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RADICALIZATION PREVENTION INITIATIVES IN SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE UK

Whitepaper



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Abstract

Terrorist organizations operating across Europe today are intentionally targeting young people, and individuals as young as 13 have already been implicated in terrorist-related activity. Environments where young people frequent during their education, including schools, colleges and universities, have an important role to play in keeping them safe from terrorist propaganda. This paper examines the implementation of the national *Prevent Strategy* in the UK, intended to deter those who encourage others to become terrorists and to stop those being radicalised and drawn to extremist causes.

For more than two decades the UK Prevent Strategy has sought to prevent terrorism and its underlying causes, including programmes to prevent radicalisation to extremist causes in schools, colleges and universities. This approach has proved to be controversial and is not without its imperfections. This paper explores how the *Prevent Strategy* is tackling the radicalisation of young adults in schools, colleges and universities, reflecting on the challenges of implementation, and the steps necessary to prevent a very small but increasingly sophisticated minority of violent extremists from recruiting and radicalising children and young adults to their violent ideologies.

1. Introduction – The catalyst for change

At the time of the devastating Al-Qaeda Planes Operation of 9/11 in the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) government, like the US and many other countries in the developed world, had no sophisticated nor coherent cross-departmental strategy to counter international terrorism. In short, the UK had no plan to institute of any rigour that would have been able to effectively respond to a major Al-Qaeda indiscriminate attack. The characteristics of violent jihadist terrorism with its vaulting ambitions, strident ideology, and disregard for civilian casualties - with adherents prepared to give their lives in their attacks - represented very new challenges for politicians, government policy-makers, and intelligence and law enforcement agencies alike.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the threat from extreme jihadist terrorism in the UK had been assessed as severe, and numerous plots affecting British interests overseas and at home were of great concern to the security authorities. In 2002 policy makers began work on a UK counter-terrorism strategy called CONTEST: CouNter-TErrorism STRatgey. The strategy was later presented to the British Cabinet and adopted in 2003. The details of the new strategy remained confidential and were not made public by the government until 2006 following the Al-Qaeda inspired coordinated suicide terror attacks on London's public transport system on 7 July 2005. This devastating attack, which killed 52 innocent civilians, proved to be a catalyst for unprecedented change in UK counter-terrorism policy. The London 7/7 terror attack served

to amplify the discord between the geographically anchored specialist policing assets and the amorphous threat from distributed non-hierarchical cells affiliated to Al-Qaeda. The terrorist threat appeared to be emerging from all sides, being variously imported into the UK or returning from overseas with individuals having received military training or combat experience in the theatres of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. The threat was also coming from within UK borders; the incubation of a home-grown threat had been identified and drawn from the very communities the counter-terrorism apparatus of the state was attempting to protect. The threat was also virtual with terrorists being recruited, radicalised, trained and tasked online in the ungoverned digital domain of cyber space.

The immediacy and the diversity of the domestic UK terror threat brought about a series of fresh challenges. At the core of many of the changes required to tackle Al-Qaeda inspired terrorism was the problematic shift to the pre-emption or interception of terrorism. This was a shift necessitated by the suicidal component of terrorist tactics, a shift that had far-reaching implications for national security. The policing of political violence traditionally categorized as intelligence-led and politically sensitive had historically generated structures which had been remote, secretive and specialist. Yet the contemporary evolution of terrorism had spawned important new trends and demanded a new policing response. Contemporary terrorism now involved embedded citizens as much as foreign extremists.

1. Introduction – The catalyst for change

While that phenomenon may not have been new to other parts of the world, it certainly represented a significant change in Britain.

The way in which members of UK communities were being influenced by the extreme single narrative of the religious ideology promoted by Al-Qaeda was of critical concern for the UK Government. This single narrative, when combined with a complex malaise of social and economic factors, served to manipulate individuals towards extremist perspectives cultivating a home-grown terrorist threat. Understanding why British citizens were moving towards extremist perspectives and creating an alternative to allow them to resist such views was widely acknowledged as the key challenge in countering the contemporary terrorist threat. As a direct result, the need for credible and actionable intelligence to monitor and prevent terrorism came to the fore and was added to the more traditional tactic of the pursuit through criminal justice processes. The imperative to refocus and react to new trends was made manifest in the Government's CONTEST strategy to counter international terrorism being structured in what became known as the '4P' campaigns which included: 'Pursue, to

stop terrorists attacks; Prevent, to stop people becoming terrorists, or supporting violent extremists; Protect, to strengthen protection against terrorist attack; and Prepare, where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact. The strategy that emerged from this work had a clear strategic aim to make it possible for society to maintain conditions of normality so that people could go about their normal business, freely and with confidence, even in the face of suicidal terrorist attacks. In developing the Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare structure of CONTEST, the strategy was easily understood as a logical narrative, translated into specific programs of action across government, the private sector and the voluntary sector, and as has been shown, capable of being updated and extended in response to developments in the threat. It was important that the complexities of such a wide-ranging strategy were simplified and focused as successful delivery would depend upon a joined-approach and the strength of partnerships. As CONTEST developed, additional focus was concentrated upon the preventative ways in which the early identification of UK home-grown terrorist threat could be developed.

