

# Myths and Misunderstandings: Understanding Opposition to The Prevent Strategy

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## Executive Summary

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### *The Prevent Duty in Practice*

- The ‘Prevent’ strand of UK counter-terrorism policy exists to “respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism”; “prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”; and “work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation”. Since 2015, public bodies including local authorities, prisons, schools, universities and NHS trusts have had a statutory duty to have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”;
- Institutional compliance with the Prevent duty to stop people from being drawn into terrorism takes a number of forms. These include:
  - Demonstrating an awareness of the risk of radicalisation, as well as training staff in understanding radicalisation and recognising those vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism;
  - Putting policies in place to assess and mitigate specific risks posed within individual sectors, and showing coordination and cooperation with local partner agencies;
  - Providing processes for staff to report concerns about individuals deemed to be potentially vulnerable to radicalisation.
- Individuals referred thought to be of sufficient concern are subject to a vulnerability assessment by a Channel panel. As collaborative efforts involving the police, social services and local community resources, the panels aim to provide personalised support to those at risk. This can include mentoring, life skills guidance, cognitive behavioural therapies, education and careers guidance, and health/housing/substance abuse support.

### *Opposition to the Prevent Duty*

- Despite the safeguarding nature of Prevent, and the clear threat from home-grown terrorism in the UK, a well-organised campaign to undermine Prevent has developed in recent years, driven by organisations which seek to see the policy scrapped and in some cases have extremist connections;
- Extremist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, CAGE, and the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) have driven a narrative which describes Prevent as an attack on Muslims. There has also been coordination between extremist groups and public sector activists, with National Union of Teachers (NUT) members working closely with MEND and National Union of Students (NUS) campaigns prominently featuring former Guantanamo Bay detainee, Moazzam Begg, while CAGE has been key to organising academic criticism of the strategy;
- However, organised attacks on the Prevent duty proposals have not simply been the preserve of extreme or intolerant groups. Student opposition to efforts to challenge extremism on-campus date back at least as early as November 2006, while other public sector unions including the NUT and UCU have also been vocal in their opposition. The strategy has also faced political opposition from the Liberal Democrats and some Labour MPs;

- Many of these organisations and individuals continue to use criticisms of the policy which don't stand up to scrutiny, as well as spreading false or misleading information about Prevent delivery processes, with the accusations able to be broken down into the following categories:
  - Complaints that racism/Islamophobia or the deliberate targeting of a suspect community are an inherent part of Prevent;
  - Claims there will be a chilling of freedom of expression and political activism, particularly from Muslim communities, who will fear being reported and criminalised;
  - Suggestions the Prevent duty will see sector staff forced to spy on or monitor individuals within their care or using their services;
  - The spreading of false or exaggerated stories of referrals or other Prevent contact, or the exploitation of a lack of knowledge about Prevent processes.

### ***Recommendations***

- The dissemination of inaccurate or misleading stories about Prevent delivery has been one of the key drivers of the campaign against the Prevent strategy. Ensuring these stories face swift and robust rebuttal from relevant authorities, with any responses coordinated with local delivery staff and relevant institutions, must be a priority. Communications teams within relevant departments should put structures in place for any institution involved in a story to release clear statements rebutting any false or misleading claims. There should also be a focus on demonstrating the dishonesty inherent in sharing claims after they have been debunked, while legitimate failings in delivery should be identified and communicated;
- The dearth of Prevent success stories is often used to question whether there is any evidence the strategy's interventions have been successful. Efforts must be made to collect and publicise cases where Prevent intervention has been beneficial – ensuring that data protection remains paramount. This should include coordinating with local authorities to gather an anonymised database containing details of interventions considered to be successful and focusing on the good practice involved; as well as giving local Prevent delivery staff the opportunity to refer individuals who express an interest in their case being used to highlight the positive effects of engagement;
- Providing support for practitioners will be crucial if Prevent is to be more effective, and delivery staff must be able to effectively respond to concerns about the strategy to help reassure communities. Ensuring staff can challenge the misinformation of the anti-Prevent lobby should drive the development of consultation events to give communities the opportunity to raise any concerns about Prevent and provide a forum for myth-busting. Delivery staff should also be provided with information on the most misunderstood aspects of Prevent, and with daily updates summarising any Prevent-related stories, to ensure they are best equipped to respond to any questions or complaints raised;
- Concerns about Prevent delivery are often taken to anti-Prevent campaign groups or legal firms rather than an accountable authority. As such, there should be efforts to examine the options currently available for individuals to seek redress should they have concerns about any Prevent-related referral and assess the extent to which they are accessible to the public. The feasibility of creating such structures within the relevant regulatory bodies for the public

sectors subject to the Prevent duty should also be considered. There appears to be need for a trusted and independent investigative complaints mechanism, yet this must not be allowed to simply provide an additional avenue for baseless attempts to undermine Prevent delivery.

# 1. Introduction

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The ‘Prevent’ strand of UK counter-terrorism policy exists to “respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism”; “prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”; and “work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation”.<sup>1</sup> Introduced alongside three other strands known as ‘Pursue’, ‘Protect’, and ‘Prepare’<sup>2</sup> as part of a “multidimensional counter-terrorism strategy” called CONTEST in 2003,<sup>3</sup> Prevent has since gone through a number of iterations and been informed by a number of consultations.

In the wake of the attacks on the London transport system on 7 July 2005, and the failed attacks on the network which followed on 21 July, the government brought together a number of working groups with the aim of “working together to prevent extremism”.<sup>4</sup> By October 2005, the report produced by these Working Groups had been completed and its recommendations had been fed into an updated edition of CONTEST released in July 2006.<sup>5</sup>

The purview of the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) from 2006 until 2011, Prevent was the subject of two reports by the department following the 2006 CONTEST update. In April 2007, ‘Preventing violent extremism – Winning hearts and minds’ was released and described the UK response to the problems posed by radicalisation.<sup>6</sup> This was followed, in 2008, by ‘Preventing Violent Extremism: Next Steps For Communities’, which laid out the extent of the threat and an assessment of why people were drawn towards these activities, before detailing methods to be used to challenge such behaviour.<sup>7</sup>

Between these reports, the Office of Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) revised the Prevent Strategy, taking into account the “more comprehensive understanding of the factors driving radicalisation in the UK and overseas” developed since 2003.<sup>8</sup> By 2009, when CONTEST was reviewed once again, all of these revisions were taken into account, as was the fact that in 2003 the preventative strand of the strategy had been “the least developed”, with resources “devoted to investigative work, in order to protect the immediate threat to life, rather than to understanding the factors driving radicalisation”.<sup>9</sup>

Following the election of the Coalition government in 2010, the new Home Secretary, Theresa May, announced that there would be a review of Prevent, with the revised strategy released in June 2011. This stated that the previous iterations of the strategy had “confused the delivery of

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Prevent Strategy’, HM Government (June 2011), available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Pursue’ seeks to “stop terrorist attacks”; ‘Protect’ aims to “strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack”; and ‘Prepare’ works to “mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack”. See: ‘CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism’, HM Government (July 2011), available at: [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), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Preventing Violent Extremism - Communities and Local Government Committee Contents’, *Communities and Local Government Committee*, 30 March 2010, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/65/6504.htm>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Preventing Extremism Together’ Working Groups August – October 2005’, Home Office (November 2005), available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/228644/7547.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228644/7547.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom’s Strategy’, HM Government (July 2006), available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/272320/6888.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/272320/6888.pdf), last visited: 18 April 2016, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Preventing violent extremism – Winning hearts and minds’, Department for Communities and Local Government (April 2007), available at: <http://resources.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Publications/Documents/Document/DownloadDocumentsFile.aspx?recordId=133&file=PDFversion>, last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Preventing Violent Extremism: Next Steps for Communities’, Department for Communities and Local Government (July 2008), available at: <http://resources.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Publications/Documents/Document/DownloadDocumentsFile.aspx?recordId=190&file=PDFversion>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>8</sup> ‘The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism’, HM Government (March 2009), available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/228644/7547.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228644/7547.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> ‘The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism’, HM Government (March 2009), pp. 83-84.

Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism” and that the revised strategy would “respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism”; “prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”; and “work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation”.<sup>10</sup>

As part of this process, the passage of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (CTSA) in February 2015 has given public bodies including local authorities, prisons, schools, universities and NHS trusts a statutory duty to have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”.<sup>11</sup> This duty came into force for all sectors other than universities in July 2015, and for all relevant higher education bodies on 21 September 2015.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Prevent Strategy’, HM Government (June 2011), available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015’, HM Government, February 2015, available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/contents>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Students urged to back counter-radicalisation programme’, BBC News, 17 September 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34267376>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

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## 2. The Prevent Duty in Practice

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Institutional compliance with the Prevent duty to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism takes a number of forms. At its most basic, the duty requires all specified authorities to “demonstrate an awareness and understanding of the risk of radicalisation in their area, institution or body”, with any public-facing staff roles trained to be able to “understand what radicalisation means and why people may be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism as a consequence of it”.<sup>13</sup> It also seeks to ensure that existing safeguarding networks are able to work together to tackle the issue, with specified authorities able to “demonstrate evidence of productive co-operation, in particular with local Prevent co-ordinators, the police and local authorities, and co-ordination through existing multi-agency forums”.<sup>14</sup> It does not give individual staff a legal duty or responsibility to report, though institutions may incorporate radicalisation issues into internal safeguarding reporting procedures using software such as CPOMS.

Different specified authorities will also have policies in place to mitigate specific risks posed within their sectors, much of which is likely already to have been in place.<sup>15</sup> Relevant Higher Education Bodies (RHEBs), for example, are required by the Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE), responsible for ensuring compliance with the Prevent duty within the sector, to have carried out a “Prevent duty risk assessment”, as well as putting “policies and procedures for managing the risks around external speakers and events on campus and institution-branded events taking place off campus” in place. They are also encouraged to provide regulators with data on referrals to Channel, the number of “events and speakers referred to the highest levels of approval required by the institution’s procedures” and “the number of staff who received Prevent-related training”.<sup>16</sup>

Prisons, meanwhile, are required to “perform initial risk assessments on reception, including cell-sharing risk assessments, and initial reception and induction interviews to establish concerns in relation to any form of extremism”. They are also expected to ensure that “any concerns about extremism [are] reported throughout the sentence” and take actions such as moving prisoners away from negative influences or use anti-bullying interventions when concerns are raised that an individual is being drawn into terrorism at any point during their sentence.<sup>17</sup>

However, the most significant example of compliance by staff within sectors subject to the Prevent duty is the referral of individuals deemed to be potentially vulnerable to radicalisation through local Channel processes. Such an intervention could be triggered by the discovery of extreme material on an individual’s social media or person, concerns over expressions of support for groups with a history of extremism, or personal expressions of extremism. While there is no one pathway by which individuals become involved in extremism, training provided to front-line practitioners who

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Revised Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales’, HM Government, available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/445977/3799\\_Revised\\_Prevent\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_\\_England\\_Wales\\_V2-Interactive.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/445977/3799_Revised_Prevent_Duty_Guidance__England_Wales_V2-Interactive.pdf), last visited: 27 April 2016, pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See Professor Colin Riordan’s comments in relation to the Prevent duty at a June 2015 meeting of the All Party Parliamentary University Group. ‘Note of Speaker Meeting: “Radicalisation, the impact of counter-terrorism and counterextremism measures on universities, and the challenge of protecting academic freedom of speech”’, All Party Parliamentary University Group, June 2015, available at: <http://appg-universities.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/University%20APPG%20Meeting%20Note%20June%202015.pdf>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Prevent duty monitoring framework, Phase 1: Request for documentation from relevant higher education bodies’, HEFCE, February 2016, available at: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/CL022016/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Revised Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales’, HM Government, pp. 15-16.

are most likely to come into contact with those vulnerable to radicalisation seeks to provide staff with the ability to recognise when someone might be at risk. According to Channel guidance for local authorities, these can include individuals dealing with:

... peer pressure, influence from other people or via the internet, bullying, crime against them or their involvement in crime, anti-social behaviour, family tensions, race/hate crime, lack of self-esteem or identity and personal or political grievances.<sup>18</sup>

The Channel Vulnerability Framework, meanwhile, lays out a number of factors which might lead individuals to be more at risk of engaging with an extreme group, cause, or ideology. These include personal factors such as a “need to dominate and control others”; feelings of grievance or perceptions of being under threat; and a “need for identity, meaning and belonging”. They can also relate to an individual’s circumstances, such as when “family or friends [have an] involvement in extremism”; and “being influenced or controlled by a group”.<sup>19</sup>

Should a potential breach of the law be involved, the individual would be arrested and charged with an offence, rather than referred for intervention, to ensure that counter-radicalisation efforts and criminal justice efforts do not become connected. However, if this is not the case, and pastoral-care staff deem the trigger to be of sufficient concern, then an individual can be referred to the local Prevent Case Management (PCM) team who will “assess whether or not the case is potentially appropriate for Channel”, with a major part of the role ensuring that they are able to “filter out any inappropriate referrals”.<sup>20</sup> If they consider the situation serious enough, it will be subject to a vulnerability assessment by a Channel panel.

Collaborative efforts involving the police; agencies, including social services; and local community resources, Channel panels aim to “assess the nature and extent” of the risk to individuals referred and to “develop the most appropriate support” for them.<sup>21</sup> Using the framework detailed above, the panel works to assess how engaged with extremist causes an individual is, and also seeks to evaluate whether the referred individual has either the intent or capability to cause harm.

The framework acknowledges that simply being engaged with a group does not mean the development of intent to cause harm is inevitable and considers the two criteria separately. It highlights how having a mind-set including “them and us’ thinking”, “dehumanisation of the enemy” or “attitudes that justify offending” can be associated with “a readiness to use violence”, with referred individuals who show both engagement with an extreme cause and these intent factors considered to be of greater vulnerability.

