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Prevent and the Children's Rights Convention

Introduction

The Institute of Race Relations is an educational charity which researches and analyses the varying forms of institutional racism in Britain, Europe and world-wide, in order to inform the struggle for racial justice. It seeks to reflect the experiences of those who suffer racial oppression. As such, a long-standing concern has been the way counter-terrorism policies have targeted Muslims, creating 'suspect communities' and fuelling Islamophobia. In 2009 the IRR was one of the first organisations to critique the then non-statutory Prevent programme, in our publication [Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism](#). We pointed to the divisive and discriminatory nature of Prevent, which constructed Muslim youth as a 'problem'; the impact on youth and social workers of pressures placed upon them to monitor religious and political opinions; and the erosion of rights to privacy, to freedom of expression and association and of professional confidentiality. Since then, many others, particularly in the fields of education and social work, have added their voices, concerned that Prevent is ineffective, counter-productive and positively harmful.

In 2011 the Prevent programme shifted from funding local initiatives to imposing a centralised agenda. In 2015, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, rushed through parliament at a speed which left little time for thought or debate, imposed it as a duty (see below). During the passage of the Bill and since, many of the objections centred on the effect on universities, as places of free debate and expression. We do not address that issue here: what we are concerned with is the impact on children's rights of the Prevent duty in schools. In that field, there are already indications that Prevent is ill-thought out and that children's rights have not been adequately considered.

What follows is a summary of the main concerns that have emerged to date, against the backdrop of some of the most widely reported cases. As far as we are aware, all the cases mentioned in the report, save one involving an anti-Israel protest, are of Muslim children.

1. What is Prevent?

Prevent is a programme developed during the first decade of the century as part of the UK's response to terrorism, designed to prevent children and young people from being drawn in to terrorism. In the wake of revelations that a number of British schoolchildren and families had left Britain to join Islamist terrorists in Syria, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015

(CTS) s26 for the first time imposed on specified authorities including local authorities, schools, nurseries and social services departments a duty to have due regard in the exercise of their functions to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. These bodies must refer those they believe to be vulnerable to the police, who decide whether to refer them to a panel ('Channel', on which representatives of the local authority, police and other bodies sit) to prepare support 'packages' to reduce their vulnerability.

The criteria for referral are extremely broad and vague. A 'vulnerability assessment framework' for use by Channel panels set out three criteria – engagement with a group, cause or ideology; intent to cause harm; and capability to cause harm – by reference to 22 indicators. The first 13 are indicators of 'engagement':

- Feelings of grievance and injustice
- Feeling under threat
- A need for identity, meaning and belonging
- A desire for status
- A desire for excitement and adventure
- A need to dominate and control others
- Susceptibility to indoctrination
- A desire for political or moral change
- Opportunistic involvement
- Family or friends involvement in extremism
- Being at a transitional time of life
- Being influenced or controlled by a group
- Relevant mental health issues

The next six are indicators of 'intent to cause harm':

- Over-identification with a group or ideology
- Them and Us' thinking
- Dehumanisation of the enemy
- Attitudes that justify offending
- Harmful means to an end
- Harmful objectives

The final three are indicators of capability to cause harm:

- Individual knowledge, skills and competencies
- Access to networks, funding or equipment
- Criminal Capability

There is no duty to inform or obtain the consent of parents or carers for referral, and although support may be refused, refusal may be taken as an indicator that the parent/carer poses a risk to the child justifying the child's removal. Other bodies such as local health or education providers have a duty to cooperate with and supply information to the police officer who coordinates the panel (subject to data protection concerns).

Around 900 children were referred to Channel in the three years April 2012-April 2015. In the three months June-August 2015, 312 children were referred (of 796 referrals in total).¹ Channel guidance says if in doubt, designated professionals should refer children 'on a precautionary basis'.

