Lockdown](#)

Historic England invited the public to submit photographs capturing one week in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a visual record now preserved in the Historic England Archive.

Museum of the Home, [Stay Home Stories](#)

A UK-based research project that explored how people experienced and redefined "home" during the COVID-19 pandemic through personal stories, creative submission, and community engagement.

National Life Stories at the British Library, [Life in the Time of Corona: Collective Memory of the Chinese Communities](#)

The Ming-Ai (London) Institute recorded 50 interviews with members of the Chinese communities in the UK. The interviews can also be accessed onsite at the British Library (search the [Sound and Moving Image catalogue](#) for information using the reference C1883) and online at the British Chinese Heritage Centre.

National Life Stories at the British Library, [Science in a Time of Crisis: Royal Society Covid Committee Interviews](#)

Run in partnership with The Royal Society, National Life Stories at the British Library

recorded six focused interviews for Science in a Time of Crisis: Royal Society Covid Committee Interviews. The project explores the three innovative Royal Society committees established in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to support the scientific response. The interviews can be accessed onsite at the British Library. Search the Library's Sound and Moving Image catalogue for information on the collection using reference C1939.

National Museums Liverpool, [COVID-19 Display](#)

A collection of how local people from across Liverpool responded to and were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Museums Liverpool, [My Story Liverpool](#)

A project which invited participants to bring to a session items and photos which represented the lockdown and pandemic for them to produce a personal 'museum in a box'. The project worked with people that had experienced particular challenges during the pandemic.

National Portrait Gallery, [Hold Still*](#)

A community project created as a unique collective portrait of the UK during lockdown.

National Portrait Gallery, [Hold Still Community Exhibition](#)

A UK-wide exhibition, supported by the Co-Op, was created to share the images with as many people as possible across the UK and saw the final 100 portraits go on display in local communities for four weeks from 20 October 2020.

People's Collection Wales, [COVID Digital Time Capsule](#)

A project inviting schools across Wales to create digital contributions in 2020-2021. It explores daily life during the COVID-19 pandemic through photographs, recordings, and personal stories collected by students. The young people documented activities, interviewed family members, and shared their experiences online as a way of preserving a record of life during the pandemic.

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, ['Stay Home' Memories](#)

A public call for diaries, photos, artworks, videos and other personal records of how people lived through the COVID-19 lockdown in Northern Ireland, so the experience of the pandemic can be preserved as a collective memory for future generations.

Queen's University Belfast, [Living Through the Covid Pandemic](#)

A collection of personal stories and memories from people reflecting on their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. It captures how the pandemic affected daily life, work, and emotions, creating a lasting record to help future generations understand its human impact beyond official statistics.

Remembering Together, [Co-creating Covid Community Memorials](#)

Remembering Together ran from July 2021 until September 2024. Funded by the Scottish Government, the project commissioned artists in all 32 local authority areas

in Scotland to co-create with their communities and find ways of honouring the people we lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring how we want to collectively remember them. Their archive is kept at the University of Stirling.

Science Museum Group, [Collecting Covid](#)

The Science Museum Group cares for one of the world's most significant collections of science, technology, engineering and medicine. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic its curators have been researching stories and identifying objects to collect on the country's behalf.

Science Museum Group, [Injecting Hope: The race for a COVID-19 vaccine](#)

A free exhibition on the science behind the COVID-19 vaccine, presented by the Science Museum Group. The exhibition went on international tour, including being shown at the National Museum of Scotland between January and April 2025.

Science Museum Group, [Online Catalogue](#)

A comprehensive online catalogue detailing the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry, [Let's Be Heard](#)

The Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry's public participation project. It aims to give a voice to everyone who was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland between 2020 and 2022. On 29 November 2024, Let's Be Heard finished gathering people's experiences of the pandemic. The team is now analysing the information people have shared to inform the Inquiry's investigations and a series of publications will be made available in 2026.

St Paul's Cathedral, [Remember Me](#)

An online memorial to those who died as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. It is free to leave a tribute to a loved one, and the memorial is open to people of all faiths and none.

The Academy of Medical Sciences, [COVID-19 Information Hub](#)

Policy and public involvement work to support the UK's best medical and health research and ensure a range of voices are included in decision-making.

The National Archives, [Outbreak to Archives](#)

A series of films combining puppetry, model-making and animation created by young people in July 2020. It explores the history of public health and disease through documents from The National Archives. The young people created, animated, scripted and recorded their films at home as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Lottery Community Fund, [Voices From the Pandemic](#)

A series of in-depth interviews with organisations working on the frontline. It explores in detail what grantholders have done, what they have learned and how they would advise others, based on their experiences in this crisis.

UK COVID-19 Inquiry, [Commemorative Artwork](#)

A series of photographs and artwork from across the UK, featuring images of memorial sites that commemorate those lost during the pandemic.

UK COVID-19 Inquiry, [These Days](#)

A series of four tapestries co-created by various artists and people or groups who were impacted by the pandemic, including the bereaved and individuals with Long Covid. They commemorate experiences and emotions at the time of the pandemic.

University of Manchester in partnership with the British Library, [Voices of our National Health Service](#)

As part of a wider research project focusing on the history of the UK's National Health Service, a set of interviews of the stories of patients, staff and the public were recorded during the pandemic. The interviews can be accessed onsite at the British Library (search the Sound and Moving Image catalogue for detailed information using the reference C1887).

University of Stirling, [Documenting the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

The Pandemic Archive contains ephemera, videos, original periodicals and an extensive photographic archive gathered through rapid response and contemporary collecting from 2020 onwards. The archive also holds the University's Pandemic Oral History Project which tells the story of the University's own community in over 60 interviews with staff and students.

University of Stirling, [Remembering Together: Collective Creative Responses to the Pandemic](#)

As part of the University of Stirling Art Collection's Year of Human Experience, Remembering Together (a Scottish Government funded project to explore commemoration in all 32 local authority areas of Scotland) and the University's Pandemic Oral History Project (which recorded the experiences of the University's own community during the pandemic) came together to exhibit around how we document, remember and memorialise the near past. The exhibition ran from 26 September 2024 to 8 August 2025.

V&A, [All Will Be Well: Children's Rainbows from Lockdown](#)

A collection of drawings of rainbows made by children during the pandemic, which were paired with quotes from the creators to revisit the powerful moment when rainbows became an international signal of hope during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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