2. Prevent emerges - Putting policy into practice

The 'Prevent' strand of CONTEST was focused towards tackling the radicalization of individuals. It set out to do this by addressing structural problems in the UK and overseas that may contribute to radicalization, such as inequalities and discrimination. To prevent terrorism and its underlying causes was recognized as requiring a long-term approach. Prevent was intended to deter those who facilitate terrorism and to deter those who encourage others to become terrorists. This required a change in the environment where extremists and those radicalizing others operated. The Prevent strand also aimed to engage in the battle of ideas, to win hearts and minds by challenging the ideologies that extremists believe can justify the use of violence. Preventing violent extremism remains a key area of CONTEST and is the proactive element of the strategy. The government believes that the UK, like many other countries, faces a challenge from terrorism and violent extremism where a very small minority seeks to harm innocent people in the name of an ideology which causes division, hatred, and violence. Within the first publication of CONTEST during July 2006, Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed his concerns about the increasing specter of Al-Qaeda inspired violence stating that: "This terrorism will not be defeated until its ideas, the poison that warps the minds of its adherents, are confronted, head-on, in their essence, at their core." The role of the government is to take tough security measures needed to keep people safe but a security response alone was considered insufficient to reduce the terrorist threat. A response led and driven by local communities was however believed to be a vital component to tackle the home-grown Al-Qaeda inspired terrorist threat. The very essence of the Prevent pillar of any counter-terrorism strategy seeks to engage partners to work together to challenge and expose the ideology that sanctions and encourages indiscriminate violence. Al-Qaeda inspired terrorists plots in the UK, discovered in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and which continued after the London 7/7

bombings, supported the pressing need to stop people, especially young people, being drawn into illegal activities associated with violent extremism. Prevent therefore prioritized its response, revealing that the government needed to expose and isolate the apologists for violence and protect the places where they operate. The government also revealed that local authorities, the police, and their partners in schools, other educational institutions and elsewhere, have a critical role in preventing violent extremism as they understand the local context. They are in a unique position to talk to local communities, hear their concerns and enable people to stand shoulder to shoulder, confident in their rejection and condemnation of violence.

The Prevent Strategy drilled deep into the core of British values, the government revealing that everyone has a right to live in a safe and welcoming neighbourhood where they feel they belong. CONTEST revealed that the government firmly believed that when people have a say in the design and delivery of public services, those services better meet their needs. These set of beliefs presented UK authorities with a real challenge: how to prevent people from adopting extremist perspectives without labelling them, isolating them or without the authorities distancing themselves from the very communities with whom they wished to engage and who otherwise could help to prevent pockets of extremism from developing. It was also recognised that a robust strategy to prevent violent extremism that leads to terrorism has to navigate and infiltrate a complex environment online and in the real world.

In the UK, concepts such as community involvement, multi-agency working and public assurance - now widely accepted and practised in local policing - had to migrate into the policing of violent extremism. All police officers, and not just those specialist counter-terrorism officers, therefore had to share in the tasks given the scale and scope of the terror threat from home-grown radicalized extremists. Counter terrorism policing thus became a matter for all in the police, for all their strategic partners and for all the public.