If referred individuals are also assessed to be “capable of causing harm or contributing directly or indirectly to an act of terrorism” through factors such as a past involvement in violence or occupational skills/technical expertise such as military training then they would be considered most

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, HM Government, 2015, available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/425189/Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_April\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Channel: Vulnerability assessment framework’, HM Government (October 2012), available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/118187/vul-assessment.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118187/vul-assessment.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, HM Government, 2015, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Channel: Supporting individuals vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists: A guide for local partnerships’, HM Government, March 2010, available at: <http://tna.europarchive.org/20100419081706/http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-publications/publication-search/prevent/channel-guidance?view=Binary>, last visited: 9 July 2016.



suitable for intervention provision.<sup>22</sup> Data from the National Police Chiefs Council suggests that the majority of referrals are not deemed to require Channel intervention and exit the process, potentially being referred to other, more appropriate services.<sup>23</sup>

When an individual is considered suitable for intervention by the multi-agency panel responsible for the vulnerability assessment, and consent is provided by the subject (or parent/guardian where the subject is a child), a personalised support package is developed drawing on the information fed into the vulnerability assessment and the professional opinion of those involved in the panel. According to the Channel Duty guidance, this can include the following support:

- **Mentoring support contact** – work with a suitable adult as a role model or providing personal guidance, including guidance addressing extremist ideologies;
- **Life skills** – work on life skills or social skills generally, such as dealing with peer pressure;
- **Anger management session** – formal or informal work dealing with anger;
- **Cognitive/behavioural contact** – cognitive behavioural therapies and general work on attitudes and behaviours;
- **Constructive pursuits** – supervised or managed constructive leisure activities;
- **Education skills contact** – activities focused on education or training;
- **Careers contact** – activities focused on employment;
- **Family support contact** – activities aimed at supporting family and personal relationships, including formal parenting programmes;
- **Health awareness contact** – work aimed at assessing or addressing any physical or mental health issues;
- **Housing support contact** – activities addressing living arrangements, accommodation provision or neighbourhood;
- **Drugs and alcohol awareness** – substance misuse interventions.<sup>24</sup>

Examples of where such support plans have been put into place and differing approaches taken for each individual are provided by the ‘Educate against Hate’ website, a joint project developed by the Department for Education and the Home Office. The first case highlighted, that of a 14 year old boy called Kamran from the West Midlands, documents the process of his referral:

Social workers picked up on comments he made in support of Osama Bin Laden, joining Daesh and killing Americans. They contacted his school safeguarding lead, who explained that Kamran had wider communication and behavioural difficulties, including autism. His mother was also very ill, and he had unsupervised access to the internet, which was a particular concern given the statements he had made.

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, HM Government, 2015, pp. 11-13 and ‘Channel: Vulnerability assessment framework’, HM Government, October 2012, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> ‘National channel referral figures’, NPCC, available at: <http://www.npcc.police.uk/FreedomofInformation/NationalChannelReferralFigures.aspx>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, HM Government, 2015, p. 17.

As a result of these concerns, Kamran was referred to Channel and provided with mentoring support. He was also encouraged towards constructive pursuits as a part of this process and family support was provided:

Kamran was a good footballer, and Daud [Kamran's mentor] encouraged him to enjoy football and the company of his friends. He talked about Islamic teachings with Kamran as well as the positive aspects of being the only Muslim pupil at the school, and explored the possibility of holding an Islamic awareness day. Daud also met Kamran's parents and accompanied him to the mosque. They recognised the importance of working with Daud to improve Kamran's behaviour, and Daud helped them to build stronger family relationships and manage Kamran's use of the internet.

Another example provided by the website details the case of a postgraduate student called Yusuf and demonstrates a very different referral process to Kamran.

A staff member ... saw Yusuf handing out leaflets for an education charity. She obtained a leaflet which he was initially reluctant to hand over. At home she read the leaflet and had a look at the charity online ... After following several links, Claire was directed to an extremist website which promoted violence and homophobia. Claire reported this to the Prevent coordinator at the University, who contacted the police.

Previous concerns had been highlighted about Yusuf's behaviour in University as he had become reclusive and on occasion very argumentative. Yusuf was interviewed by Student Services and Channel police officers, who determined that he was at risk of radicalisation.

Following this referral, Yusuf voluntarily accepted support from Channel, which included mentoring provided by the university chaplaincy and psychological provision and was successful in eroding his support for extremist ideology and removing him from the influence of older extremists at his local mosque.

A final example given by the website details yet another referral trigger and process, documenting the case of Callum, a teenager whose teacher was told that he had been promoting extremist material within his school.

Callum had been promoting a Facebook page for a group called the Young Patriots, which contained a lot of hateful language ... [a teacher] confirmed that it contained violent language and links to extreme right-wing websites ... [and] ... informed her head teacher.

...

The school safeguarding lead reported the concern to a police liaison officer who confirmed that the site did contain material of a highly-racist nature and would need to be closed down.

In this case, Callum's school worked alongside the local authority and police to discuss the issue with Callum's parents, who were concerned about his increasing isolation from them and his peer group and his involvement with older extremists. Together, they were able to convince Callum to engage with the support provided by Channel including contact with "a social care worker from the local authority" who was able to provide mentoring and advice, finding out that Callum had significant personal concerns about his future. As a result, his support plan was able to provide a careers contact, while family support work meant that "an uncle and cousin stepped in to take him to football matches, so he had a routine and role models". Callum has since stated that he had

planned to take a flare to a demonstration, potentially breaking the law, highlighting the type of illegal incidents that early intervention can help prevent.<sup>25</sup>

A further example of the dangers such interventions can help avert has been provided by Chief Constable Simon Cole, police lead for the Prevent strategy, who has documented a case in which teachers raised concerns that a teenage school pupil “had aspirations to follow some older boys from the school out to Syria”. After evaluating the pupil’s vulnerability, the teachers assessed the boy to be at risk and passed his case to their local Prevent officers. A multi-agency assessment provided mentoring services for the pupil, allowing “an exploration of other ways the boy could challenge foreign policy and to debate different moral codes between faiths”. The pupil has since been deemed to be doing well at school again and the risk levels appear to have dropped, while “of the group of friends he had originally supported ... two were killed in Syria and one has been jailed”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Stories of hope’, *Educate against Hate*, available at: <http://educateagainsthate.com/governors/cases-stopped-a-young-person-radicalised/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>26</sup> ‘CC Simon Cole Blog: Prevent – 21 April 2016’, *NPCC*, 21 April 2016, available at: <http://www.npcc.police.uk/ThePoliceChiefsBlog/CCSimonColeBlogPrevent21April2016.aspx>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

### 3. Opposition to the Prevent Duty

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The previous case studies highlight the successes Prevent intervention can have on individuals vulnerable to radicalisation, while the 7/7 attacks demonstrated that there was a clear threat from home-grown terrorism in the UK. Subsequent convictions for Islamism-inspired terrorism offences have highlighted further how the threat is predominantly posed by individuals born and raised in this country.<sup>27</sup> In the last six months, Islamism-inspired individuals have been convicted for plotting to kill US military personnel in East Anglia<sup>28</sup> and for planning a drive-by shooting targeting police officers or soldiers in West London.<sup>29</sup> The conviction of neo-Nazi Zack Davies for attempted murder in September 2015, meanwhile, highlights the ongoing threat posed by far-right extremists.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the risk posed by violent extremists operating in the UK, since the beginning of the conflict in Syria it is believed that over 750 people have travelled to the country to fight with armed Islamist groups including Islamic State and the *al-Qaeda* affiliate *Jabhat al-Nusra*.<sup>31</sup> Individuals have also continued to be recruited to fight with jihadist groups in other conflicts, including in Libya and Somalia.<sup>32</sup> Despite the danger posed by those extremists who seek to recruit individuals to these causes, a well-organised campaign to undermine Prevent has developed in recent years, driven by organisations which seek to see the policy scrapped and in some cases have extremist connections.

#### 3.1 Extremist Opposition to Prevent

Beginning as early as 2008, extremist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir sought to position the strategy as “about controlling, vetting and ultimately ‘reforming’ and assimilating the Muslim community” and declared that the government aimed “to censor Islamic ideas as part of the ‘preventive strategy’”.<sup>33</sup> They were joined in this by the pro-terrorist group, CAGE, which sought to present the 2011 revised Prevent Strategy as an “extremely dangerous” attempt to “further alienate Muslims from the mainstream of society”.<sup>34</sup> In 2013, meanwhile, the organisation returned to targeting Prevent, hysterically characterising the strategy as a “cradle to grave police-state” which “legitimised the idea of spying on Muslims to monitor their ideas and thoughts”.<sup>35</sup>

Since the passage of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act in February 2015 and the imposition of Prevent as a statutory public sector duty however, campaigning against the policy has seen a sharp increase. These efforts began with a campaign to prevent the act from becoming law in the first place. Extremist groups were heavily involved in this activism, with a website called ‘Stop the Bill’

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<sup>27</sup> The second edition of the Henry Jackson Society report ‘Islamist Terrorism: The British Connections’ found that 69% of Islamist-related offences committed between 1999 and 2010 were committed by British citizens. See: Simcox, R. et al., ‘Islamist Terrorism: The British Connections’, The Henry Jackson Society (July 2011), pp. 253-58.

<sup>28</sup> ‘US airmen terror attack: Junead Khan found guilty’, *BBC News*, 1 April 2016, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35944661>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Two convicted over moped drive-by London terror plot’, *The Guardian*, 23 March 2016, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/23/two-convicted-over-moped-drive-by-london-terror-plot>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Lee Rigby revenge attacker Zack Davies given life sentence’, *BBC News*, 11 September 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-34218184>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Iraq and Syria: How many foreign fighters are fighting for Isis?’, *The Telegraph*, 24 March 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isis/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>32</sup> See ‘Death of British Islamists in Libya sparks fear of new front for jihad’, *The Sunday Times*, 27 September 2015, available at: [http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk\\_news/article1612455.ece](http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/article1612455.ece), last visited: 9 July 2016, and ‘British al-Shabaab jihadist Thomas Evans ‘killed in battle’ in Kenya’, *The Independent*, 15 June 2015, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/british-muslim-convert-and-islamic-fighter-killed-in-battle-says-kenyan-government-10320231.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>33</sup> ‘The British Government’s “Preventing Violent Extremism” & “Community Cohesion” Agenda’, Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, July 2008, available at: [http://www.hizb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/hitb\\_pve\\_2008.pdf](http://www.hizb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/hitb_pve_2008.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, pp. 5-7.

<sup>34</sup> Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqi, ‘Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A response to the revised Prevent strategy’, CAGE (2011), available at: [http://www.cageuk.org/sites/files/reports/CP\\_Good\\_Muslim\\_Bad\\_Muslim.pdf](http://www.cageuk.org/sites/files/reports/CP_Good_Muslim_Bad_Muslim.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, pg. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqi, ‘The Prevent Strategy: A Cradle to Grave Police-State’, CAGE (2013), available at: [http://www.cageuk.org/wp-content/uploads/A4\\_PREVENT\\_CAGE\\_REPORT\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.cageuk.org/wp-content/uploads/A4_PREVENT_CAGE_REPORT_WEB.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016.

opposing the bill on the grounds that “making the Prevent theory a statutory duty” was taking the country towards “the outlawing of dissenting political and religious views which challenge the official State ideology”.<sup>36</sup> The website was run by Jamil Rashid,<sup>37</sup> a senior figure at the Muslim Research and Development Foundation (MRDF), an Islamist organisation founded by the extreme cleric Haitham al-Haddad.<sup>38</sup> The MRDF promoted the website through its website, Islam21C,<sup>39</sup> and also provided a Friday khutbah template attacking the bill as a resource.<sup>40</sup>

This opposition was also led by CAGE, which released a document called ‘Challenging the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill’ – also available as a resource on the ‘Stop the Bill’ website.<sup>41</sup> This attacked the plans to place Prevent on a statutory footing and criticised the provision of deradicalisation efforts for individuals convicted of terrorism-related offences.<sup>42</sup> CAGE also promoted the ‘Stop the Bill’ website,<sup>43</sup> and following the passage of the bill, launched a UK-wide event tour aiming “to build a strong coalition of communities that can build a national campaign to repeal this law”.<sup>44</sup> During this tour, CAGE Research Director, Asim Qureshi, was strongly criticised by politicians from both Labour and the Conservative parties, as well as the former Chief Crown Prosecutor for North-West England, Nazir Afzal, after he told parents the new law meant they would have their children taken away if they attended political demonstrations or repeated political slogans.<sup>45</sup>

Since the publication of a Home Affairs Select Committee report examining radicalisation which highlighted concerns about the perceptions of Prevent within Muslim communities,<sup>46</sup> CAGE has repeated its attacks on Prevent and argued it “needs to be scrapped”. In a statement on 25 August, the organisation described the strategy as “failed policy” which was “reinforcing the good Muslim, bad Muslim dichotomy”.<sup>47</sup> This was followed on 29 September by the release of a report, ‘The ‘Science’ of Pre-Crime’, which sought to undermine Prevent on the grounds the factors informing the Channel vulnerability assessments were based on flawed research. The report’s authors had not seen the research in question, and made misleading claims about the extent to which public sector workers were expected to assess individuals, yet the recommendations still called for Prevent to be scrapped.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Background’, *Stop the Bill*, available at: <http://stopthebill.co.uk/background/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Screenshots archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Sheikh Haitham Al-Haddad’, *Sabeel*, available at: [http://www.sabeel.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=105&catid=29&Itemid=65](http://www.sabeel.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=105&catid=29&Itemid=65), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>39</sup> ‘A quick guide to the proposed CTS Bill’, *Islam21C*, 24 January 2015, available at: <http://www.islam21c.com/politics/a-quick-guide-to-the-proposed-counter-terrorism-security-bill/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Resources’, *Stop the Bill*, available at: <http://stopthebill.co.uk/downloads/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> ‘Challenging the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill’, *CAGE*, 2015, available at: [http://stopthebill.co.uk/file/cage\\_cts.pdf](http://stopthebill.co.uk/file/cage_cts.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Screenshots of all activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>44</sup> ‘CAGE launches nationwide tour on CTS Act to educate community on their rights’, *CAGE*, 30 March 2015, available at: <http://www.cageuk.org/unategorized/cage-launches-nationwide-tour-cts-act-educate-community-their-rights/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Cage’s lies over new anti-terror laws: Terrorism apologists accused of scaremongering after warning Muslims police will take their children away’, *Daily Mail*, 12 April 2015, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3035188/Cage-s-lies-new-anti-terror-laws-Terrorism-apologists-accused-scaremongering-warning-Muslims-police-children-away.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Radicalisation: the counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point’, *Home Affairs Select Committee*, 25 August 2016, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/135/135.pdf>, last visited: 31 August 2016.