2. The effects on children's rights to freedom of thought, expression and assembly

Art 14 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (COROC) protects children's freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject to limitations prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, public order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Art 13: protects their right to freedom of expression including to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds ... Subject to restrictions provided by law and necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals

Art 15: protects children's right to freedom of association and assembly, subject to the same restrictions

In July 2015, when the new Prevent duty came into force, 280 academics, educationalists and public figures signed an open letter warning that it would stifle open debate, free speech and dissent.² Earlier, in the Lords debate on the CTS Bill, Viscount Hansworth warned that the programme:

'has the potential to give rise to an era comparable to the post-war era of anti-communist persecution in the United States, known as the era of McCarthyism ... People suspected of being involved in terrorist-related activities must be reported to the police. If I understand correctly, terrorist-related activities are deemed to include non-violent extremism, which would make the category very wide and ill-defined. All the activities in fulfilment of the duties must be recorded, and reports of compliance must be made available on request. These provisions are quite sufficient for the creation of a totalitarian police state.'³

He has not been the only one to draw parallels with totalitarian states' treatment of dissent. As Stephanie Petrie, senior lecturer in law and social policy and registered social worker, observes:

'There are enormous dangers in the way child protection legislation in the UK intersects with Channel, with only a few legal steps between the suggested interventions set out in the [Channel guidance](#) and the possibility of a child being removed from their home because their family's political views are unacceptable and don't adhere to "British values". Totalitarian states remove children from "politically unacceptable" parents. To define unacceptable political views and expressions of dissent as child abuse is a dangerous step to take.'⁴

Such fears are understandable in the light of guidance such as that contained in a recent leaflet issued by the London Borough of Camden's Safeguarding Children Board. Parents were warned that 'appearing angry about government policies, especially foreign policies' is a sign 'specific to radicalisation', as may be 'mistrust of mainstream media reports', changing friendship groups or styles of dress, secretive behaviour or switching computer screens when adults approach. Concerned parents were urged to contact police or the area anti-extremism coordinator.⁵

In Waltham Forest, council officials circulated a questionnaire to primary schools for

completion by schoolchildren as young as nine, profiling their religious views to record potentially 'extremist' attitudes. The questionnaire was devised by the Behavioural Insights Team, also known as the 'nudge unit' and part-funded by the Cabinet Office, under the council's BRIT (Building Resilience through Integration and Trust) scheme. At Greenleaf Primary School, Walthamstow, seven children aged between nine and ten were identified by the project as 'vulnerable to radicalisation' and selected for 'targeted intervention'.⁶ The names of the children were subsequently disclosed.

In the Lords' debate on the CTS Bill, Baroness Smith of Basildon reminded peers of the things children say without knowing their meaning:

'A young Muslim friend of mine was absolutely horrified when her nephew came home from school playing with an imaginary gun and saying that he was going to fight in Iraq. He does not know where Iraq is and he had no idea of what he was saying. He did not hear it at home, but somehow he picked it up. What would be the duty of the nursery when he said that? My nephew at the age of four caused great embarrassment to my younger sister when on a train back home one day he asked the German man sitting opposite him: "Are you a Nazi then?". Where did he pick that up? ... Children say things that are inappropriate; that they do not mean or understand. I wonder how that fits in with the Government's Prevent agenda and the duty that they are going to place on nurseries.'⁷

The 'eco-terrorism' case was widely reported:

* A 14-year-old boy at Central Foundation Boys', Islington mentioned 'eco-terrorisme' in a French class where the subject was protecting the environment. Some days later he was taken out of class and questioned by a child protection officer who allegedly asked him if he was 'affiliated with IS'.⁸

Other reported cases include:

* A 15-year-old boy was referred to police under the Prevent programme after he came to school with leaflets promoting a boycott of Israel. The police officer said that the boy's views on sanctions against Israel were 'terrorist-like beliefs'. The boy's form tutor allegedly said he would report him although he was 'uncomfortable' about it. The boy has had run-ins with teachers and with the Prevent officer based in the school to 'deal with this sort of extremism', and the dinner lady reported him to teachers for asking if the dinners were cooked with ingredients from Israel.⁹

* A teenager in Manchester was identified as potentially requiring de-radicalisation after attending a peaceful protest against the Israeli deputy ambassador.¹⁰

Cases from the organisation PREVENT Watch include:

* A 16-year old Portsmouth boy referred to Prevent after taking a book on terrorism out of the school library.¹¹

* An 8-year-old Birmingham boy referred to Channel by his Muslim primary school after a homework piece referred to guns and violence, which his father says was inspired by his reading of Marvel comics. Social services and a council member visited the house following the parents' refusal of intervention, and his parents were allegedly pressured to agree to his undertaking the programme.¹²

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), in its submission to the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, David Anderson QC,¹³ gave examples of young children being referred to Prevent for using common religious words, or for referring to Muslim concepts:

* A two year old child in East London who has a diagnosed learning disability, sang an Islamic song and said 'Allahu Akbar' spontaneously – he was allegedly referred to social services for 'concerning behaviour'.