2. Radicalisation: defining the risk and navigating the noise

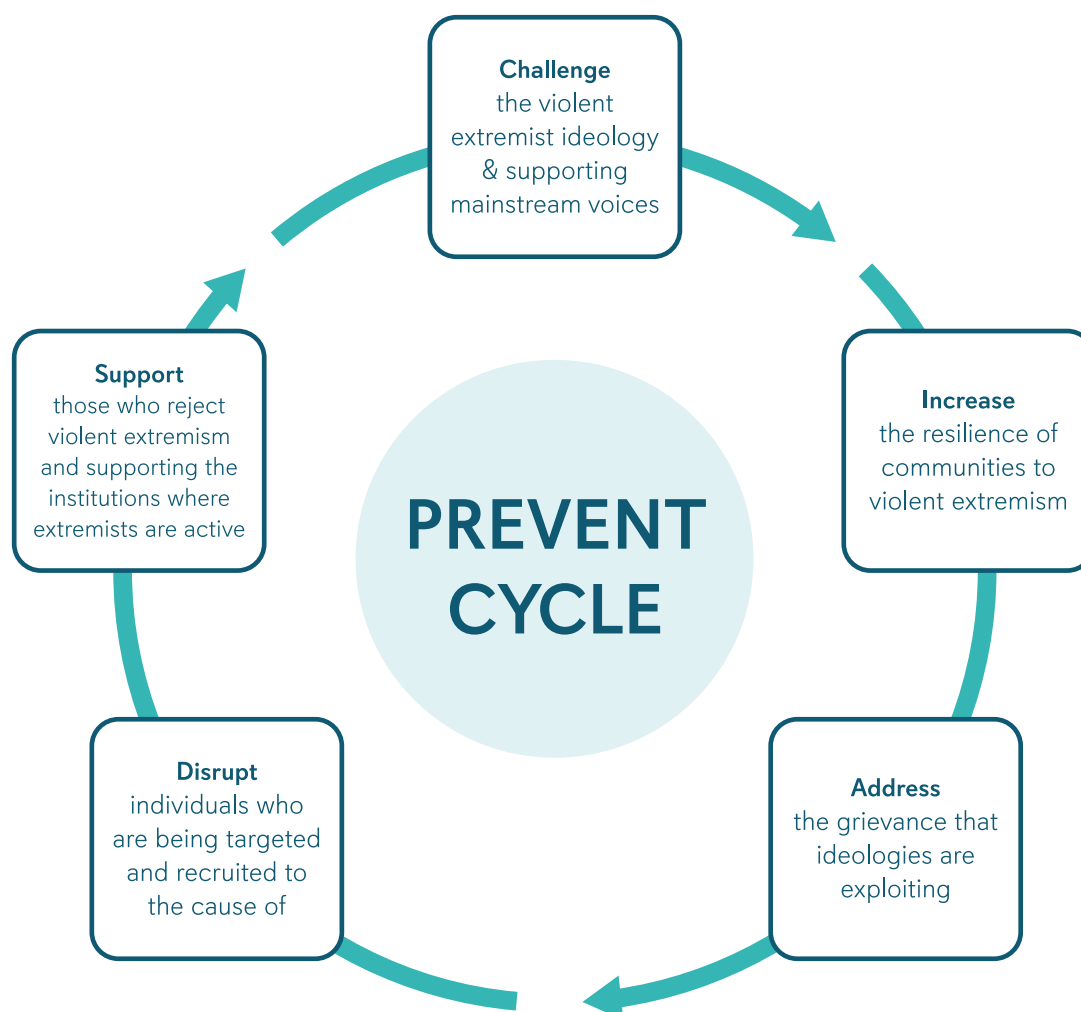


Figure 1 – The Prevent Cycle

The Prevent Strategy highlighted that everyone has a right to live in a safe and welcoming neighborhood where they feel they belong. At the same time, it identified that no neighborhood can truly succeed unless local people define their future by working together to tackle the challenges they face. Moreover, to prevent terrorism at its source required a cycle of sustained effort illustrated in Figure 1 - The Prevent cycle, which includes challenging violent extremist ideology and supporting mainstream voices, increasing resilience of communities, addressing the grievance that violent ideologies are exploiting, disrupting those who are being targeted and recruited to violent extremist causes, and supporting them and institutions to reject extremist ideologies.

The long-term solution to preventing terrorism is to stop people becoming terrorists or becoming involved in violent extremism. Through the UK Governments Prevent Strategy, the police service and its partners have an integral role to play working with local communities to support people who are vulnerable to being drawn into criminal activity and to challenge those who support violent extremism. Supporting those who may be vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremism is a key strand of the UK Governments Prevent Strategy. To be effective this approach depends upon the creation and maintenance of a partnership approach requiring the acceptance of a shared responsibility and active participation, an approach which continues to be tested by the radicalization and recruitment of young people to violent, extreme and terrorist causes.

3. Radicalization and recruitment – Preventing teenage terror plots

In June of 2006, Hammad Munshi, a 16 year old schoolboy from Leeds in the North East of England, was arrested and charged on suspicion of committing terrorism related offences. Following his arrest, police searches were conducted at his family home where his wallet was recovered from his bedroom. It was found to contain hand-written dimensions of a sub-machine gun. Munshi had excellent information technology skills and had registered and ran his own website on which he sold knives and extremist material.

He passed on, for example, information on how to make Napalm as well as how to make detonators for Improvised Explosive Devices (IED). At the time of his arrest Munshi had been directly influenced by being exposed to extremist rhetoric and propaganda on the internet unbeknown to his family, friends and wider social network. At the time of his actual offending Munshi was just 15 years of age and was radicalised to the violent jihadist ideology of Islamic State but it was not only this extremist doctrine that was recruiting teenage boys to radical causes. On 20th September 2019 at Leeds Crown Court, a boy who tried to build a bomb at the age of 15 was convicted of terrorism offences and jailed for five years. Kieran Cleary had researched extreme right-wing and anti-Muslim material online and had praised Adolf Hitler during his radicalisation journey. The sentencing of Cleary followed an announcement by the UK's most senior counter-terrorism police officer, Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu of the Metropolitan Police, who warned that right-wing extremism posed the fastest growing terror threat to the UK.