<sup>47</sup> ‘PREVENT has ended, ENGAGE is its rebirth’, *CAGE*, 25 August 2016, available at: <http://cage.ngo/article/prevent-has-ended-engage-is-its-rebirth/>, last visited: 31 August 2016.

<sup>48</sup> ‘The ‘Science’ of Pre-Crime: The Secret ‘Radicalisation’ Study Underpinning Prevent’, *CAGE*, September 2016, available at: [http://cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CAGESciencePreCrime\\_Report.pdf](http://cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CAGESciencePreCrime_Report.pdf), last visited: 29 September 2016.

### 3.2 Public Sector Activists Working with Extremists to Oppose Prevent

Since the passage of the bill and the imposition of the strategy as a statutory duty, there has been an increasing amount of coordination between extremist activists involved in spreading the most inflammatory claims about Prevent and activists from other sectors.

#### 3.2.1 Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

MEND has opposed the Prevent duty since it was included in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill, saying that it would “do nothing to dispel fears that Muslim communities are being ‘spied on’ by agencies delivering key good and services” and risked a “further narrowing of civil society and an encroachment on the right to dissent”.<sup>49</sup>

Formerly known as iEngage,<sup>50</sup> the group’s director of engagement, Azad Ali,<sup>51</sup> lost a libel case in 2010 which found he “was indeed ... taking the position that the killing of American and British troops in Iraq would be justified”.<sup>52</sup> He has also expressed support for Hamas,<sup>53</sup> and stated: “democracy ... at the expense of not implementing the Sharia, of course no one agrees with that”.<sup>54</sup> Former MEND CEO, Sufyan Ismail, has claimed British society “hates” Muslims and that they are not protected by British law. He has also suggested Muslims should become involved in politics as it could stop those travelling to fight in Syria being criminalised.<sup>55</sup>

Despite this, a small number of National Union of Teachers (NUT) members have worked closely with the group to undermine Prevent and to build opposition to it in East London. A network of activists involved in Newham ‘Stand up to Racism’, including NUT member Rob Ferguson and MEND official Tahir Talati, drafted and distributing a statement attacking the policy which claimed it targets “normal Muslim religious practice” and falsely suggested Prevent “was behind moves to “ban Friday prayers” and Islamic dress in two Newham schools”.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, NUT National Executive member, Alex Kenny, a key figure behind the passage of anti-Prevent motions to NUT Conferences in 2015 and 2016,<sup>57</sup> is reported to have “worked closely with Mend to undermine Prevent”,<sup>58</sup> speaking at meetings organised by the group to attack the policy.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Counter Terrorism and Security Bill 2014 Briefing’, MEND, 2014, available at: [http://stopthebill.co.uk/file/CTSB2014\\_Briefing\\_Pa\\_v3.pdf](http://stopthebill.co.uk/file/CTSB2014_Briefing_Pa_v3.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> ‘The baroness, Islamic extremists and a question of free speech’, *The Telegraph*, 22 March 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/11488175/The-baroness-Islamic-extremists-and-a-question-of-free-speech.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>51</sup> ‘MEND Team’, MEND, available at <http://mend.org.uk/mend-team/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Kill British blog man fails in MoS libel bid’, *Press Gazette*, 28 January 2010, available at: <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/kill-british-blog-man-fails-in-mos-libel-bid>, last visited: 6 May 2016.

<sup>53</sup> See ‘We are the Resistance!’, *Between the Lines*, 30 December 2008, available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20130709160454/http://blog.islamicforumeurope.com/2008/12/30/we-are-the-resistance/>; ‘We are the Resistance II’, 15 January 2009 available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20140824081833/http://blog.islamicforumeurope.com/2009/01/15/we-are-the-resistance-ii/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>54</sup> ‘“Britain’s Islamic republic”: full transcript of Channel 4 Dispatches programme on Lutfur Rahman, the IFE and Tower Hamlets’, *The Telegraph*, 22 October 2015, available at: <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/andrewgilligan/100060409/britains-islamic-republic-full-transcript-of-channel-4-dispatches-programme-on-lutfur-rahman-the-ife-and-tower-hamlets-the-full-transcript/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing election’, *The Telegraph*, 4 April 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/11515630/Muslim-group-with-links-to-extremists-boasts-of-influencing-election.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>56</sup> ‘NUT leaders ‘colluding to undermine anti-terror policies’, *The Telegraph*, 23 January 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/12117736/NUT-leaders-colluding-to-undermine-anti-terror-policies.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Teachers complain they’re expected to be ‘frontline stormtroopers’ in the fight against Islamist extremism in schools’, *The Daily Mail*, 6 April 2015, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3027422/Teachers-complain-expected-frontline-stormtroopers-fight-against-Islamist-extremism-schools.html>, and ‘Teachers back motion calling for Prevent strategy to be scrapped’, *The Guardian*, 28 March 2016, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/mar/28/teachers-nut-back-motion-calling-prevent-strategy-radicalisation-scrapped>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> ‘Prevent - We can beat this racist clampdown’, *Socialist Worker*, 22 September 2015, available at: <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/41349/Prevent+-+We+can+beat+this+racist+clampdown>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

In September 2016, it was also revealed that the Labour politician, Andy Burnham, had been working with the group. Appearing at a MEND fringe event at the Labour conference, Burnham attacked the Prevent strategy, and it was reported that he had been reviewing the organisation's most recent report.<sup>60</sup>

### 3.2.2 CAGE

Within the higher education sector, the 'Students not Suspects' campaign has become inextricably linked with CAGE, with Moazzam Begg appearing at seven on-campus events across the UK specifically branded as opposing Prevent, campaigning alongside senior NUS figures including new President Malia Bouattia on all of those occasions.<sup>61</sup> The group's Communications Officer, Ibrahim Mohamoud, a former Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) Vice-President, appeared at another event branded as part of the 'Students not Suspects' campaign and was also joined by a senior NUS official.<sup>62</sup>

A small section of the academic community has also allied itself with CAGE in order to campaign against Prevent, with evidence suggesting that the group has played a key organisational role in this activity. In July 2015, an open letter condemning Prevent signed by several hundred academics and graduate students, as well as a number of extremist activists, appeared in the *Independent*.<sup>63</sup> CAGE has since admitted helping to organise this letter,<sup>64</sup> which at the time was referred to by a small number of activists as a CAGE letter, but not publicised as such.<sup>65</sup> Many of the signatories of that letter also signed a second letter attacking Prevent in September 2016, with their criticism once again based on CAGE activism following the group's 'The 'Science' of Pre-Crime' report.<sup>66</sup>

Several of these academics also put their names to this CAGE report as reviewers, including Professor David Miller, Dr Tom Mills and Dr Narzanin Massoumi, further highlighting the existence of co-operation on the issue.<sup>67</sup> Professor Miller has previously campaigned against Prevent alongside CAGE, appearing with Asim Qureshi at the University of Essex in February 2016 and at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) with CAGE outreach director, Moazzam Begg, in November 2015.<sup>68</sup> He also praises the group's work in a foreword to the report, and has written in defence of CAGE's activism on at least two occasions alongside Mills and Massoumi.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.2.3 The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC)

Activists from the campaign have also appeared alongside speakers from the IHRC, such as Lena Mohamed, on at least two occasions,<sup>70</sup> while the NUS Black Students' Campaign has organised

<sup>60</sup> 'Prevent anti-extremism strategy 'legitimising' Islamophobic hate attacks, Andy Burnham warns', *The Independent*, 26 September 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/prevent-anti-extremism-strategy-legitimising-islamophobic-hate-attacks-andy-burnham-warns-a7330951.html>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Screenshots of all activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>62</sup> Screenshots of all activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>63</sup> 'PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent', *The Independent*, 10 July 2015, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/prevent-will-have-a-chilling-effect-on-open-debate-free-speech-and-political-dissent-10381491.html>, last visited: 9 July 2015.

<sup>64</sup> 'The 'Science' of Pre-Crime: The Secret 'Radicalisation' Study Underpinning Prevent', *CAGE*, September 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Screenshots of all social media activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>66</sup> 'Anti-radicalisation strategy lacks evidence base in science', *The Guardian*, 29 September 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/sep/29/anti-radicalisation-strategy-lacks-evidence-base-in-science>, last visited: 29 September 2016.

<sup>67</sup> 'The 'Science' of Pre-Crime: The Secret 'Radicalisation' Study Underpinning Prevent', *CAGE*, September 2016, pg. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Screenshots of all activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>69</sup> See 'Apologists for terror or defenders of human rights? The Cage controversy in context', *Open Democracy*, 31 July 2015, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/tom-mills-narzanin-massoumi-david-miller/apologists-for-terror-or-defenders-of-human-right>; and 'Why on earth would leftists go out of their way to support Cage?', *Open Democracy*, 13 August 2015, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/tom-mills-narzanin-massoumi-david-miller-max-farrar/why-on-earth-would-leftists-go-out-of>, last visited: 29 September 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Screenshots of all activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

events in conjunction with the group<sup>71</sup> and encouraged students to contact the group and read its material.<sup>72</sup> Policy passed targeting Prevent by UCU in May 2015 also mandated the union to support “the 13 June 2015 conference, ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’, being co-organised by civil liberties groups: Islamic Human Rights Commission” and also asked UCU to “co-sponsor the conference and to offer its national HQ as a possible venue”.<sup>73</sup>

This is despite the fact that the IHRC has devoted significant time to targeting and undermining Prevent, and since the statutory duty in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act came into effect has been helping people approached as part of Prevent “respond to their [Prevent delivery staff] Islamophobic questions, explain your rights and explore options to challenge them if they try to refer you to Channel”.<sup>74</sup> This activism follows a long history of targeting counter-terrorism measures, which the group has described as “a modern day witch-hunt” being “deliberately used to target Muslims” and operated in a “wholly Islamophobic manner”,<sup>75</sup> as well as an extensive history of calling for the release of convicted terrorists including Abu Hamza al-Masri,<sup>76</sup> Omar Abdel Rahman<sup>77</sup> and Dr Aafia Siddiqui.<sup>78</sup>

However, as the cooperation between these groups and public sector activists shows, organised attacks on the Prevent duty proposals have not simply been the preserve of extreme or intolerant groups, with groups including the NUS and Liberty opposing the Prevent duty on the grounds it would lead to “a culture of suspicion and surveillance on campuses”<sup>79</sup> and risked “mistrust and alienation”.<sup>80</sup>

### *3.3 Opposition to Prevent within Higher Education*

Student opposition to efforts to challenge extremism date back to November 2006, when the University of Warwick Student Union (UWSU) passed policy on CONTEST which declared it “constructs the Muslim population as a ‘suspect community’”.<sup>81</sup> A motion passed at the National Union of Students (NUS) Conference in 2010, meanwhile, claimed that Prevent had resulted in “a racist witch-hunt in the tradition of McCarthyism”, argued that the strategy aimed “to clamp down on Muslim students’ freedom of expression” and resolved to “oppose PVE and similar initiatives on our campuses”.<sup>82</sup>

A number of students’ unions have also targeted the Prevent duty since the passage of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, with the most significant being the calls from the NUS and its associated

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<sup>71</sup> ‘NUS campaign works with IHRC to attack Prevent’, *Student Rights*, 29 July 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2291/nus\\_campaign\\_works\\_with\\_ihrc\\_to\\_attack\\_prevent](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2291/nus_campaign_works_with_ihrc_to_attack_prevent), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent’, NUS Black Students’ Campaign (2015), available at: [http://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/20353/20e0c6d0960aa7836fccc4e1dd2aa8320/2015\\_Preventing\\_PREVENT\\_handbook\\_BSC.pdf](http://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/20353/20e0c6d0960aa7836fccc4e1dd2aa8320/2015_Preventing_PREVENT_handbook_BSC.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>73</sup> ‘UCU Congress 2015’, *UCU*, 24 May 2015.

<sup>74</sup> ‘The PREVENT Strategy: Campaign Resources’, *IHRC*, 21 June 2015, available at: <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/projects/11472-the-prevent-strategy-campaign-resources>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>75</sup> ‘British Anti-Terrorism: A Modern Day Witch-Hunt’, *IHRC*, October 2005, available at: <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/file/2005BritishAntiTerrorism.pdf>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Press Release: Abu Hamza case reveals British double standards’, *IHRC*, 20 May 2014, available at: <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/press-releases/11023-press-release-abu-hamza-case-reveals-british-double-standards>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Prisoners of Faith Campaign Pack Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman’, *IHRC* (September 2007), available at: [http://www.ihrc.org.uk/attachments/5355\\_PFOmarAbdelRahmanFinal.pdf](http://www.ihrc.org.uk/attachments/5355_PFOmarAbdelRahmanFinal.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Action Alert: USA - Aafia Siddiqui must be repatriated now’, *IHRC*, 11 September 2013, available at: <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/alerts/10717-action-alert-usa-aafia-siddiqui-must-be-repatriated-now>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Statement on Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill’, *NUS*, 14 January 2015, available at: <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/statement-on-counter-terrorism-and-security-bill>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Unsafe, Unfair’, *Liberty*, available at: <https://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/unsafe-unfair>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>81</sup> ‘009 Contest, Unions, and Universities’, *Warwick SU*, archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Society and Citizenship Zone Policy: 2011-14’, *NUS*, 2013, archived by the Henry Jackson Society.



