

## **Prevent: a strategy to counter extremism and terrorism**

Prevent is one of the four strands of Contest, the Government's strategy for countering terrorism and extremism in the UK. The four strands are:

- PURSUE:** to stop terrorist attacks;
- PREVENT:** to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism;
- PROTECT:** to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack; and
- PREPARE:** to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack.

Prevent works at the pre-criminal stage by using early intervention to encourage individuals and communities to challenge extremist and terrorist ideology and behaviour. Terrorism and extremism are not just about violent Islamism and its associated movements; extreme right wing (XRW) groups are also part of the challenge.

### **Background**

The original Prevent strategy was launched in 2007 in response to the 2005 London bombings and was framed as a 'hearts and minds' approach to countering Al Qa'ida inspired domestic terrorism with a particular focus on theological, youth, women's and counter radicalisation projects. Its original aims included: challenging violent extremism ideology and supporting mainstream voices; disrupting the promotion of violent extremism; supporting individuals who were being targeted and recruited to the cause of violent extremism; increasing the resilience of communities to violent extremism and addressing the grievances that ideologues exploited. Prevent was then re-launched by the coalition government in June 2011 with a slightly sharpened target based upon the assumption that a terrorist attack was 'highly likely'. The new strategy came with a clear focus on Al Qa'ida and targets non-violent extremism as well as violent extremism.

More recently the murder of Lee Rigby and the 'Trojan Horse' scandal - which involved a number of schools in Birmingham infiltrated by Islamic extremists attempting to take over - have both led to efforts to intensify the Prevent programme and to proposals to tighten up some aspects of the law. The new Conservative government is likely to review the strategy again.

The Home Office sees the responsibility of safeguarding vulnerable people from radicalisation as no different from safeguarding them from other forms of harm, and Prevent is more about helping vulnerable individuals to make better choices and take up support rather than criminalising their behaviour. Individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation by extremist organisations are often also vulnerable to criminal activity, bullying, cyber bullying and sexual exploitation. To this end, work has been taking place across communities, faith

**Reconstruct Research Service**  
**01568 619390**



Email: [research@reconstruct.co.uk](mailto:research@reconstruct.co.uk)  
Visit: [www.reconstruct.co.uk](http://www.reconstruct.co.uk)  
Follow us on Twitter [@ReconstructUK](https://twitter.com/ReconstructUK) or like us on Facebook [here](#)



groups, healthcare providers, through education, criminal justice organisations and through the internet and social media.

The Channel part of the Prevent strategy is the process through which individuals are identified who might be particularly vulnerable to violent extremism. Channel is an early intervention approach between local authorities, the police, statutory partners and the local community, involving a multi-agency panel designed to safeguard vulnerable individuals at risk of being drawn into extremist or terrorist behaviour. Early intervention can prevent individuals being drawn into terrorist-related activity in a similar way to criminal activity such as drugs, knife or gang crime. The multi-agency partnership develops a clear understanding about the threshold level of risk and at which point services should intervene. Safeguarding issues are managed as part of broader work on community cohesion with children, young people and their families rather than focusing on extremism. This approach has placed greater emphasis on prevention, linked to a programme of safer neighbourhoods and the need to intervene at earlier points before radicalisation takes place.

Channel works in a similar way to existing multi-agency partnerships for other vulnerable individuals. It is a voluntary process allowing the individual to withdraw from the programme at any time. Those referred to Channel are not seen exclusively as potential terrorists but also as vulnerable youngsters who often live isolated lives in difficult personal circumstances, many finding themselves under peer pressure or being drawn into extremist groups, both from the far right and Islamist militancy.

Referrals come from a variety of sources, mainly through the police but also through teachers or social workers. Cases are then discussed by a panel to decide whether any action is needed and if so, what. Partnership involvement means there is access to a wide range of support which could include mainstream health, education, employment or housing services through to specialist mentoring or faith guidance and wider diversionary activities such as sporting activities.

Since 2006 nearly 4,000 people have been referred, with about 20% needing further action. Channel has picked up significant momentum over its lifespan: only 80 people were referred in the programme's first two years, compared with over 1,200 last year. Between April 2007 and the end of March 2014 Channel received a total of 1,450 referrals of young people under 18 years of age (National Channel Referral Figures, ACPO).