* Parents in Stoke-on-Trent were brought in because their children were using inappropriate language, such as 'Alhamdulillah', which is a religious term, meaning 'Praise be to God'.

* A parent told the MCB how a young child was asked to do a presentation on Syria, showing both sides of the conflict, to find out the parents' views.

* A young child in south London was allegedly referred to social services for signs of radicalisation after he was specifically asked to write a piece on British foreign policy and he mentioned the history of the Caliphate.

Teachers have expressed the fear that Prevent will inhibit free speech in the classroom. 'One teacher, who did not want to be identified, told me that her Muslim pupils had become more careful about what they talk about for fear of being referred through Prevent.'¹⁴ NUT general secretary Kevin Courtney described how London Muslim schoolgirls were 'reluctant to discuss Charlie Hebdo' in January, as their mothers feared referral to the panel.¹⁵

Human Rights Watch has expressed concern for children's rights to freedom of political or religious expression:

'Educators are worried ... a range of educators, administrators, and community groups spoke about the effects thus far of the policy; students referred to authorities for practicing their faith, parents warning their children not to express political or religious beliefs at school.'¹⁶

3. Effects on the right to education

Art 29 of the UN Children's Rights Convention protects the right to education. Education should be directed to:

- (a) development of the child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to the fullest potential;
- (b) development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (c) development of respect for parents, cultural identity, language, values, the national values of the host country and the country of origin and other civilisations;
- (d) preparation for a responsible life in a free society in a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes and friendship among all peoples.

Teachers and educationalists are worried about the Prevent duty in the context of the importance of education in fostering critical intelligence. The obligation of teachers to report children to an outside body dominated by police, for behaviours and expressions indicative of

nothing more than 'normal' growth – including passionate anger about injustice, desire for political or moral change – directly undermines children's right to an education which encourages intellectual, emotional and critical growth. Retired teacher Jane Shallice points out:

'[C]hildren must have the space to be wrong, to rethink and to develop new ideas ... We would expect adolescents to be changing their attitudes towards Britain and its values, their religious practice, dress, activities at this stage in their lives. As teachers we understand and aim for the development of questioning and critical thinking. [Otherwise] we are merely producing unthinking automata ... [P]eople learn to think critically when they can test out their ideas in discussion, maybe feeling that they are transgressing, but within contexts which assure them that their ideas will not be considered as fully formed and could or will change. ... this will only take place if the ideas can be formulated without fear that this will lead to being placed under suspicion and labeled as a proto-terrorist or extremist.'¹⁷

Another analysis considers the aims of education in the centuries-old radical tradition, and considers how Prevent policies 'constitute a direct attack on the core elements' of that tradition:

'[I]nstead of working with students to train their critical and analytical lens on the states and societies that shape their lives – to foster the "healthy doubt" which is the "best safeguard against dogmatism and the acceptance of authoritarianism" – [it] asks educators to work hand in glove with the state security apparatus to train their analytical lens on students themselves ... [C]ommitments to oppose and pathologise any individual who favours "fundamental changes in political or social conditions" demonstrate the reorientation of the goals of education away from any notion of education playing a central role in [creating] a more inclusive, just and egalitarian society ... Anti-radicalisation is suspicious of any non-officially sanctioned forms of talk designed to influence or transform the thinking of another individual.'¹⁸

4. Effect on children's welfare

Art 3: the principle of the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all administrative acts.