Black Students' Campaign to boycott the strategy.<sup>83</sup> While motions against Prevent had been passed by a small number of student unions prior to the imposition of the statutory duty, the last year has seen widespread campaigning against the strategy coordinated by several NUS officials, who have been key figures in the 'Students not Suspects' campaign.<sup>84</sup>

This has included numerous events across the UK, often in concert with extremist activists like CAGE Outreach Director, Moazzam Begg,<sup>85</sup> and the production of template motions encouraging local student unions to work against Prevent.<sup>86</sup> On 25 April 2016, the University of Edinburgh saw what appears to have been the first student sit-in specifically targeting Prevent, with students demanding the university "commit to a sustained lobbying campaign of the Home Office to repeal this policy".<sup>87</sup>

This activism culminated in the passage of a motion at the 2016 NUS Conference which characterised Prevent as "an expansive surveillance architecture to spy on the public and to police dissent, systematically targeting minorities and vulnerable individuals". While accepting that the statutory element of Prevent meant institutions were legally bound to follow government policy, the NUS resolved to "beat PREVENT with collective, democratic action that disrupts its functioning" and to "have the overall aim of tackling the problem at the root and stop PREVENT from being a legal compliance for our institutions to follow".<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile, on 4 June 2016, the 'Students not Suspects' campaign hosted a major conference at Goldsmiths College, with attendees drawn from student groups across the UK, as well as from public sector unions, campaign groups, and extremist groups. On 25 August 2016, following the release of the Home Affairs Select Committee report examining radicalisation which highlighted concerns about the perceptions of Prevent within Muslim communities,<sup>89</sup> the NUS issued another call "for the discredited Prevent programme to be scrapped",<sup>90</sup> echoing the arguments made by CAGE.

Since the beginning of the 2016-17 academic year, Malia Bouattia has used an interview in *The Guardian* to expand on the group's opposition to Prevent, claiming it is "actually hunting down students that choose to be politicised, particularly those who are racialized". She suggested "the Prevent agenda quite explicitly target[s] black and Muslim activists" and is "an incredibly racist policy" with "incredibly racist intentions". In addition to the claims of racism, however, Bouattia also stated that Prevent is an "attack on politicised people and groups, anti-austerity activists, [and] anti-fracking activists".<sup>91</sup> At the first of the new academic year's 'Students not Suspects' events meanwhile, NUS vice president for welfare, Shelly Asquith, told students at Queen Mary University

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<sup>83</sup> 'NUS fights back against government's 'chilling' counter-radicalisation strategy', *The Guardian*, 2 September 2016, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/sep/02/nus-fights-back-against-governments-chilling-counter-radicalisation-strategy>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>84</sup> 'About', *Students not Suspects*, available at: <https://studentsnotsuspects.com/about-2/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>85</sup> 'Fanatics campaign of hate on campus is revealed: Islamic zealots who backed Jihadi John are poisoning the minds of students', Daily Mail, 8 January 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3389444/Fanatics-campaign-hate-campus-revealed-Islamic-zealots-backed-Jihadi-John-poisoning-minds-students.html> and 'Events', *Students not Suspects*, available at: <https://studentsnotsuspects.com/events/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>86</sup> 'Model Motion - Boycott Prevent', *NUS*, 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/winning-for-students/resources/model-motion-boycott-prevent>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>87</sup> 'Students not Suspects', *Facebook*, 28 April 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/StudentsNotSuspects/posts/868467236632330>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>88</sup> 'NUS National Conference 2016 Final Proposals', *NUS*, available at: [http://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/23606/CD10\\_final\\_proposals\\_v9.pdf](http://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/23606/CD10_final_proposals_v9.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, pp. 74-76.

<sup>89</sup> 'Radicalisation: the counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point', *Home Affairs Select Committee*, 25 August 2016.

<sup>90</sup> 'NUS calls for Prevent to be scrapped following report on countering extremism', *NUS*, 25 August 2016, available at: <http://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/nus-calls-for-prevent-to-be-scrapped-following-report-on-countering-extremism/>, last visited: 31 August 2016.

<sup>91</sup> 'NUS president Malia Bouattia: 'Political activists are being demonised'', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/sep/18/nus-president-malia-bouattia-political-activists-are-being-demonised>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

they should refuse to attend Prevent training sessions to ensure universities were unable to comply with their statutory requirements, and said the NUS was “asking people to break the law” to ensure non-compliance with Prevent.<sup>92</sup>

### 3.3.1 Public Sector Union Opposition

The presence of activists from public sector unions such as the NUT at the ‘Students not Suspects’ Conference and their involvement with extremist groups demonstrates how efforts to undermine the strategy within the sectors subject to the duty have seen some significant successes. In May 2015, the University and College Union (UCU) passed policy which claimed the new Prevent duty would “stifle campus activism” and threaten “academic freedom and freedom of speech”. It also claimed it would force UCU members “to be involved in the racist labelling of students” and was “discriminatory towards Muslims, and legitimises Islamophobia and xenophobia”. The policy also mandated UCU to campaign “for the abolition of the Prevent agenda”,<sup>93</sup> and in December 2015, the union released guidance for members on how they could establish the legal grounds for a boycott of any involvement with Prevent within their institutions.<sup>94</sup>

The NUT, meanwhile, has also passed policy attacking Prevent in addition to some of its activists working with extreme groups, with a motion passed in March 2016 calling on the government “to withdraw the prevent strategy in regard to schools and colleges and to involve the profession in developing alternative strategies to safeguard children”.<sup>95</sup> This follows a motion passed at the union’s 2015 conference which called on schools to be removed from the Prevent duty and called for students vulnerable to radicalisation to be dealt with by existing safeguarding procedures.<sup>96</sup> One teacher claimed the duty to be aware of the risks posed to students meant they were “expected to be front-line stormtroopers who listen, spy and notify the authorities of students”, while the NUT National Executive member, Alex Kenny, said “Prevent is shutting down debate and we must oppose it”.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.3.2 Local Opposition to Prevent

In addition to opposition from within some of the sectors subject to the Prevent duty, the campaign against Prevent has also seen some successes at a local level. The Waltham Forest Council of Mosques, a body which claims to represent up to 70,000 Muslims in East London, issued a statement stating it would boycott Prevent in December 2015. Describing Prevent as an “ill-conceived and flawed policy” which was “racist, and overtly targets members of the Muslim faith”, the Council of Mosques stated that it was “fighting the implementation of Prevent and will not let it into the mosques”.<sup>98</sup>

In January 2016, meanwhile, the chair of Birmingham Central Mosque, Muhammad Afzal, told a ‘Stand up to Racism’ event that people should boycott Prevent and that it was “ridiculous that the

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<sup>92</sup> Recording archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>93</sup> ‘UCU Congress 2015’, *UCU*, 24 May 2015, available at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/7523/Business-of-the-recruitment-organising-and-campaigning-committee-2015#62>, last visited: 9 July 2015.

<sup>94</sup> ‘The Prevent duty: A guide for branches and members’, UCU (December 2015), available at: [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/7370/The-prevent-duty-guidance-for-branches-Dec-15/pdf/ucu\\_preventdutyguidance\\_dec15.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/7370/The-prevent-duty-guidance-for-branches-Dec-15/pdf/ucu_preventdutyguidance_dec15.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>95</sup> ‘NUT prevent strategy motion: what it actually says’, *Schools Week*, 28 March 2016, available at: <http://schoolsweek.co.uk/nut-prevent-strategy-motion-what-it-actually-says/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>96</sup> ‘NUT votes to oppose Prevent’, *SACC*, 8 April 2015, available at: <http://www.sacc.org.uk/news/2015/nut-votes-oppose-prevent>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Teachers ‘fear extremism debates in class’, *BBC News*, 6 April 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-32162012>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Society of mosques to boycott ‘racist’ anti-terror Prevent programme’, *The Guardian*, 17 December 2015, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/17/society-of-mosques-to-boycott-anti-terror-prevent-programme>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

government is saying Muslims are becoming radicalised”.<sup>99</sup> These both followed Islington Council resolving to lobby the government over Prevent after a motion was submitted criticising the handling of a case in which a schoolboy was allegedly questioned by child protection officers after using the word ‘*ecoterrorisme*’ in a French class.<sup>100</sup>

Local opposition in East London has been driven by the ‘*ecoterrorisme*’ case, with the boy’s mother, Ifhat Smith, working with a group operating in the area called ‘Prevent Watch’.<sup>101</sup> An organisation which claims to have been set up to support “people impacted by Prevent”, ‘Prevent Watch’ instead spreads misleading claims about the strategy and has even attacked its involvement with individuals later convicted of terrorism-related offences.<sup>102</sup> The group has also worked alongside the NUT. In February 2016, Alex Kenny, was advertised as a key speaker at a campaign event against Prevent alongside Haras Ahmed and Ifhat Smith,<sup>103</sup> both of whom have worked with Prevent Watch to spread exaggerated stories about Prevent delivery in education.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.3.3 Criticism from Practitioners

There have also been individual criticisms of elements of Prevent from prominent individuals, including a number either working in or with experience of the sectors subject to the statutory duty. Within the higher education sector, there has been criticism from a number of Vice-Chancellors, and Professor Louise Richardson, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, has suggested that while “Prevent legislation is not explicitly anti Islamist ... it’s widely perceived to be directed against extreme Islamists and I worry that Islamic students would feel that they are suspect”.<sup>105</sup> Professor Richardson has also compared the policy to so-called ‘safe spaces’ and suggested it was preventing students from learning how to challenge objectionable, but legal, speech.<sup>106</sup>

Professor Julius Weinberg, Vice-Chancellor of Kingston University, meanwhile, has suggested Prevent “threatens to drive ideas underground rather than open them to challenge”.<sup>107</sup> This concern has been echoed by Ken Macdonald, the warden of Wadham College, University of Oxford and former Director of Public Prosecutions, who has said the Prevent duty “risks a chilling effect on

<sup>99</sup> ‘Birmingham Central Mosque chairman calls for boycott of ‘racist’ Prevent programme’, *The Telegraph*, 23 January 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/12117605/Birmingham-Central-Mosque-chairman-calls-for-boycott-of-racist-Prevent-programme.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Islington Council to challenge Prevent scheme in wake of ‘eco-terror’ incident’, *Islington Gazette*, 16 October 2015, available at: [http://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/education/islington\\_council\\_to\\_challenge\\_prevent\\_scheme\\_in\\_wake\\_of\\_eco\\_terror\\_incident\\_1\\_4274760](http://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/education/islington_council_to_challenge_prevent_scheme_in_wake_of_eco_terror_incident_1_4274760), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Muslim extremists’ ‘campaign of lies’ to undermine the government’s fight against terror’, *The Telegraph*, 30 January 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/12132054/Organised-campaign-to-hobble-anti-terror-fight.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>102</sup> Stories posted on the Prevent Watch website which attack Prevent involvement with the individuals in question have included that of law student, ‘DF’, and taxi driver, ‘NT’. Details in the story of ‘DF’ reveal her to be Afsana Kayum, convicted of possessing a document or record of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism in February 2015. ‘NT’, meanwhile, appears to be Naseer Taj, convicted of preparation of terrorist acts and possession charges in February 2016. See ‘Social Media’, *Prevent Watch*, available at: <http://www.preventwatch.org/social-media/>; ‘Woman guilty of terrorism charge after ‘Al Qaeda magazine’ found in Plaistow house’, *Newham Recorder*, 19 February 2015, available at: [http://www.newhamrecorder.co.uk/news/crime-court/woman\\_guilty\\_of\\_terrorism\\_charge\\_after\\_al\\_qaeda\\_magazine\\_found\\_in\\_plaistow\\_house\\_1\\_3963795](http://www.newhamrecorder.co.uk/news/crime-court/woman_guilty_of_terrorism_charge_after_al_qaeda_magazine_found_in_plaistow_house_1_3963795); ‘The Taxi Driver’, *Prevent Watch*, available at: <http://www.preventwatch.org/the-taxi-driver/>; and ‘British taxi driver Naseer Taj jailed for terrorist offences’, *BBC News*, 20 May 2016, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-36346610>, last visited: 27 September 2016.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Waltham Forest against PREVENT’, *Eventbrite*, available at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/waltham-forest-against-prevent-tickets-20742107201>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Muslim extremists’ ‘campaign of lies’ to undermine the government’s fight against terror’, *The Telegraph*, 30 January 2016.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Vice-Chancellor Richardson Criticises RMF, Prevent’, *Cherwell*, 16 January 2016, available at: <http://www.cherwell.org/2016/01/16/vicechancellor-richardson-criticises-rmf-prevent/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>106</sup> ‘Oxford University vice-chancellor says Prevent strategy ‘wrong-headed’’, *The Independent*, 22 September 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/oxford-university-vice-chancellor-says-prevent-strategy-wrong-headed-a7323916.html>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

<sup>107</sup> ‘KU VC challenges Prime Minister’s ‘extremist university’ claim’, *The River*, 20 October 2015, available at: <http://riveronline.co.uk/ku-vc-challenges-prime-ministers-extremist-university-claim/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

intellectual discourse and exchange”, although he agrees “universities should have some mechanisms allowing them at least to identify people at risk”.<sup>108</sup>