Both the Prevent and Channel programmes have generated controversy with critics describing it as counter-productive and discriminating against Muslims, while others have said there is no clear way to measure its effectiveness. Many of those involved in delivering Prevent are accused of not understanding the communities they serve, particularly in cities such as London and Birmingham. The review of Prevent in 2010 by the Coalition

**Reconstruct Research Service**  
**01568 619390**



Email: [research@reconstruct.co.uk](mailto:research@reconstruct.co.uk)  
Visit: [www.reconstruct.co.uk](http://www.reconstruct.co.uk)  
Follow us on Twitter [@ReconstructUK](https://twitter.com/ReconstructUK) or like us on Facebook [here](#)



government acknowledged that overlap between the Prevent and Community Cohesion policies had led to accusations that they were only interested in Muslim communities in relation to the risk of terrorism' and a revised Prevent strategy was announced in June 2011 separating the two, although in practice overlaps can be difficult to avoid.

Prevent has also been met with considerable opposition from many local authorities who felt that it was insensitive to local issues and alienated communities who saw it as a state surveillance programme. Prevent has been 'rejected, modified, contested and opposed by much of Muslim civil society and governance actors on the ground and was widely perceived as a spying programme' (Toole et al 2015). A very common response of Muslim organisations has been to simply refuse to engage with Prevent, in other cases organisations have used their expertise and positions as gatekeepers to particular groups as negotiation tools to insist on their own terms of engagement; for instance, in spite of central government's bar on working with Islamists, in Tower Hamlets the East London Mosque (ELM), often described as harbouring and promoting Islamists, has a strong position locally as a key institution. It is deeply embedded in local governance networks and the largest non-governmental provider of local services.

Some go further and see it as part of a neo-Conservative worldview seeking a global confrontation with the Muslim world. As a consequence, they believe that few Muslims are now prepared to cooperate with the Government's task force and those that do, do so secretly. In their view teachers, doctors, police officers, civil servants and local government officers are effectively being trained and indoctrinated with a politicised understanding of Islam and Muslim political struggles being presented as some kind of expert analysis (Cage 2013).

### **Young people and radicalisation**

Despite efforts to prevent radicalisation, there has been a steady stream of young people travelling to Syria to join the jihadists. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, part of King's College London, estimates that more than 20,000 people from around the world have done so, including more than 500 UK citizens and at least 3,000 from the rest of Europe. Among them are a growing number of women and girls, some as young as 15 (Khui 2015).

A number of vulnerabilities and risk factors can potentially increase young people's susceptibility to radicalisation by extremist groups, including the far right. There is a complex interplay between individual, community and family factors including identity and belonging, alienation and boredom, denial and lack of challenge born out of passive support for racist and far right extremism, as well as intergenerational family attitudes and beliefs.

**Reconstruct Research Service**  
**01568 619390**



Email: [research@reconstruct.co.uk](mailto:research@reconstruct.co.uk)  
Visit: [www.reconstruct.co.uk](http://www.reconstruct.co.uk)  
Follow us on Twitter [@ReconstructUK](https://twitter.com/ReconstructUK) or like us on Facebook [here](#)



In a study involving men and women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin living in the UK Khui explored the link between sympathy for terrorist acts and violent protest and susceptibility to future radicalising influences. He found that these views were held by just 2.5% of his sample and were unrelated to poverty, political engagement, or experience of discrimination and adversity. However, he did find a correlation between extremist sympathies and being young, in full-time education, relative social isolation and having a tendency towards depressive symptoms. Girls and women were as likely as men to hold extreme sympathies, although the association with depression was stronger in men. Frequency of religious worship and attending a place of worship were not correlated with extremist leanings.

In contrast, recent Muslim immigrants were more focused on their immediate situations; housing, work, education and finances and were seen as less likely to become radicalised or to hold extremist views; being born outside the UK, having general ill health or large social networks were all associated with moderate views.

Khui and his colleagues are using the science of public health to try and identify risk factors and resilience factors, an approach which is already used to prevent suicide, violence and mental illness. Healthy sources of self-esteem, authentic religious teaching and social support are known to buffer the risk of joining gangs, and are also likely to be important in fighting extremism. Encouraging young people to learn about risky behaviour and the risks they might be exposed to, and about morality and spirituality and healthy ways of growing all contribute to a protective environment.

### **Prevent and Education**

Schools are identified as one of the key organisations committed to working with other groups such as healthcare providers, faith groups, charities and the wider criminal justice system to counter extremism. Schools can play a vital role in identifying and working with young people, both boys and girls, who may be at risk and vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism.

Teachers have been required by law since 2012 “not to undermine fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”. An updated Ofsted inspection framework published in January 2013 sets out expectations on preventing extremism and how well a school responds to extremist behaviour. Ofsted recently published a report warning that pupils at six independent schools in east London were 'vulnerable to extreme influences' and there have been concerns around the development of Free Schools and the potential for minority groups with extreme views to apply to run them.