Educationalists have also expressed the fear that the pastoral relationship between children and their teachers will be damaged by the imposition of the duty to report suspicions, with serious consequences for the children's welfare. In the parliamentary debate referred to above, Baroness Sharp referred to concerns expressed by the Association of School and College Leaders:

'The proposed powers to the Home Secretary, particularly with no parliamentary oversight, could have serious negative consequences for the curriculum and/or pastoral functions of schools and colleges. The implied duty to report children and young people "at risk" to the police for referral to the Local Panels is problematic because schools and colleges may be unwilling to sacrifice relationships and trust on the basis of suspicion or may go to the other extreme and try to cover themselves by reporting every risk.'¹⁹

The fact that teachers and social workers can be criminalised for failure to refer children sets up a potential conflict between the welfare of the children for whom they are responsible and fears for their own career. But as Tony Stanley observes:

'By using local authority data, statistical, actuarial and criminogenic data (via algorithms), risk factors are woven together to establish predictions, that point out, or indicate, who is likely to ... become a terrorist. It suggests risk in rather linear terms using a causal logic that we can mathematically locate and resolve it. This is impossible. It represents an Orwellian development for social work and we need to take it on ... If social workers are seen as 'soft police' help may be experienced as control or monitoring. This work is professionally dominated, driven via a narrow securitising lens and is seriously blurring the line between liberty and security for us and our service users.'²⁰

Childcare providers too are 'confused about what is expected of them' according to Beatrice Merrick, chief executive of British Association for Early Childhood Education. She said failure to promote 'British values' could lead to being struck off the childcare register or denied funding.²¹

'Pathologising' children for expressions and attitudes which are a sign of healthy, normal growth affects not just their right to education but also their growth and development as people. The package of 'interventions' which might be proposed by a Channel panel include 'anger management' – more appropriate for those convicted of crimes of violence – and 'cognitive/ behavioural therapies'. It may be asked: what are they designed to cure? The fear is that all the qualities in young people which should be encouraged - curiosity, idealism, anger at injustice, a desire to change the world - will be stifled or killed in the name of security.

The Prevent guidance documentation nowhere considers the effect on a child's welfare of a referral to a Channel panel, which labels him or her as vulnerable to being drawn in to terrorism. This is extremely important, because of the sense of stigma and shame felt by pupils and parents at being singled out in this way. And the vagueness of the criteria for referral mean that in four-fifths of cases, the panel subsequently declines the referral²² – but the stigma is not so easily removed.

In the Lords parliamentary debate during the passage of the CTS Act, Viscount Hanworth referred to the baleful effects of the Prevent strategy on young Muslims:

'... the alienation and radicalisation of young British Muslims has been related to a rising tide of Islamophobia. ... there are clear indications that the existing Prevent strategy ... has added to the sense of alienation ... the strategy has already become counterproductive. By placing the strategy on a statutory basis and by mandating acts of surveillance on the part of various public institutions, the damage that has already been done is in danger of being exacerbated.'²³

A parent's fears for her children were graphically set out in a *Guardian* article:

'Will you be looked at with suspicion? Will you be accused of having "the wrong thoughts" by a staff member who is simply ignorant? ... At what age will you first be insulted for your

background and how will I explain it? ... I am ... scared that you will grow up with the same self-loathing and depression that is spreading among Muslims as a result of the continual trickle of negative news regarding people of the same faith. I really hope you can stay positive and avoid depression.'²⁴

Murtaza Hussain reported in November 2015 that:

'A similar program to Prevent, which the FBI was due to launch in the US in early November 2015, has been paused in the light of concerns that it will increase bullying of Muslim children while doing nothing to counter radicalisation. The program, described in a recent *New York Times* [report](#) as "a series of games and tips intended to teach how to identify someone who may be falling prey to radical extremists," has been criticised as discriminating on the basis of race and religion and focused on Islamic extremism while ignoring the [far more prevalent forms of violence facing young people](#) in American schools ... "Programs designed to identify potentially radicalized children in schools would almost certainly increase bullying," says Naureen Shah, a director at Amnesty International. They "create a line between Muslim and Arab students and their peers, marking out for such kids that in order to be safe they have to be apolitical, and that they should expect to have less of a right to freedom of speech and expression than others." A better approach is to deal with terrorism as part of online safety classes which deal with cyber-bullying, sexting etc.'²⁵

5. Discriminatory application of Prevent: targeting Muslim children

Art 2 of COROC protects respect for the rights set out in the Convention without discrimination on the basis of child's or parent's race, religion or political opinion ... It also protects against discrimination or punishment on the basis of (eg) the expressed opinions or beliefs of a parent or family member.

Art 8 protects respect for the right of the child to preserve his or her identity.