During a presentation to journalists, Mr Basu revealed that around 10 per cent of 800 live counter-terror investigations in the UK involved far-right extremists a significant increase on previous years. Mr Basu also warned that teenagers were increasingly being drawn into far-right extremism. When UK anti-terror police arrested Cleary and searched his home in August 2018, they found a shrapnel-filled device that could have been made into a viable CO2 bomb. The court heard that the teenager had researched bomb-making tactics on

the dark web and almost created a weapon with a 30 metre blast radius that would have caused maximum harm and death to civilians. The Crown Prosecutors explained to the court that Cleary told friends he was going to "go on a rampage" and "kill many people" weeks after making the device. The jury heard that Cleary first came to the police's attention aged 13 and was referred to the UK's Prevent counter-extremism scheme for support and intervention but efforts to intervene could not stop him developing his extremist views into terrorist acts. Detective Chief Superintendent Martin Snowden, the head of Counter Terrorism Policing North East, revealed that Cleary had spent a lot of time alone on the internet in this disturbing case stating: "His fascination with violence and death is particularly concerning given his age and vulnerability. Despite extensive attempts to steer this boy away from the path of criminality, due to the progression of his behaviour, he was arrested and charged with serious offences. His online searches combined with the manufacture of an explosive device had the potential to put the safety of others at risk and could not go unprosecuted."

The case of Cleary brought into sharp focus the vulnerability of young teenagers of school age to the extremist online propaganda but Cleary was not the youngest teenager to be arrested and charged with terrorism-related offences in the UK. At just 14-years-old, a schoolboy from Darlington in the UK became one of the youngest people in the UK to be convicted of terror charges. The boy, who cannot be named because of his age, appeared before Westminster magistrates court in 2022 charged with possessing a terrorist publication. He pleaded guilty to three offences contrary to section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000, admitting possessing a record of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism. Police said the charges related to extreme right-wing terrorism. The teenage terror trend is not unique to the UK, many nations across the world have seen an increase of the young and impressionable being coerced into planning and committing acts of violence. In Austria during 2025, the foiled teenage

3. Radicalization and recruitment – Preventing teenage terror plots

terror plot to slaughter Taylor Swift fans attending the Era's Tour concert in Vienna provided further evidence that the recurrent targeting of crowded public spaces by teenage terrorists radicalised and recruited by the outlawed Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist group remains a significant threat. The cancelling of the concert was a victory for violent extremists operating across Europe who are actively being encouraged by online propaganda to exploit the intrinsic vulnerabilities of what are considered "soft targets", such as stadiums and concert halls, a term that derives from their open nature and public character. The arrest of three teenagers by security forces in Austria revealed their attack plans which appears to have sought to combine the use of homemade explosives with marauding knife attacks with the intent of causing mass casualties as fans made their way to the concert venue. Following their arrest, Vladimir Vorokov, the United Nations Under Secretary for Counter Terrorism,

revealed that Europe faces a more acute threat from Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), the ISIS affiliate to whom a 19-year old man pledged allegiance before plotting to terrorise Taylor Swift's concertgoers in Vienna. Vladimir Vorokov stated: "ISIS mostly operates through branches in different parts of the world, and the one that I would say is the most successful, and arguably the only one that has been consistently operating also in the West and planning terrorist attacks in the West, is ISIS-K. This group is considered the greatest external terrorist threat to the continent".

The continued rise of teenagers being indoctrinated by terrorist ideologies in the UK and across Europe continues to raise concerns about how the police and their network of partners can better develop ways in which to identify the early signs and indicators of radicalisation development to prevent teenagers being drawn to terrorist causes.

4. Play your part - Educating against extremism

The education sector has an important role to play in preventing violent extremism. We must first, however, face an uncomfortable truth; some terrorist organizations operating today have recruited children to their cause. All in authority must now recognize that terrorists operating in the UK, and across Europe, are intentionally and systematically targeting young people, and individuals as young as 13 and 14 have already been implicated in terrorist-related activity. In the UK, most of the teenagers arrested for terrorism related offences have been educated in British schools and several have exhibited degrees of vulnerability while of school age prior to being radicalized as teenagers. The purpose of the Prevent Strategy in schools is simply to offer opportunities to help young people understand the risks associated with violent extremism and to develop knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments. Preventing violent extremism from emerging within young people in schools supports the Prevent Cycle by:

- Using teaching and learning to help young people develop the knowledge and skills to challenge extremist narratives.
- Identifying how to prevent harm to pupils by individuals, groups or others who promote violent extremism.
- Providing programmes to support pupils who are vulnerable.
- Increasing the resilience of pupils and school communities through the curriculum, other learning opportunities or activities.
- Using teaching styles and curriculum opportunities which allow grievances to be aired.