Another sector subject to the Prevent duty is the police service, and there has also been some individual criticism from serving and former officers. Sir Peter Fahy, at the time Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police and Police Prevent spokesman, stated in October 2015 that he was concerned that “efforts to control extremist narratives will limit free speech and backfire if we don’t get the balance right”. He also suggested that proposals risked “policing religion and not just Muslims”.<sup>109</sup> Fahy has been joined in his criticism by Dal Babu, a former Metropolitan Police chief superintendent, who has claimed Prevent is “a toxic brand” and that “most Muslims are suspicious of what Prevent is doing”.<sup>110</sup>

### 3.3.4 Political Opposition to Prevent

Prevent has also faced criticism from some parliamentarians and political parties. The Home Affairs Select Committee report into radicalisation published on 25 August found that it was “viewed with suspicion by many” and had become “a huge source of grievance”.<sup>111</sup> Prior to this, the Labour MP, Andy Burnham, had criticised Prevent, saying it made Muslim communities feel “spied upon and unfairly targeted”, comparing it to internment without trial, and calling for it to be scrapped.<sup>112</sup> Burnham has also compared Prevent to the French ban on the burkini, argued that it doesn’t focus on far-right extremism and argued it “singles out one community for different treatment”.<sup>113</sup>

On 13 September, the Liberal Democrat MP and home affairs spokesman, Alistair Carmichael, stated the party would seek to abolish Prevent.<sup>114</sup> He also tabled an Early Day Motion, which called for “ministers to scrap the Prevent strategy in its entirety and replace it with a community-led programme that builds institutions and resilience for tackling social problems”. This was signed by two other MPs, Liberal Democrat, Mark Williams, and Labour MP, Yasmin Qureshi.<sup>115</sup> The Liberal Democrats have also since passed a motion at the party’s 2016 conference which formally adopted scrapping the strategy.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> ‘Anti-terror laws risk ‘chilling effect’ on academic debate – Oxford college head’, *The Guardian*, 7 February 2016, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/feb/07/anti-terror-laws-academic-debate-oxford-college-ken-macdonald-prevent-strategy-university>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Anti-extremism drive puts British values at risk, says police chief’, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2015, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/oct/19/government-extremism-crackdown-hurt-uk-values-peter-fahy-manchester>, last visited: 9 July 2015.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Muslim ex-police officer criticises Prevent anti-terror strategy’, *BBC News*, 9 March 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31792238>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Radicalisation: the counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point’, *Home Affairs Select Committee*, 25 August 2016.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Andy Burnham calls for ‘toxic’ Prevent strategy to be scrapped’, *The Guardian*, 9 June 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/09/andy-burnham-calls-for-toxic-prevent-strategy-to-be-scrapped>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Prevent anti-extremism strategy ‘legitimising’ Islamophobic hate attacks, Andy Burnham warns’, *The Independent*, 26 September 2016.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Lib Dems aim to scrap ‘counter-productive’ Prevent strategy’, *The Guardian*, 13 September 2016, available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/sep/13/lib-dems-aim-to-scrap-counter-productive-prevent-strategy>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Early day motion 425’, *UK Parliament*, 7 September 2016, available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/business-papers/commons/early-day-motions/edm-detail1/?ednnumber=425&session=2016-17>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Lib Dems call for targeted surveillance not Big Brother’, *Liberal Democrats*, available at: <http://www.libdems.org.uk/targeted-surveillance-not-big-brother#>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

## 4. Misleading Criticisms of the Prevent Duty

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While criticism of Prevent must not be dismissed out of hand or labelled simply as extremist agitation, it is clear an organised campaign to undermine the Prevent duty as a requirement and the Prevent strategy as policy more generally does exist and is being driven by organisations which seek to see the policy scrapped, and which in some cases have extremist connections. Many of these organisations continue to use criticisms of the policy which don't stand up to scrutiny, as well as spreading false or misleading information about Prevent delivery processes, and as such it is clear a significant element of 'myth-busting' is required if perceptions are to be changed. The Student Rights' 2015 report 'Preventing Prevent: Challenges to Counter-Radicalisation Policy On-Campus' highlighted a number of themes prevalent in student criticism of Prevent, and many of these themes are also apparent in wider criticism of the Prevent duty, as is evidence of efforts to exploit people's misunderstandings about the strategy. Broadly, these themes can be broken down into the following categories:

- Accusations that racism/Islamophobia or the deliberate targeting of a suspect community are an inherent part of Prevent;
- Claims there will be a chilling of freedom of expression and political activism, particularly from Muslim communities, who will fear being reported and criminalised;
- Suggestions that the Prevent duty will see sector staff forced to spy on or monitor individuals within their care or using their services;
- The spreading of false or exaggerated stories of referrals or other Prevent contact;
- The exploitation of misunderstandings and lack of knowledge about Prevent processes;
- Claims that the Prevent strategy and its theories have been rejected by practitioners and experts in extremism/radicalisation and are therefore discredited.

### *4.1 Accusations of Racism/Islamophobia*

The claim that the Prevent duty and wider strategy are either manifestations of government racism against the UK's Muslim communities or will inevitably lead to increased racism against Muslims is found in criticism expressed by almost all those who target Prevent. Extremist groups such as CAGE have long claimed this, suggesting in 2014 that Prevent "only targets Muslim, and feels from a Muslim perspective like racist legislation",<sup>117</sup> and in 2011 that it was "clearly discriminatory".<sup>118</sup>

However, since the passage of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, similar sentiments have been expressed by:

- UCU, which has claimed Prevent "is discriminatory towards Muslims, and legitimises Islamophobia and xenophobia, encouraging racist views to be publicised and normalised within society";<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "Racist legislation": British Muslims hit out at new anti-terror laws', *RT*, 27 November 2014, available at: <http://rt.com/uk/209443-britishgovernment-terror-criticism/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>118</sup> Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqui, 'Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A response to the revised Prevent strategy', *CAGE* (2011), p. 14.

<sup>119</sup> 'UCU Congress 2015', *UCU*, 9 July 2015.

- The NUS, with Shelly Asquith, claiming in August 2016 that Prevent is “a racist, reactionary agenda” and “state-sponsored islamophobia”,<sup>120</sup> and Malia Bouattia claiming it is “an incredibly racist policy” with “incredibly racist intentions”;<sup>121</sup>
- The NUT, which has claimed the strategy “risks being used to target young Muslim people”,<sup>122</sup> and;
- Institutions outside of sectors subject to the duty, such as the Waltham Forest Council of Mosques, which has declared that Prevent is “racist, and overtly targets members of the Muslim faith”.<sup>123</sup>

Despite these claims, no compelling evidence to support the extremely serious allegations of institutional and systemic racism within the Prevent strategy or its delivery has ever been produced. The 2011 Prevent review does focus more heavily on the threat level posed by Islamism-inspired terrorism, stressing that “the greatest threat to the UK as a whole is from Al Qa’ida and groups and individuals who share the violent Islamist ideology associated with it”,<sup>124</sup> and this is echoed by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), which highlights that:

The greatest threat the UK currently faces is from terrorists who claim to act in the name of Islam, and who specifically target Muslims. Therefore Prevent activity such as the support offered through Channel predominately takes place in and with Muslim communities.<sup>125</sup>

However, it also points out that “the principles of Channel apply equally to other communities who may be the focus of attention from violent extremist groups”.<sup>126</sup> This has been acknowledged by the government to include far-right extremism, which the former Security Minister, James Brokenshire, stated in March 2013 “appeals to people who share many of the same vulnerabilities as those exploited by Al Qaeda-inspired extremism”.<sup>127</sup> Dealing with far-right extremism was also a key part of the government’s Extremism Task Force, which declared in 2013 that “the Islamophobia and neo-Nazism espoused by the murderer of Mohammed Saleem to justify his terrorist attacks against mosques in the West Midlands” demonstrated the severity of the far-right threat.<sup>128</sup> Figures released in 2013 showed that 371 cases of concern about far-right extremism had been referred to Channel since the programme’s inception in 2007.<sup>129</sup> Meanwhile, Chief Constable Cole, police lead for Prevent, has stated that far-right referrals make up half of the Prevent case work in Yorkshire and

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<sup>120</sup> ‘NUS calls for Prevent to be scrapped following report on countering extremism’, *NUS*, 25 August 2016.

<sup>121</sup> ‘NUS president Malia Bouattia: Political activists are being demonised’, *The Guardian*, 18 September 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/sep/18/nus-president-malia-bouattia-political-activists-are-being-demonised>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

<sup>122</sup> ‘NUT prevent strategy motion: what it actually says’, *Schools Week*, 28 March 2016.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Society of mosques to boycott ‘racist’ anti-terror Prevent programme’, *The Guardian*, 17 December 2015.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Prevent Strategy’, HM Government (June 2011), p. 6.

<sup>125</sup> ‘National channel referral figures’, *NPCC*, available at: <http://www.npcc.police.uk/FreedomofInformation/NationalChannelReferralFigures.aspx>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> ‘Far-right extremism “a real threat” says UK security minister’, *BBC News*, 13 March 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21767326>, last visited: 9 July.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Tackling extremism in the UK’, HM Government, December 2013, available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/263181/ETF\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263181/ETF_FINAL.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Channel project under fire after conviction of Britain’s youngest terrorist’, *The Telegraph*, 23 July 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11756822/Channel-Project-under-fire-after-conviction-of-Britain-youngest-terrorist.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

30% of the case work in the East Midlands,<sup>130</sup> highlighting the clear focus on challenging all forms of extremism.

Other criticisms which imply a discriminatory focus on Muslims suggest that people are more likely to be considered for referral to Prevent and Channel assessment processes if they are visibly religious, or increase this visibility. This was claimed in July 2015 in the open letter to the Independent signed by several hundred academics and graduate students, as well as a number of extremist activists, with the letter suggesting that ““growing a beard, [or] wearing a hijab” were “key markers used to identify ‘potential’ terrorism””.<sup>131</sup>

However, this is also clearly not the case, with the Channel Duty Guidance very clear that “outward expression of faith, in the absence of any other indicator of vulnerability, is not a reason to make a referral to Channel”.<sup>132</sup> The clear falsehood in this letter, alongside claims the focus on far-right extremism is “a tokenistic effort to appease criticism”<sup>133</sup> or that despite Prevent training dwelling “on the case of a far right activist ... in practice Prevent overwhelmingly targets Muslims”,<sup>134</sup> highlights the bad faith some of these claims of racism are made in.

#### ***4.2 Chilling of Freedom of Expression***

The claim that Prevent delivery will chill freedom of speech is another common theme within opposition to the strategy, and there should be genuine concern that young Muslims in particular may self-censor their political opinions and activism due to their concerns about Prevent – even if those concerns are considered to be misguided or driven by misinformation – as the end result will be the same. Anecdotal evidence from school teachers has suggested pupils choose not to discuss these issues for fear of being included on a “register” or “watch list”, or deliberately act provocatively in order to challenge perceived restrictions on discussing certain topics.<sup>135</sup> A report into employment opportunities for Muslims published by the Women and Equalities Select Committee in August 2016 also highlighted how some Muslims approached had been “reluctant to engage with us for fear that our inquiry was part of the Prevent programme”.<sup>136</sup> Similar concerns were also expressed by a number of actors in the Home Affairs Select Committee’s August 2016 report into radicalisation.<sup>137</sup>

However, it must be noted that extremist groups have driven this fear and often sought to claim that Prevent deliberately targets Muslim opinion, with CAGE claiming that “Prevent is clearly about dealing with the political views of Muslims”<sup>138</sup> and that it is a “clear attempt ... to outlaw Muslim political ideas and beliefs” that will “give rise to further restrictions on Muslim freedom of speech”.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> ‘Police study links radicalisation to mental health problems’, *The Guardian*, 20 May 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/may/20/police-study-radicalisation-mental-health-problems>, last visited: 31 August 2016.

<sup>131</sup> ‘PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent’, *The Independent*, 10 July 2015.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, HM Government, 2015, p. 12.

<sup>133</sup> Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqui, ‘Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A response to the revised Prevent strategy’, CAGE (2011), p. 14.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Challenging the Prevent Agenda’, *UCU Left*, 27 September 2015, available at: <http://uculeft.org/2015/09/challenging-the-prevent-agenda/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>135</sup> Discussions with former East London teacher and Jones, O., ‘Government policy will seal the mouths of Muslim pupils’, *The Guardian*, 1 July 2015, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/01/muslim-children-enemy-radicalisation>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>136</sup> ‘Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK’, *Women and Equalities Committee*, 11 August 2016, pg. 11, available at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmiwomeq/89/89.pdf>, last visited: 31 August 2016.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Radicalisation: the counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point’, *Home Affairs Select Committee*, 25 August 2016, pp. 17-22.

<sup>138</sup> Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqui, ‘Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A response to the revised Prevent strategy’, CAGE (2011), p. 16.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Tackling Extremism in the UK: An Ideological Attack on Muslim Communities’, CAGE (2013), available at: [http://www.cageuk.org/wp-content/uploads/CAGE\\_REPORT\\_Extremism\\_In\\_The\\_UK.pdf](http://www.cageuk.org/wp-content/uploads/CAGE_REPORT_Extremism_In_The_UK.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 11.