**Reconstruct Research Service**  
**01568 619390**



Email: [research@reconstruct.co.uk](mailto:research@reconstruct.co.uk)  
Visit: [www.reconstruct.co.uk](http://www.reconstruct.co.uk)  
Follow us on Twitter [@ReconstructUK](https://twitter.com/ReconstructUK) or like us on Facebook [here](#)



**Key points for schools:**

- Ensure that teachers know what to do if they see signs of radicalisation
- Reduce the risk of extremist views being promoted during out of school hours
- Help children's services work with schools and other agencies
- Develop products for teachers to use

**And for Government and Ofsted:**

- Ensure inspection emphasises shared values sufficiently
- Strengthen the Independent School Standards
- Develop a set of standards for teachers which clarify obligations around extremism
- Minimise the risk of people with unacceptable views setting up Free Schools
- Ensure that charity law is complied with by schools

**Prevent in the NHS**

All NHS commissioners, providers and contracted out services are covered by the Prevent Strategy including General Practices, Hospitals, Mental Health and Learning Disability services, community nurses and community based therapists, dentists, opticians and pharmacists.

The NHS is expected to work together with key partners such as the local authority, the police, probation, housing and prison services and the local community to identify vulnerable individuals at risk of being drawn in to violent extremism and to then assess the nature and extent of that risk and develop the most appropriate support for the individuals concerned. Referrals will generally use either existing safeguarding routes or follow area specific ones.

**Reconstruct Research Service**  
**01568 619390**



Email: [research@reconstruct.co.uk](mailto:research@reconstruct.co.uk)  
Visit: [www.reconstruct.co.uk](http://www.reconstruct.co.uk)  
Follow us on Twitter [@ReconstructUK](https://twitter.com/ReconstructUK) or like us on Facebook [here](#)



## **References**

Mohammed, J & Siddiqui, A (2013) The Prevent Strategy : A CRADLE TO GRAVE POLICE-STATE

<http://cageuk.org/report.pdf>

Kamaldeep Bhui (2015) Radicalisation: A mental health issue, not a religious one

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22630160.200-radicalisation-a-mental-health-issue-not-a-religious-one.html?full=true#.VW6RCFpBvIU>

Kamaldeep Bhui, Nasir Warfa, Edgar Jones; (2014) Is Violent Radicalisation Associated with Poverty, Migration, Poor Self-Reported Health and Common Mental Disorders?

[http://www.wolfson.qmul.ac.uk/images/pdfs/journal.pone.0090718\\_1.pdf](http://www.wolfson.qmul.ac.uk/images/pdfs/journal.pone.0090718_1.pdf)

further reading

<http://www.wolfson.qmul.ac.uk/newsandevents/professor-kamaldeep-bhui-launches-community-study-on-depression-and-radicalisation-in-the-uk>

Toole, T et al, (2015) Governing Through Prevent: Regulation and Contested Practice in State–Muslim Engagement Bristol university

<http://soc.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/02/19/0038038514564437.full.pdf>

## **Key resources**

Prevent & Channel guidance, available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-guidance>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/protecting-the-uk-against-terrorism/supporting-pages/preventv>

<http://www.safeguardingschools.co.uk/> consultancy and briefings for schools

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-counter-terrorism/2010-to-2015-government-policy-counter-terrorism>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97994/contest-summary.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97994/contest-summary.pdf)

[www.preventforschools.org](http://www.preventforschools.org)

The Key: The Home Office's Prevent strategy: how should schools respond?

<https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/administration-and-management/ethos-equality/the-prevent-strategy-action-in-schools>

**Reconstruct Research Service**

**01568 619390**

Email: [research@reconstruct.co.uk](mailto:research@reconstruct.co.uk)

Visit: [www.reconstruct.co.uk](http://www.reconstruct.co.uk)

Follow us on Twitter [@ReconstructUK](https://twitter.com/ReconstructUK) or like us on Facebook [here](#)



**Newspaper articles**

Talking and walking:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/05/uk-mentors-steer-youth-away-from-radicalisation>

UK anti prevent radicalisation strategy a toxic brand:

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/09/anti-radicalisation-prevent-strategy-a-toxic-brand>

Denham J (2013) After Woolwich, we should not 'Prevent' certain views, but engage with them

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/29/after-woolwich-prevent-views-engage>

**Reconstruct Research Service**  
**01568 619390**

Email: [research@reconstruct.co.uk](mailto:research@reconstruct.co.uk)

Visit: [www.reconstruct.co.uk](http://www.reconstruct.co.uk)

Follow us on Twitter [@ReconstructUK](https://twitter.com/ReconstructUK) or like us on Facebook [here](#)