Accepting that the potential radicalization of young people of school age is an issue to be addressed is the first and most important step in countering this threat. It cannot and must not be ignored, yet preventative measures in schools requires a sensitive, delicate and morally justified response-but it does require a response. It is widely acknowledged across government, in particular departments responsible for schools, education, children and families, that preventing violent extremism in schools is a challenging issue which needs to be a shared endeavour across local partners and communities, with activities tailored to meet local needs. Young people represent the future of society which educates them to identify a variety of risks such as alcohol, tobacco, vaping, drugs, and gambling, it is also important to support the welfare of pupils who may be particularly vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization. Prevent in schools serves to highlight the complexity of the threat of today's terrorism and the reach required of counter measures to protect the public now and in the future.

4. Play your part - Educating against extremism

Universities and colleges also have an important role to play in preventing terrorism. They hold a unique cultural and legal position in the UK and provide a complete learning experience through a mix of social and academic opportunities. There are times, however, when universities need support from other agencies to safeguard the well-being of their students. In 2008, the Centre for Social Cohesion Commission published the results of their in-depth and groundbreaking study into attitudes towards Islam on British university campuses. Still the most comprehensive study to date, the research discovered, among other things, that students who are active in their university Islamic society were twice as likely as non-members to hold extreme views, including that killing in the name of religion being justified. Studies also show that more than 30% of people convicted of Al-Qaeda associated terrorist offences in the UK between 1999 and 2009 were known to have attended university. A report of research findings published during 2010 by the Centre for Social Cohesion Radical Islam on UK Campuses - A Comprehensive List of Extremist Speakers at UK Universities, found that a significant number of students and graduates from UK universities have committed acts of terrorism or have been convicted for terrorism related offences, in the UK and abroad. The report also revealed that more than 30.71% of individuals involved in violent Islamist terrorism in the UK were educated to degree level or higher. Of these, 19 individuals studied at a UK university; 16 were graduates; three were postgraduate students and one had achieved a postgraduate qualification. A further finding of the research identified that at least four individuals involved in acts of terrorism in the UK were members of their student's union Islamic society, and a further six were studying at a UK university at the time of their arrest. In a number of terrorism cases both in the UK and worldwide, the individuals involved were reportedly radicalised on UK university campuses. While the body of evidence gathered by the Centre for Social Cohesion strongly suggests that the radicalisation of young adults while studying at university presents a risk, this does not in any way mean that higher education institutes are at fault for the development of radicalisation. With a large and diverse student population attending university, some extremist organizations target specific institutions with the objective of radicalizing and recruiting students. As a direct result of this emerging threat the Prevent Strategy stated that further and higher education institutes have a role to play in reducing the risk from terrorism by working in partnership to challenge terrorist ideologies, support those who are vulnerable to being radicalized, and work with those institutions where radicalization takes place. To build effective partnerships between police, colleges and universities, police officers should use the '4R' model for reducing risk of radicalization at universities shown in Figure 2, including the key elements of the process concerning Risk, Responsibility, Relationships and Referral. It is important for the effective delivery of the Prevent Strategy that police officers engaging with colleges and universities acknowledged that they must uphold academic freedom and provide an environment for research and open debate but in this context all in authority within education institutes must acknowledge the following;