These criticisms have also been joined by:

- UCU, which claims Prevent “seriously threatens academic freedom and freedom of speech”;<sup>140</sup>
- The NUT, which suggests “the Prevent agenda ... is having the effect of closing down spaces for such discussion and that many school staff are now unwilling to allow discussions in their classroom for fear of the consequences”<sup>141</sup> which is “undermining the confidence of teachers and students to explore and discuss global issues”;<sup>142</sup> and
- The NUS, which has claimed Prevent “discourages free expression and analysis of ideas”.<sup>143</sup>

A number of university vice-chancellors have also raised concerns, as does the open letter to the Independent signed by academics, students and activists in July 2015, which claimed that Prevent “will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent”.<sup>144</sup>

The wide range of groups concerned about the impact of Prevent on freedom of speech suggests that government messaging on this subject has not been sufficient, something which should be addressed as robustly as possible. However, with regards to one sector subject to the duty – higher education – the government has been clear that universities must balance their legal duty to protect freedom of expression with the Prevent duty. It recommends that “where any event is being allowed to proceed, speakers with extremist views that could draw people into terrorism are challenged with opposing views as part of that same event, rather than in a separate forum”.<sup>145</sup>

Further to this, in September 2015, the Security Minister John Hayes assured the House of Commons Legislation Committee that “this measure is not a de facto ban on speakers with non-violent extremist views from speaking on campus”. Instead, he stated, universities must consider and seek to mitigate fully any risk, arguing that he had “confidence that our universities will handle this well ... meaning that speaker meetings will proceed”.<sup>146</sup>

Meanwhile, the Department of Education has pointed out that instead of seeking to stop extremism from being discussed in class, schools can in fact provide a safe forum for young people to discuss these issues, stating:

There is no reason for the Prevent duty to stifle debate in schools. Debate is vital in helping children form balanced views and better understand issues. Schools provide a safe space for this debate and play a key role in helping young people develop critical thinking skills, which increases their resilience to a range of risks, including the risk of extremism.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> ‘UCU Congress 2015’, *UCU*, 24 May 2015.

<sup>141</sup> ‘NUT votes to oppose Prevent’, *SACC*, 8 April 2015.

<sup>142</sup> ‘NUT prevent strategy motion: what it actually says’, *Schools Week*, 28 March 2016.

<sup>143</sup> ‘NUS National Conference 2016 Final Proposals’, NUS, pp. 74-76.

<sup>144</sup> ‘PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent’, *The Independent*, 10 July 2015.

<sup>145</sup> ‘Prevent Duty Guidance: for higher education institutions in England and Wales’, HM Government, 16 July 2015, available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/445916/Prevent\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_For\\_Higher\\_Education\\_\\_England\\_\\_Wales\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/445916/Prevent_Duty_Guidance_For_Higher_Education__England__Wales_.pdf), last visited: 17 April 2016, p. 4.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Ninth Delegated Legislation Committee’, *House of Commons*, 10 September 2015, available at: [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmgeneral/deleg9/150910/150910s01.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmgeneral/deleg9/150910/150910s01.htm), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Teachers’ union rejects government’s Prevent anti-terrorism strategy’, *The Evening Standard*, 28 March 2016, available at: <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/education/teachers-union-rejects-governments-prevent-antiterrorism-strategy-a3212861.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.



Lesson plans for teachers focusing on “enabling schools to help pupils build a resistance to extremist messages and to challenge a number of harmful and divisive narratives” and giving students space to debate these issues are also provided by some local councils and Prevent groups.<sup>148</sup>

#### 4.3 *Spying on Service Users*

Another common myth about the Prevent duty is that it will create spies out of staff providing front-line services in the sectors subject to the Prevent duty. CAGE has made the issue a significant part of its campaigning, claiming that Prevent is “turning teachers into informants”<sup>149</sup> and has “legitimised the idea of spying on Muslims to monitor their ideas and thoughts”.<sup>150</sup> The issue has also been addressed by religious groups, with some East London imams claiming it will lead to “spying on our young people”,<sup>151</sup> and appears to be a particular concern of teachers, lecturers and students:

- Some NUT members have claimed that they will be “expected to be front-line stormtroopers who listen, spy and notify the authorities of students” and that the union should work to “stop education professionals being the secret service of the public sector”;
- UCU policy, meanwhile, claims that “the Prevent Agenda will force our members to spy on our learners”;
- This is echoed by NUS claims that Prevent has created “an expansive surveillance architecture to spy on the public and to police dissent”.<sup>152</sup>

This suggestion that public sector workers must spy on people, epitomised by the claim in a letter signed by students and academics which claimed “individuals working within statutory organisations must report individuals suspected of being ‘potential terrorists’ to external bodies for ‘de-radicalisation’”<sup>153</sup> ignores the fact that individual staff members simply do not have a duty to report individuals, and that no legal sanctions exist as part of the Prevent duty if they fail to do so.

In addition, reviews by both the Home Office and the Communities and Local Government Select Committee have found “little or no evidence to support” allegations of spying, and have suggested that these claims were “based on a misunderstanding about the process for supporting vulnerable people”.<sup>154</sup> The guidance provided to those sectors subject to the Prevent duty also clearly states that “the Prevent programme must not involve any covert activity against people or communities”.<sup>155</sup>

#### 4.4 *False or Exaggerated Stories*

In addition to these themes, false or exaggerated stories of referrals or other Prevent contact are pervasive within the criticisms made of the Prevent duty, and are repeated across the spectrum of activism against the strategy – from the extremists that seek to scaremonger within Muslim communities, as well as by activists from sector unions, and even by those who would otherwise be supportive of the policy. In addition, a small number of those individuals involved in the cases have

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<sup>148</sup> See ‘Prevent and schools – resources and lesson plans’, *Hammersmith and Fulham Council*, available at: <https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/children-and-young-people/schools-and-colleges/school-staff-zone/prevent-and-schools/prevent-and-schools-resources-and-lesson-plans>, and ‘P4S Secondary Schools’, *Prevent for Schools*, available at: [http://www.preventforschools.org/index.php?category\\_id=83](http://www.preventforschools.org/index.php?category_id=83), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>149</sup> ‘FBI program instructs teachers to report radical students’, Press TV, 6 March 2016, available at: <http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2016/03/06/454039/FBI-Preventing-Violent-Extremism-in-Schools-extremism-CAGE>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>150</sup> Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqui, ‘The Prevent Strategy: A Cradle to Grave Police-State’, CAGE (2013), p. 26.

<sup>151</sup> Prevent programme ‘spying on our young people’, say east London imams’, *The Guardian*, 6 December 2015, available at: [https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/dec/06/east-london-muslims-prevent-strategy?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/dec/06/east-london-muslims-prevent-strategy?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>152</sup> ‘NUS National Conference 2016 Final Proposals’, NUS, pp. 74-76.

<sup>153</sup> ‘PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent’, *The Independent*, 10 July 2015.

<sup>154</sup> ‘Prevent Strategy’, HM Government, June 2011, p. 31.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Revised Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales’, HM Government, p. 4.

since become involved in activism attacking Prevent, speaking at events and appearing in the media as part of wider anti-Prevent campaigning.

#### 4.4.1 The 'Eco-terrorism' Case

Chief among these cases has been Ifhat Smith, who claimed that her son had been left “scared and nervous” after he was “taken out of class and treated as a criminal” after talking about eco-terrorists in a French class.<sup>156</sup> This case is regularly used to undermine Prevent, with Ms Smith herself claiming that the strategy “Prevent absolutely goes against” safeguarding and child protection and is “stopping dialogue ... it shouldn't be there at all”.<sup>157</sup> Her son's case has also been cited by the Institute of Race Relations as evidence of Prevent's “effects on children's rights to freedom of thought, expression and assembly”,<sup>158</sup> by the ‘Students not Suspects’ campaign, who say he was “interrogated on his views on ISIS”,<sup>159</sup> and also appears to have been behind Islington Council's opposition to the strategy.<sup>160</sup>

However, legal action taken by Ms Smith has since found that “the school acted properly” and that “the supposed “interrogation” of the teenager using “police state” and “criminal” methods was conducted by two school staff on school premises, had nothing to do with the criminal justice system or police”. Ms Smith was also ordered to pay a significant amount in costs for wasting court time.<sup>161</sup>

#### 4.4.2 The 'Palestine Badge' Case

The same appears to be true in the case of another individual who has become involved in activism against Prevent. Rahmaan Mohammadi has appeared on a number of ‘Students not Suspects’ panels, including at the University of Exeter<sup>162</sup> and at the NUS Conference, where he was described as a “school student victimised by prevent”.<sup>163</sup> Mohammadi claims that he was “questioned by police under the government's anti-terror laws after he wore a "free Palestine" badge into school and asked permission to fundraise for children affected by the Israeli occupation”.<sup>164</sup> His case has been cited by the Institute of Race Relations,<sup>165</sup> at least one local UCU group,<sup>166</sup> and a senior NUS official.<sup>167</sup> He has also enabled extremists to further attack Prevent, presenting a Guardian video published in August 2016 in which he interviewed anti-Prevent activists including MEND director of engagement, Azad Ali. This video also gave a platform to Roshan Salih, the editor of Islamist website, 5Pillars, to claim Prevent was “state Islamophobia [which] targets the entire Muslim community”, and the Imam of Lewisham Islamic Centre, Shakeel Begg.<sup>168</sup> Begg has previously

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<sup>156</sup> ‘School questioned Muslim pupil about Isis after discussion on eco-activism’, *The Guardian*, 22 September 2015, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/sep/22/school-questioned-muslim-pupil-about-isis-after-discussion-on-eco-activism>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Anti-Radicalisation Strategy ‘Alienating Pupils’’, *Sky News*, 14 December 2015, available at: <http://news.sky.com/story/1605240/anti-radicalisation-strategy-alienating-pupils>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Prevent and the Children's Rights Convention’, *Institute of Race Relations*, January 2016, available at: [http://www.irr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IRR\\_Prevent\\_Submission.pdf](http://www.irr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IRR_Prevent_Submission.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>159</sup> Darshna Soni, @darshnasoni, *Twitter*, 14 October 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/darshnasoni/status/654247021474390016>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>160</sup> ‘Islington Council to challenge Prevent scheme in wake of ‘eco-terror’ incident’, *Islington Gazette*, 16 October 2015.

<sup>161</sup> ‘Muslim extremists’ ‘campaign of lies’ to undermine the government's fight against terror’, *The Telegraph*, 30 January 2016.

<sup>162</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent – Students not Suspects’, *Facebook*, available at: [https://www.facebook.com/events/233434703665792/?active\\_tab=highlights](https://www.facebook.com/events/233434703665792/?active_tab=highlights), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>163</sup> ‘A guide to the fringes at National Conference 2016’, *NUS*, 15 April 2016, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/a-guide-to-the-fringes-at-national-conference-2016>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>164</sup> ‘Anti-Terror Prevent Police Questioned Schoolboy Rahmaan Mohammadi For Wearing A Palestinian Badge’, *The Huffington Post*, 15 February 2016, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/02/15/prevent-police-questioned-schoolboy-wearing-palestinian-badge\\_n\\_9234968.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/02/15/prevent-police-questioned-schoolboy-wearing-palestinian-badge_n_9234968.html), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>165</sup> ‘Prevent and the Children's Rights Convention’, *Institute of Race Relations*, January 2016, available at: [http://www.irr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IRR\\_Prevent\\_Submission.pdf](http://www.irr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IRR_Prevent_Submission.pdf), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>166</sup> ‘Prevent: Tackling Extremism or Criminalising Dissent?’, *Goldsmiths UCU*, available at: <https://goldsmithsucu.wordpress.com/2015/09/21/prevent-tackling-extremism-or-criminalising-dissent/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>167</sup> Shelly Asquith, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 14 February 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/698983204796166144>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>168</sup> ‘The problem with Prevent: ‘I was investigated by the government's anti-radicalisation programme’ – video’, *The Guardian*, 26 August 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2016/aug/26/prevent-anti-radicalisation-muslims-london-video>, last visited: 31 August 2016.

claimed “...helping the families of brothers who are in prison...is like as if we are making jihad in the path of Allah. And we know jihad in the path of Allah is of the greatest of deeds that a Muslim can take part in”.<sup>169</sup>

Despite these claims, and the widespread reporting that Mohammadi had been referred to Prevent for wearing his Free Palestine badge, his school has clearly stated his claims are entirely false, and that “teachers were not concerned about the nature of the badges and wristbands or because he asked to raise money for Palestinian children”. It states that he was told to remove the badge as it breached uniform policy, and that he did in fact raise money for Palestine, and was supported in doing so by the school.<sup>170</sup> The real reason behind the school’s concerns about Mohammadi’s safety are confidential, yet appear to be related to his distribution of Friends of Al-Aqsa material in class.<sup>171</sup> Friends of Al-Aqsa is a Leicester-based group which protests against Israel and whose bank account was recently closed by the Co-operative Bank.<sup>172</sup> The group has published the Holocaust denier<sup>173</sup> Paul Eisen,<sup>174</sup> as well as writers with a history of anti-Semitic views<sup>175</sup> such as Gilad Atzmon,<sup>176</sup> Israel Shamir,<sup>177</sup> and Khalid Amayreh,<sup>178</sup> while Patel has declared: “ Hamas is no terrorist organisation ... we salute Hamas for standing up to Israel”.<sup>179</sup> While Mohammadi says he was intimidated by police officers, a statement from Bedfordshire Police says that “officers spoke to the boy and were satisfied that he was not at risk and he was given advice and support”.

#### 4.4.3 The Staffordshire University Student Case

The spreading of false information about these cases, or the apparent manipulation of cases to make them appear more serious than they are is one of the most concerning aspects of the ongoing campaign to undermine Prevent. Further examples of this practice include the case of Mohammed Umar Farooq, who was reported by the Guardian to have been “accused of being a terrorist for reading a book on terrorism”. Farooq claims to have been questioned on his views about homosexuality and Islamic State by an official at the University of Staffordshire before being reported to a security guard. This clear example of poor practice by an untrained official was described by the university as part of its attempt to respond to the Prevent duty, despite the fact that the duty was not in fact in force at the time and did not come into place for another six months.

The security guard alerted about Farooq by the staff member quickly realised there had been a mistake and after an investigation the university and the staff member both apologised to Farooq.<sup>180</sup> At no point was there any involvement from Prevent delivery staff at any point in the process.

<sup>169</sup> ‘HHUGS Annual Dinner - 03/11 - Imam Shakeel Begg (Part 3)’, *YouTube*, 28 June 2011, available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwV\\_wV4Ccbk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwV_wV4Ccbk), last visited: 31 August 2016.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Luton school denies referring student to anti-terror police for wearing ‘Free Palestine’ badge’, *Luton on Sunday*, 18 February 2016, available at: <http://www.luton-dunstable.co.uk/Luton-school-denies-referring-student-anti-terror/story-28762208-detail/story.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>171</sup> ‘Anti-Terror Prevent Police Questioned Schoolboy Rahmaan Mohammadi For Wearing A Palestinian Badge’, *The Huffington Post*, 15 February 2016.

<sup>172</sup> ‘Co-operative Bank closes FOA bank account’, *Friends of Al-Aqsa*, 5 January 2015, available at: <http://foa.org.uk/campaigns/co-operative-bank-closes-foa-bank-account>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>173</sup> ‘My Life as a Holocaust Denier’, Paul Eisen, January 2008, available at: <http://www.righteousjews.org/article27a.html>, last visited: 10 May 2016.

<sup>174</sup> Screenshots of all activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>175</sup> See ‘Rewriting History: Holocaust Revisionism Today’, *Hope not Hate* (2012), available at: <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/shop/rewriting-history.pdf>, last visited: 9 July 2016, p. 79; for Israel Shamir, and Andy Newman, ‘Gilad Atzmon, anti-Semitism and the left’, *The Guardian*, 25 September 2011, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/sep/25/gilad-atzmon-antisemitism-the-left>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>176</sup> Screenshots of all activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>177</sup> Screenshots of all activity archived by the Henry Jackson Society.

<sup>178</sup> Amayreh, K, ‘When will America wake up from her slumber’, *Friends of Al-Aqsa*, 21 December 2009, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20091221193645/http://www.aqsa.org.uk/HOME/tabid/36/ctl/Details/mid/427/ItemID/1699/language/en-US/Default.aspx>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Ismael Patel | Stop the Gaza massacre Demonstration London 10 January 2009’, *YouTube*, 11 January 2009, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCLNX9xyd6c>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>180</sup> ‘Mohammed Umar Farooq Interview: The student accused of terrorism for reading a book’, *YouTube*, 29 September, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbaUxBjZmLo>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

Despite this, false claims about the case are frequently used to undermine the Prevent duty and the wider strategy – something which has been exacerbated by the University of Staffordshire’s inadequate response. The most obvious example of this is a claim made in leaflets distributed as part of the ‘Students not Suspects’ campaign, which have falsely claimed Farooq was “arrested for reading a module core text”.<sup>181</sup> Other activists, such as the University of Leeds UCU branch have claimed that he “was referred to Prevent” for reading a book.<sup>182</sup>

#### 4.4.4 The ‘Terrorist House’ Case

The exaggeration of police or Prevent involvement in this case is also echoed in the story of a young boy who was allegedly questioned by Prevent police because he wrote that he lived in a “terrorist house” when he meant to write “terraced house”.<sup>183</sup> This has been widely referenced as an example of absurd heavy-handed policing, with a senior NUS official using the example when attacking Prevent in March 2016,<sup>184</sup> and Miqdaad Versi, Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) describing the case as “a natural consequence of the extension of the ‘Prevent Duty’ to schools” in January 2016.<sup>185</sup>

However, soon after the case was reported it became clear that it had been utterly misrepresented. Despite the widespread claims about the boy’s referral to Prevent, Lancashire Police and the local council stated that it is “untrue to suggest that this situation was brought about by a simple spelling mistake” and that “the school and the police ... acted responsibly and proportionately in looking into a number of potential concerns”.<sup>186</sup> These concerns were that the child had also claimed his uncle beat him. In addition, despite the fact the case has regularly been referred to as a Prevent case, the police have stressed that a police officer and social worker carried out the visit, which was not dealt with by Prevent staff.<sup>187</sup>

It is not just exaggerated stories about individuals that have been spread to undermine Prevent delivery however. UCU Left has claimed that “Prevent officers were involved in shutting down a conference on Islamophobia at Birkbeck university in December 2014”,<sup>188</sup> something originally claimed by CAGE, who suggested that the event had been shut down as part of “a social engineering [sic] programme to legitimise the government sponsored [sic] version of Islam”.<sup>189</sup> This was repeated by students as well, with an open letter claiming the alleged cancellation showed “the troublesome collusions between Islamophobic agendas of far-right groups, the government and some of the top academic institutions in this country”.<sup>190</sup> These claims all ignored the fact that there had been a high

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<sup>181</sup> Darshna Soni, @darshnasoni, *Twitter*, 14 October 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/darshnasoni/status/654247021474390016>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>182</sup> ‘Prevent’ – students not suspects’, *University of Leeds UCU*, available at: <http://www.leedsucu.org.uk/archives/1960>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>183</sup> ‘Muslim Boy’s ‘Terrorist House’ Spelling Error Leads To Lancashire Police Investigation’, *The Huffington Post*, 20 January 2016, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/01/20/muslim-child-terrorist-house-spelling-error\\_n\\_9025336.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/01/20/muslim-child-terrorist-house-spelling-error_n_9025336.html), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>184</sup> Shelly Asquith, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 11 March 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/shellyasquith/status/708242461999689729>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>185</sup> ‘Father of Muslim boy, 10, questioned by police for saying he lived in ‘terrorist’ house brands it a ‘joke’’, *The Telegraph*, 20 January 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/12109399/Father-of-Muslim-boy-10-questioned-by-police-for-saying-he-lived-in-terrorist-house-brands-it-a-joke.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>186</sup> ‘Lancashire police criticise BBC over ‘terrorist house’ story’, *The Guardian*, 21 January 2016, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/21/lancashire-police-criticise-bbc-over-terrorist-house-story>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>187</sup> ‘Lancashire police say ‘terrorist house’ incident not about spelling mistake’, *The Independent*, 21 January 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/lancashire-police-say-terrorist-house-incident-not-about-spelling-mistake-a6824481.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>188</sup> ‘Challenging the Prevent Agenda’, *UCU Left*, 27 September 2015.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Prevent infiltrates Birkbeck and shuts down IHRC Islamophobia event’, *CAGE*, 12 December 2014, available at: <http://www.cageuk.org/article/prevent-infiltrates-birkbeck-and-shuts-down-ihrc-islamophobia-event>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>190</sup> ‘An Open Letter to Birkbeck College regarding the cancellation of the Islamophobia Conference Booking’, *White Rose Critical Race & Ethnicities Network*, 21 December 2014, available at: <http://www.cren.org.uk/#!An-Open-Letter-to-Birkbeck-College-regarding-the-cancellation-of-the-Islamophobia-Conference-Booking/c1uh6/F379F405-23F0-46C3-A6B5-CF7CBD57E7D9>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

threat level posed to the event by far-right groups which planned to target an on-campus function hosted by the IHRC. To mitigate the risk of violence or disruption, Birkbeck was advised to move the event, which went ahead at a different venue.<sup>191</sup>

#### 4.5 *Exploiting Misunderstandings*

Much of the criticism of Prevent repeats misunderstandings of the processes involved, such as suggesting Prevent has produced new and unnecessary procedures. A motion passed by the NUT opposing Prevent suggested that where “schools have evidence that students may be vulnerable or at risk as a result of exposure to groups promoting violence or extremism that this should be dealt with under existing safeguarding procedures”.<sup>192</sup> Extremist opposition to the Prevent strategy has also used this misunderstanding to undermine the strategy, with CAGE attacking a referral to social services by stating that “it is therefore critical that already existing mechanisms are used to support students to ensure their issues, grievances and ideas are addressed internally rather than escalated to external agencies”.<sup>193</sup>

These criticisms suggest that the Prevent duty has been imposed unnecessarily and that existing safeguarding processes could be used instead. However, they misunderstand that the duty imposed by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act simply requires institutions to be aware of these already existing safeguarding procedures and have policies in place which ensure staff are aware of the process available to them should they have concerns – both within an institution’s internal policies and beyond. When concerns are raised about an individual’s potential vulnerability, it is these already existing safeguarding procedures which are used to provide support, with the Prevent duty simply ensuring there is sector-wide consistency and a high level of coordination between the different support services which become involved. In many cases, institutions within the sectors subject to the Prevent duty will likely already have had such arrangements in place, and the duty simply ensures consistency and provides a framework for compliance.

Another misunderstanding regularly cited by those opposed to the policy in an attempt to damage it is the erroneous claim Prevent stigmatises those with mental health issues. The NUS has claimed that “the government’s identified ‘warning signs’ of “radicalisation” are highly problematic and renders suspect those with mental health difficulties”,<sup>194</sup> while a number of student unions have passed motions claiming students will be “victimised for suffering from mental health [sic] issues”.<sup>195</sup> This criticism has also appeared in extremist opposition to Prevent, with CAGE attacking the “gross generalisation of [...] people who are already stigmatised and marginalised” in government advice around mental health and extremism.<sup>196</sup>

Despite these claims, the only references to mental health in the revised Prevent strategy highlight that “people with mental health [sic] issues or learning disabilities [...] may be more easily drawn into terrorism” and that mental-health practitioners may hear such people expressing extreme

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<sup>191</sup> ‘Far-right threat halts Islamophobia conference’, *Student Rights*, 12 December 2014, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2237/far\\_right\\_threat\\_halts\\_islamophobia\\_conference](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2237/far_right_threat_halts_islamophobia_conference), last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>192</sup> ‘NUT votes to oppose Prevent’, *SACC*, 8 April 2015.

<sup>193</sup> ‘Prevent written evidence’, London Assembly Police and Crime Committee (December 2015), available at: [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/preventing\\_extremism\\_in\\_london\\_evidence\\_pack.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/preventing_extremism_in_london_evidence_pack.pdf), last visited: 9 May 2016, p. 7.

<sup>194</sup> ‘NUS National Conference 2016 Final Proposals’, NUS, pp. 74-76.

<sup>195</sup> ‘Rejecting the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and tackling Islamophobia’, City University London Students Union, available at: <http://www.culsu.co.uk/pageassets/howwework/policy/Rejecting-the-Counter-Terrorism-and-Security-Act-2015-and-tackling-Islamophobia.pdf>, and ‘“Students not Suspects” Motion’, *King’s College London Students’ Union*, available at: <http://www.kclsu.org/referenda/motion/6/20/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>196</sup> Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqui, ‘Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A response to the revised Prevent strategy’, CAGE (2011), p. 20.

views.<sup>197</sup> There is evidence in at least one case of an individual convicted of terrorism-related offences that this can be the case. Nicky Reilly, sentenced to 18 years in prison after a failed suicide bombing in 2008,<sup>198</sup> was described in the revised Prevent strategy as having “had regular contact with mental health services and had spoken about terrorism to them”.<sup>199</sup>

Further to this, the Channel vulnerability guidance suggests that relevant mental health issues may be one reason why individuals are vulnerable to engagement with extremist groups or ideologies.<sup>200</sup> While critics suggest this stigmatises people with mental health issues as suspect, it instead seeks to highlight how identifying a history of mental health issues in someone who has shown other signs of radicalisation can enable a greater understanding of the wider vulnerability of an individual, as well as the development of a more effective support plan. This is highlighted in the case of ‘Ali’, a young man referred in East London, who a multi-agency meeting found “had a long history with the Mental Health Services and demonstrated clear signs of paranoia” in addition to his targeting by known extremists. As a result of this coordination, local delivery staff were able to ensure his support package “worked with Ali through his mental health worker” to help him find work and steer clear of extremist influences, eventually resulting in him being discharged from mental health services.<sup>201</sup>

#### **4.6 Prevent as a Discredited Policy**

Finally, a key theme within criticisms of Prevent is to claim that the previous examples are only symptoms of the fact that the whole strategy and its conceptualisation of how to challenge extremism and radicalisation are based on a poor understanding of the problem itself. This opposition includes claims that address the nature of how the Prevent strategy defines extremism, to its understanding of how people become radicalised, and often seeks to present the strategy as one discredited by all right-minded intellectuals and activists. CAGE has regularly used this approach, with an August 2016 press release which claimed “flawed theories” and an “opaque scientific basis” lie behind Prevent misleadingly citing a poorly informed opinion article critical of US CVE programmes in *Psychology Today* as evidence the processes behind Prevent have been rejected by academics.<sup>202</sup>

One key example of this practice is the repetition of the myth that Prevent is based on the so-called ‘conveyor belt’ theory. A model motion for student unions to boycott Prevent produced by the NUS claims that:

The “conveyor belt” theory of radicalisation that the strategy is based on maintains that Muslims are at risk of being recruited into “violent extremism” when exposed to specific ideological strands within Islam, rather than considering violence as a methodology in itself, that a minority of people in any group may adopt.<sup>203</sup>

This has been echoed by other activists, including the IHRC advocate, Lena Mohamed, who told students at the University of Portsmouth that the theory was promoted by government and neo-conservative think-tanks supportive of Prevent,<sup>204</sup> and CAGE, who wrote in March 2015 that it was

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<sup>197</sup> ‘Prevent Strategy’, HM Government (June 2011), p. 83.

<sup>198</sup> ‘Nail-bomber given life sentence’, *BBC News*, 30 January 2009, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7859887.stm>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>199</sup> ‘Prevent Strategy’, HM Government (June 2011), p. 56.

<sup>200</sup> ‘Channel: Vulnerability assessment framework’, HM Government (October 2012), p. 2.

<sup>201</sup> ‘Prevent written evidence’, London Assembly Police and Crime Committee (December 2015), p. 29.

<sup>202</sup> ‘PREVENT has ended, ENGAGE is its rebirth’, *CAGE*, 25 August 2016.

<sup>203</sup> ‘Model Motion – Boycott Prevent’, *NUS*, 19 April 2016.

<sup>204</sup> Private correspondence with Prevent official present at event.