4. Play your part - Educating against extremism

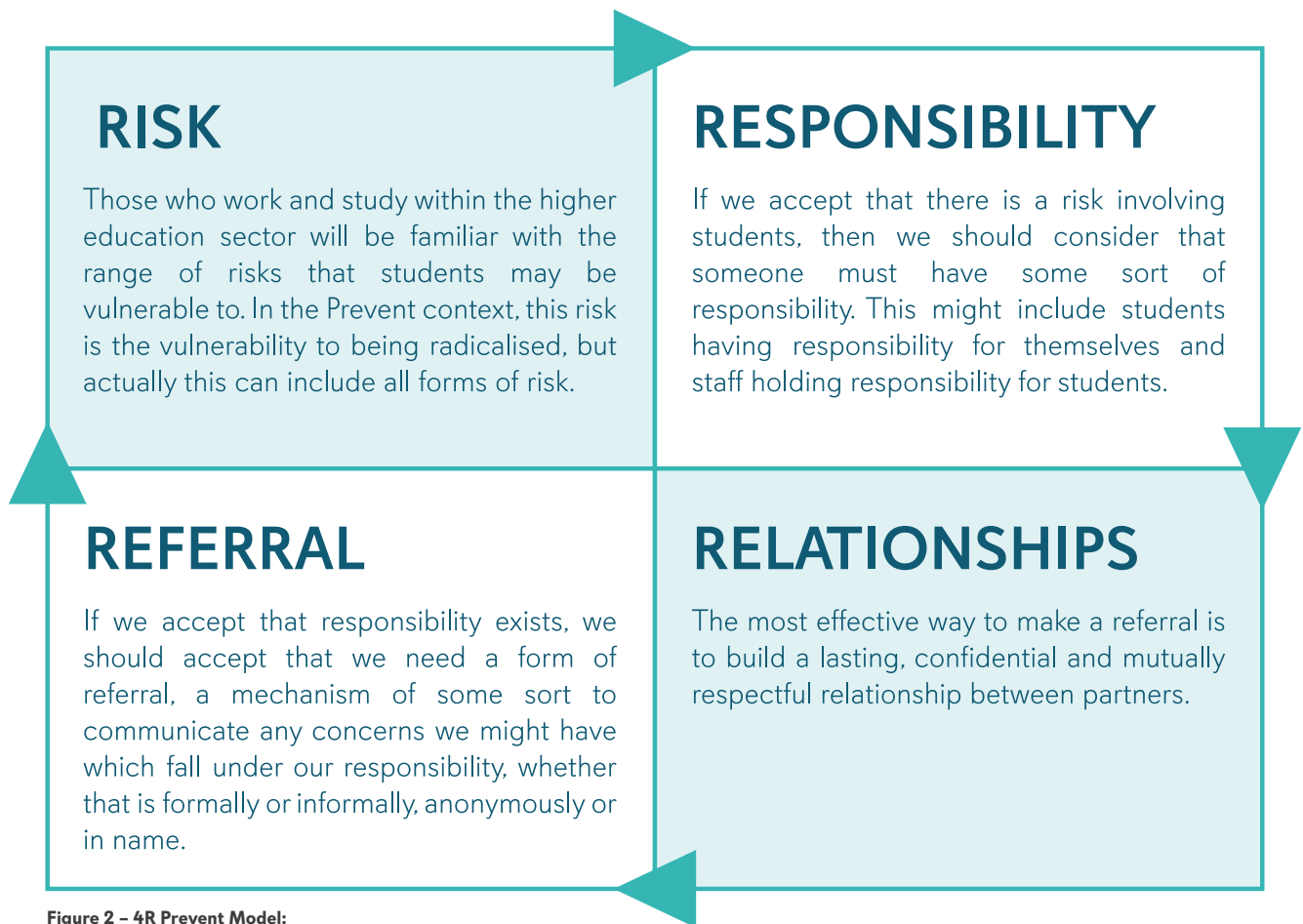


Figure 2 – 4R Prevent Model:
Reducing the risk of radicalization in universities

- Colleges and universities possess some form of risk for their students and staff;
- College and university staff, students and the police have a responsibility to help minimize and mitigate against the risks to public safety;
- College, university, and police information sharing and referral mechanisms are crucial;
- College, university, and police collaborative partnerships and relationship building form the foundation of future work to identify, mitigating, minimize and manage risk to public safety

4. Play your part - Educating against extremism

These themes assist in creating the simple '4R' model for reducing risk at universities. Police officers who work with colleges and universities may find the model useful in discussing how Prevent fits with students and staff. The positive outcome of the model is that risk is reduced by building strong professional relationships. The use of the 4R model as a basic tool to build partnerships between the police service and universities is an effective framework to explain how information sharing and raising awareness of vulnerability can be understood by those who work within universities. It provides a basis on which to build a positive and productive working relationship. In practice, building long-term strategic partnerships means that police, college and university colleagues must get to know one another, share information appropriately and work together to solve challenges. From police Prevent Strategy perspectives, this relationship is not about gathering intelligence, it is talking about the risks of racialization and working together to manage, mitigate and minimize the risks to public safety by providing support to vulnerable citizens as part of safeguarding the young and vulnerable in society.

To reinforce the importance of preventing terrorism by police and all partners, the UK government introduced the Prevent statutory duty through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The duty requires local authorities, schools, colleges, higher education institutions, as well as health bodies, prisons and probation, and the police, to consider the need to safeguard people from being drawn into terrorism. It sits alongside long-established duties on professionals to safeguard vulnerable people from exploitation from a range of other harms. This Prevent Duty shines into UK law the role and responsibility of all institutions to protect those vulnerable to radicalisation. The Prevent Duty also provides mechanisms and frameworks to support authorities and institutions to fulfil their Prevent Duty, including the introduction in all areas of the UK of the requirement to have local action

plans in place to support vulnerable individuals; in some areas this support is provided by a process known as Channel. Channel provides a mechanism for supporting those who may be vulnerable to violent extremism by assessing the nature and the extent of the potential risk and, where necessary, providing an appropriate support package tailored to an individual's needs. A multi-agency panel decides on the most appropriate action to support individuals taking their circumstances into account. The partnership focused structure is similar to existing, successful partnership initiatives which aim to support individuals and protect them from harm, such as drugs and involvement in knife crime and gang culture.