“time to put to bed the fallacy of the 'conveyor belt' to terrorism theory”.<sup>205</sup> A more nuanced version of this criticism suggests that, when combined with the belief that psychological factors can trigger radicalisation, “this analysis of radicalisation remains as influential as ever and constitutes an official narrative on the causes of terrorism”.<sup>206</sup>

This claim that Prevent views extremism purely through a simplistic lens of religious ideology is echoed by the open letter to the Independent signed by academics, students and activists in July 2015 which claims that “the way that PREVENT conceptualises ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’ is based on the unsubstantiated view that religious ideology is the primary driving factor for terrorism”.<sup>207</sup> This letter, which itself is regularly quoted as evidence that Prevent has been rejected by experts in the field of extremism and radicalisation, concludes by stating “that PREVENT has failed ... as a strategy”.<sup>208</sup> The downplaying of ideology or religion as a factor in religion and extremism is also apparent in analysis from the IHRC, which claims many of those who commit terrorism-related offences:

... lack religious literacy and could actually be regarded as religious novices. Very few have been brought up in strongly religious households, and there is a higher than average proportion of converts. Some are involved in drug-taking, drinking alcohol and visiting prostitutes.<sup>209</sup>

What these criticisms ignore is that the characterisation of Prevent as being based on the so-called ‘conveyor belt’ theory, or positioning ideology as the sole cause of radicalisation, are entirely inaccurate. Government guidance on radicalisation hosted by the ‘Educate against Hate’ website states that there is “no single pathway leading to involvement in extremism” and that “no single factor is enough to cause someone to join a terrorist movement”. Instead, it highlights how “individuals with a vulnerable state of mind, who find themselves exposed to an extremist ideology, and who lack the protective factors (which would include strong family and community networks) that would otherwise help insulate them from radicalisation” are the most vulnerable.<sup>210</sup>

The Channel Vulnerability Assessment used “to guide decisions about whether an individual needs support to address their vulnerability to radicalisation and the kind of support that they need” is at pains to point out that “not all those who become engaged by a group, cause or ideology go on to develop an intention to cause harm”, as well as that “not all those who have a wish to cause harm on behalf of a group, cause or ideology are capable of doing so”.<sup>211</sup> Meanwhile, classified papers leaked to the Sunday Telegraph in 2010 stated that the government at the time did “not believe that it is accurate to regard radicalisation in this country as a linear 'conveyor belt' moving from grievance, through radicalisation, to violence”.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> ‘MI5’s Behavioural Unit’s prophecy: Terror policing may backfire’, *CAGE*, 11 March 2015, available at:

<http://www.cageuk.org/article/mi5%E2%80%99s-behavioural-unit%E2%80%99s-prophecy-terror-policing-may-backfire/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>206</sup> Kundnani, A., ‘A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism’, Claystone (January 2015), available at: <http://www.claystone.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Claystone-rethinking-radicalisation.pdf>, last visited: 10 May 2016, pp. 10-11.

<sup>207</sup> ‘PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent’, *The Independent*, 10 July 2015.

<sup>208</sup> ‘PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent’, *The Independent*, 10 July 2015.

<sup>209</sup> ‘The PREVENT Strategy: Campaign Resources’, *IHRC*.

<sup>210</sup> ‘Introduction to radicalisation’, Educate against Hate, available at: <http://educateagainsthate.com/downloads/IntroductionToRadicalisation.pdf>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Channel: Vulnerability assessment framework’, HM Government (October 2012), pp. 2-3.

<sup>212</sup> ‘Hizb ut Tahrir is not a gateway to terrorism, claims Whitehall report’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 25 July 2010, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/andrew-gilligan/7908262/Hizb-ut-Tahrir-is-not-a-gateway-to-terrorism-claims-Whitehall-report.html>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

While these assessments do all highlight the importance of an ideology in radicalisation, they do not suggest that once an individual believes in this ideology they will inevitably travel towards terrorism, nor does it claim that religious ideologies leave people uniquely vulnerable to radicalisation as the critics suggest. Instead, it highlights the many different factors which can put people at risk, such as the drug and alcohol abuse mentioned by the IHRC, which Prevent processes including Channel seek to address.



## 5. Policy Recommendations

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### **Issue: Dissemination of Inaccurate or Misleading Stories about Prevent Delivery**

**Recommendation: Ensure inaccurate or misleading stories face swift and robust rebuttal from relevant authorities, with any responses coordinated with local delivery staff and relevant institutions.**

One of the key drivers of the campaign against the Prevent strategy has been the repeated use of anecdotes about young children or students being harassed or questioned for what appear to be absurd reasons. However, many of these stories have later been found to have been exaggerated, misleading, or even entirely false, yet continue to be used as examples of why Prevent is a failed or discredited policy by its opponents. These claims must be countered by those involved in delivery, with the dishonesty inherent in sharing such claims after they have been debunked made clear. As such, government should seek to:

- Swiftly investigate any claims attacking specific incidents of Prevent delivery made through the media by the anti-Prevent lobby, including contacting the institution involved and ensuring a credible account of events is recorded;
- Work with communications teams within relevant Whitehall partners such as the Department of Education or Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to put structures in place for any institution involved in a story to release clear statements rebutting any false or misleading claims;
- Ensure any legitimate failings in delivery are identified and communicated, including where sector staff may have been overzealous, and communicate importance of discussing any concerns with Prevent contacts before speaking to those believed to be of concern.

### **Issue: Dearth of Prevent Success Stories**

**Recommendation: Coordinate efforts to collect and publicise cases where Prevent intervention has been beneficial.**

A question often asked of those who defend the Prevent strategy is whether there is any evidence that the strategy's interventions have been successful in stopping people from being radicalised or carrying out terrorist attacks. Data protection should remain a prime concern of the strategy, but given the challenge posed by the spread of stories attacking Prevent, the Home Office and CLG should investigate the possibility of working together to:

- Coordinate efforts with local authorities responsible for convening Channel panels to gather an anonymised database containing details of interventions considered to be successful, focusing on the good practice involved, and develop plans to include these in online training packages to ensure sector staff can see Prevent delivery in context;
- Give local Prevent delivery staff who have regular contact with individuals referred such as social workers or mentors the structures and opportunity to refer individuals who express an interest in their case being used to highlight the positive effects of engagement;
- Identify local authorities with a significant caseload of Channel referrals relating to far-right extremism and work with delivery staff involved to develop anonymised case studies related to these examples which can be used in Prevent training.

**Issue: Providing Support for Practitioners and Driving Successful Engagement**

**Recommendation: Ensure Prevent delivery staff are provided with the support necessary to enable them to effectively respond to concerns about the strategy and increase engagement work to help reassure communities.**

The processes involved in Prevent delivery mean that local staff deal with a multiplicity of audiences and are required to address a wide range of concerns, while complaints Prevent has failed to successfully engage with communities and front-line practitioners suggest more of this engagement work is needed. Ensuring staff are properly equipped to challenge the misinformation of the anti-Prevent lobby during this engagement is vital, and with this in mind government should:

- Develop a series of consultation events which specifically aim to give communities and practitioners greater opportunity to raise any concerns about Prevent with both local delivery staff and policy-makers, as well as providing a forum for myth-busting;
- Carry out work to identify the narratives and practices of groups which work to undermine Prevent and other counter-radicalisation and counter-extremism policies within specific areas and provide relevant practitioners with detailed briefs. This will help Prevent staff identify these groups and ensure those which have consistently sought to damage engagement by scaremongering or attacking community groups which work with government have no place in the debate;
- Provide delivery staff with a regularly updated handbook containing detailed information explaining those aspects of Prevent delivery which appear to be the most frequently misunderstood, as well as material outlining how elements of Prevent delivery which have not been successful will be addressed;
- Develop a centrally produced daily digest for delivery staff disseminated each morning which summarises any Prevent-related stories to ensure all staff are able to respond to any questions or complaints raised. Ensure information on any rebuttal stories is collated and made available to any delivery staff involved in engagement or training;
- Develop a standardised set of lesson plans potentially to be taught by external teaching staff (similarly to some sex education programmes) which will both cut teachers' workload and ensure pupils are encouraged to debate extremism-related issues and understand the processes followed once an individual is deemed to be vulnerable to extremism – highlighting the importance of pastoral-care provision and allaying fears of arrest or 'criminalisation'.

**Issue: Concerns about Poor Prevent Delivery are taken to anti-Prevent Campaign Groups or Legal Firms rather than an Accountable Authority**

**Recommendation: Explore options for the development of an independent investigative complaints mechanism to address legitimate concerns about individual cases within Prevent procedures and delivery.**

Ihhat Smith, who claimed her son was “taken out of class and treated as a criminal” as part of Prevent delivery appears to have been encouraged to take expensive and futile legal action,<sup>213</sup> while the ‘Prevent Watch’ website provides a directory of legal firms for people who feel they have been “impacted by Prevent” to fight “strategic cases”.<sup>214</sup> The Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, David Anderson, has suggested the Prevent strategy “could benefit from independent review”,<sup>215</sup> and it is clear that, at present, there is no recognised independent authority for parents like Ms Smith to complain to. This leaves them prey to those with an agenda, and means cases are often reported to the media rather than relevant authorities. To counter this, the government should seek to:

- Examine the options currently available for individuals to seek redress should they have concerns about any Prevent-related referral and assess the extent to which they are accessible to the public and successful in resolving complaints;
- Consider the feasibility of creating such structures within the relevant regulatory bodies for the public sectors subject to the Prevent duty, such as Ofsted, HEFCE, and the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC);
- Understand the need for such a trusted and independent service to stop the exploitation of vulnerable families, and accept that if this is not forthcoming it may have to consider the creation and funding of a mechanism akin to an independent Prevent Ombudsman which would be able to investigate any complaints about Prevent and provide successful complainants with restitution – with this being considered only after all other options have been examined;
- Take note of the need to balance such a credible structure with an appreciation of the pitfalls of providing an additional avenue for baseless attempts to undermine Prevent delivery and that any such structure must add value to the process without becoming a tool for extremists to exploit.

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<sup>213</sup> ‘Muslim extremists’ ‘campaign of lies’ to undermine the government’s fight against terror’, *The Telegraph*, 30 January 2016.

<sup>214</sup> ‘About’, *Prevent Watch*, available at: <http://www.preventwatch.org/about/>, last visited: 9 July 2016.

<sup>215</sup> ‘Supplementary written evidence submitted by David Anderson Q.C. (Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation’, *Home Affairs Select Committee*, 29 January 2016, available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/countering-extremism/written/27920.pdf>, last visited: 26 September 2016.

## 6. Conclusion

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The policies developed by the UK government to challenge extremism have had a long development period, during which mistakes have been made and lessons have been learned. The process of refinement that the policy has gone through since 2003 in examining the extent of the threat, assessing why people were drawn towards violent extremism, and detailing methods to challenge such behaviour has seen the preventative part of the strategy developed, and rectified the mistake of confusing work on integration with challenging terrorism and extremism. Today, it has left a Prevent strategy which aims to respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and work with the country's public sector institutions to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.

The imposition of the Prevent duty on public sector bodies such as schools, universities, prisons and the NHS trusts by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act has given these specified authorities the legal responsibility to have an awareness and understanding of the risks posed by radicalisation, and to ensure that their public-facing staff understand the processes around radicalisation. They should also ensure staff are aware of the processes which will result should they trigger a referral of individuals deemed to be potentially vulnerable to radicalisation – with the multi-agency safeguarding processes available through Channel the most serious. Ultimately, this duty aims to identify and support individuals before they commit criminal offences or do harm to themselves or others.

Despite this aim, as well as the clear threat from home-grown violent extremism in the UK posed by both Islamist and far-right extremists, a well-organised campaign to undermine Prevent has developed in recent years and has intensified since the Prevent duty has come into force. Developed and promoted by extremist groups, this campaign has since been joined by civil rights activists, union staff from sectors subject to the Prevent duty, and students. There has also been more nuanced criticism of elements of Prevent delivery from prominent individuals, including a number either working in or with experience of the sectors subject to the statutory duty.

Much of the criticism of Prevent espoused by these campaigners can be broken down into the following themes which are used to make misleading attacks on the policy, including:

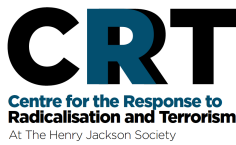
- Accusations that racism/Islamophobia or the deliberate targeting of a suspect community are an inherent part of Prevent;
- Claims there will be a chilling of freedom of expression and political activism, particularly from Muslim communities, who will fear being reported and criminalised;
- Suggestions that the Prevent duty will see sector staff forced to spy on or monitor individuals within their care or using their services;
- The spreading of false or exaggerated stories of referrals or other Prevent contact;
- The exploitation of misunderstandings and lack of knowledge about Prevent processes;
- Claims that the Prevent strategy and its theories have been rejected by practitioners and experts in extremism/radicalisation and are therefore discredited.

While it is clear there exists an organised campaign to undermine the Prevent duty as a requirement and the Prevent strategy as policy more generally, criticism of Prevent must not be dismissed out of

hand or labelled simply as extremist agitation. Government and those agencies responsible for Prevent delivery and compliance monitoring must take into account and seek to address legitimate criticism, as well as working to provide guidance and training outlining exactly what the Prevent duty entails and what is expected of institutions. They must also work to identify and rebut the misleading information and criticisms of Prevent, as without this the strategy's enemies will continue to have the upper hand.

## About the Author

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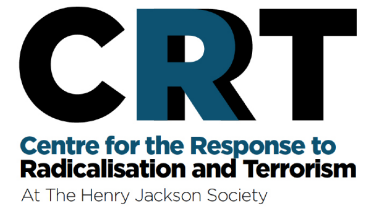
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The Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT) at The Henry Jackson Society provides top-quality, in-depth research and delivers targeted, tangible and impactful activities to combat the threats from radical ideologies and terrorism at home and abroad.



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The Henry Jackson Society is a think tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free - working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.



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