Supporting those most at risk of being drawn into violent extremism is about diverting people away from potential risk at an early stage which prevents them from being drawn into criminal activity. Partnership involvement ensures that those at risk have access to a wide range of support ranging from diversionary activities through to providing access to specific services such as education, housing and employment. Partners may include, depending on local circumstances: education, health, probation, prisons, police, social services, children's and youth services, border agencies, voluntary services, charitable organisations and community members. Channel is not about reporting or informing on individuals in order to prosecute them. It is about communities working together to support vulnerable people at an early stage, preventing them from being drawn in to violent extremism. There are currently 28 local coordinators across more than 70 local authorities.

Those in communities who have concerns about individuals who may be vulnerable are advised to contact their local authority, the police or other trusted local organization for further advice. The critical success factors of the Prevent Strategy in schools, colleges and universities is the sharing of experiences and challenges, the development of partnerships, and the creation of a platform from which to engage and raise awareness of the threat

4. Play your part - Educating against extremism

from terrorism and violent extremism to ensure communities are safer and feel safer. Despite the best efforts of all Prevent Strategy partners and the statutory Prevent Duty being in place, serious problems persist. The latest UK Government Home Office figures, released in 2025, reveal that 8,778 individuals were referred to the Prevent Strategy programme between April 2024 and March 2025, which is the highest number since records began in 2015. This represents a 27 per cent increase compared with the previous year and reflects growing concerns around radicalisation and safeguarding. This release of data contains official statistics in development on individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme due to concerns they were susceptible to radicalisation. Following initial screening and assessment, referrals may be passed to a multi-agency Channel panel where a risk of radicalisation exists. In 2025, the Home Office Prevent Programme figures reveal that the education sector made the

most referrals (3,129; 36%), followed by the police (2,631; 30%). These figures highlight the vital role that teachers play in ensuring that individuals vulnerable to radicalisation receive early support, as most referrals are for 11- to 15-year-olds, with 36 per cent of all referrals (where the age is known) being for this age group in 2024-25. The second largest proportion of referrals in the past year was for those aged 16 to 17 (13 per cent). Overall, the referral data reinforces the critical role that the education sector plays in identifying early signs of radicalisation. It also points to the need for multi-agency collaboration, particularly where there is crossover with mental health and special educational needs and disabilities.

The key takeaway from the recent set of published Prevent Programme data from the Home Office is that multi-agency collaboration between partners is essential for preventative safeguarding measures to succeed and to overcome the problems of delivering Prevent Strategy policy.

5. Lessons to be learned - Problems with Prevent

The UK, like many other nations across the world, faces a real and sustained threat from terrorism and violent extremism. Tough security measures are needed to keep communities safe but a preventative response led and driven by local partners is also vital. The Prevent Strategy has been established as a response to this longer-term challenge because violent extremists are constantly seeking to exploit new tactics and technologies in both attack planning and recruitment. The Prevent Strategy therefore enables the police service to adapt and strengthen its response to deter people joining the recruitment line. The police service is gaining a better understanding of the communities they serve as a direct result of implementing the Prevent Strategy and are engaging more actively with hitherto hard to reach communities and working more closely with key partners all of these are key to building an atmosphere of trust rather than grievance and resentment. Delivering the Prevent Strategy is without doubt a challenging and complex arena that requires a whole community approach to empower communities, challenge those who espouse violence and support those who are vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremism. It will only have effect if the police service continues to build trust and confidence through renewed and consistent engagement activity.

The police service responsibility to deliver the Prevent Strategy is not a short-term priority to be discontinued as the threat level recedes. The threat from terrorism remains high in the UK and it is vital that the policing response remains dynamic in response to violent extremism from wherever it emerges. The Prevent Strategy is something that the police service is doing with its partners and all communities with a longer-term objective. It is a shared objective that most importantly, brings the police service closer to the communities they serve and protect.

The early efforts and initial approaches by the UK government to implement preventative counter terrorism action through the CONTEST

Strategy was by no means welcomed and supported by all. Many in society held the view that the government response through the Prevent Strategy, and being driven by the police, was a knee-jerk reaction which failed to create a coordinated, comprehensive policy to tackle the post London 7/7 terrorist threat. Those individuals who were opposed to the initial Prevent Strategy suggested that that it played to the emotions of the general public for the government and the police to be seen to be tough on terrorism and the causes of terrorism as aroused by the media and national press. Many ethnic minority communities also felt that the Prevent Strategy representing government policy was being solely directed at their religion.

In developing the Prevent Strategy, aspects of counter-terrorism policy at a local community level positioned the government and the police service in uncharted territory. Never before had national central government counter-terrorism policy been directly linked to local community issues in this way. Allegations of spying on communities and criminalising entire communities as being either terrorists, potential terrorists, or potential future terrorists, due to their faith and ideology, were levelled at government and the police. Yet despite strong views opposing the government's preventative approach, the challenge of protecting the young and vulnerable in society from recruitment and radicalisation of violent extremists had to be tackled.

For the police service, community engagement is quite properly an important part of the Prevent Strategy which serves as a response to the wider challenge of tackling contemporary terrorism and violent extremism. But inevitably there will continue to be times when police intelligence-based activity, targeted at specific terrorist suspects within communities, will rub up uncomfortably against Prevent Strategy initiatives to engage with the community more broadly. This is likely to be a recurring theme in counter-terrorist work in the UK in the years ahead.

5. Lessons to be learned - Problems with Prevent

The police service and its partners will need to continue to invest effort in explaining their actions to ensure that they retain public confidence. But it cannot and must not be allowed to deflect the police service and its partners from continuing the intelligence work which is necessary and proportionate to match the terrorist threat. As the Prevent Strategy has matured, it has increasingly recognized the many forms of violent extremism to be addressed in Britain today, and not just those linked to the original aim of the CONTEST Strategy in tackling the Al-Qaeda genre of international terrorism. Ensuring that strategies for intervention were targeted towards those most vulnerable in UK society was pivotal to the long term success of preventing violent extremism in all of its forms. The key challenges in leading the Prevent Strategy for the police service have been winning and sustaining support from local authorities and other partners. Prevent Strategy challenges have included facing the accusations of unfair targeting of, or worse, spying upon Muslim communities.

The Prevent Strategy is also not wholly accepted by universities or students; despite the strategies aim to support those who are vulnerable from becoming terrorists. The UK's National Union of Students finds the language and approach of the Prevent Strategy problematic, whilst academics are concerned at the potential erosion of freedom of speech. It is important that the police should not expect students or staff to readily accept the Prevent Strategy and its approach. In fact, if police who engaged with colleges and universities embrace challenge and debate whilst being aware of the sensitivities that students and academics might possess, the Prevent Strategy has a much greater chance of success. Many political and academic commentators continue to argue that the Prevent Strategy is flawed, confusing the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism. Moreover, commentators arguing against the Prevent Strategy suggest that it is failing to confront the extremist ideology at the heart of the threat the UK faces. Yet, despite these accusations, the Prevent Strategy has endured, being independently reviewed and updated at regular intervals by successive UK governments.

6. From threat to threat - The future of Prevent policy

While the UK has rightly made strides towards an increasingly open and public facing domestic security apparatus, the very nature of counter-terrorism remains enshrined in a preventative ethos. To prevent terrorism and to render visible what others do not want us to know, counter-terrorism must be intelligence-led and so necessitates a covert approach. That being said, not all counter-measures need to be cloaked in secrecy for them to be effective, and the contemporary phase of counter-terrorism has evolved important new trends alongside palpable moves towards expansion and localism. Countering terrorism today is a collaborative approach. No one single government agency or department can protect its nation from the diverse range of terrorist threats endured at home and overseas. To ensure a holistic response, all in authority must now bring their expertise to bear in concert with one another in the nation's interest, which includes intelligence agencies, police, schools, parents, and wider society, to prevent the development of extremist views that may lead to violence and acts of terror. Preventing terrorism and violent extremism remains the most challenging aspect of countering terrorism in all of its forms. Methods to prevent terrorism have proved controversial and are not without their imperfections. The UK's Prevent Strategy has been continuously developed and updated from its original iteration devised in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. Despite this sustained effort of prevention terrorist groups have radicalised and recruited young people, to their causes, a problem that continues to persist.

The learning from implementing the Prevent Strategy in Britain over the last two decades is that all preventative measures, whether programmes for schools, colleges, universities, probation services, prisons, or for the wider general public, requires a shared, sensitive, delicate and morally justified response, and one that is underpinned through continuous monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the response remains appropriate and proportionate to tackle complex terror threats to both neighbourhood safety and national security. Recognising that the potential radicalisation of young people of school age in modern society is a safeguarding issue to be addressed is the first and most important step all in authority must take to counter this persistence menace it cannot and must not be ignored and all schools, colleges and universities are encouraged to protect the children and young adults in their care from adopting extremism and violent ideologies that may lead to terrorism.

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