Art 30 recognises that ethnic and religious minority children have the right, with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture and to profess and practice their own religion ...

As the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, David Anderson QC, pointed out in his review of 2014,²⁶ in that year the only terrorist attacks in the UK were 109 shooting and bombing incidents in Northern Ireland, perpetrated by Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries. But according to the government, the greatest current risk is from Islamist terrorism. So although Prevent is supposed to apply to all kinds of extremism, the government's focus is clearly on Muslim children – and this is the overwhelming experience of educationists, community and religious leaders and parents, all those connected with or affected by Prevent.

Official statistics do not break down referrals into 'Islamist', 'far-Right' etc, but where religious affiliation data was collected, from 2007-10, 67 per cent of those referred were Muslim and in 2012-13, 57 per cent of referrals were of Muslim children (their percentage in the population being 5 per cent).²⁷ The statutory guidance says that a child's religious expression *on its own* should not lead to referral - but if it forms part of the reason for a referral, this probably

constitutes direct religious and/ or race discrimination, which is unlawful in domestic as well as international law.

The context for Prevent is the increase in racist violence and 'extremely negative stereotypes of ... Muslims' noted by the UN Human Rights Committee in August 2015.²⁸ Islamophobia and far-Right extremism have become more mainstream, with nearly one-third of young children believing Muslims are taking over England and over a quarter believing that Islam encourages terrorism.²⁹ A survey of Muslims by the Islamic Human Rights Commission found that in 2014, 58 per cent had experienced suspicion and hostility, and 66 per cent verbal abuse, while 17.8 per cent had experienced physical violence. The intensity as well as the frequency of violence had increased.³⁰

Racism towards Muslims can be found in schools too – and not just among the pupils. Following the Paris attacks in November 2015, in one school a head teacher found an older teacher sharing Britain First posts on Facebook, while admin staff were heard saying 'They should let them all sink and die, even the kids', 'Send them back to their own country', 'Shoot to kill' and more. There was a heated argument in the staffroom about whether Islam was fundamentally a violent religion.³¹ The head in question was alert and concerned enough to deal with this anti-Muslim prejudice, but not all heads would be. Since the Paris attacks, the public expression of anti-Muslim sentiments seems to have become more acceptable.

In one all-white school in rural Norfolk, in the analogous context of 'personal social health education', teachers were told to show Year 9 children videos of 'Jihadi John' boasting of beheadings carried out by ISIS, and victims being prepared for beheading.³² In a school with no Muslim teachers or authority figures, these are likely to be the only images of Muslims the children see at school. As such it is almost inevitable that they create or entrench ideas of Muslims as barbaric and bloodthirsty, fuelling racist attitudes.

In more mixed areas, the subjective nature of the criteria for referral makes it easy for prejudice, often unconscious, to guide decisions. Imams in Newham (with one-third Muslims, the second-highest proportion in the UK) warn that Prevent schemes are 'exclusively targeting young Muslims for the views they hold on religion or issues such as government foreign policy'.³³

Similar concerns have been expressed in Bradford, where the leader of the Bradford Council for Mosques, Ishtiaq Ahmed, said: 'In our experience of working in Bradford, with 90-plus mosques and supplementary schools, I am not aware of any which in any way, directly or indirectly, promotes and motivates people towards radicalisation. It is important that the Government takes forward its Prevent strategy in a manner that does not isolate, target, or blame any specific community, including the Muslim community.' Superintendent Vince Firth, West Yorkshire Police, accepted there was anger over the Prevent strategy but said he could not let it get in the way of what he was trying to do, safeguard children.³⁴

In March 2015, three Barnsley schools (in an area where the English Defence League and the BNP have a great deal of support) were reported to be monitoring [only BME](#) pupils as 'white kids aren't at risk'. Perhaps they took their lead from the local council, which in its later (autumn 2015) discussion of the duty refers only to Islamist terrorism, jihad and the threat from ISIL.³⁵

Software has now been designed to 'spot signs of radicalisation', marketed by commercial company Impero and developed with anti-extremism consultancy the Quilliam Foundation.³⁶ But using algorithms does not guarantee non-discrimination, if the programming selects on the basis of religious or racial profiling. According to the marketing blurb, 'one of the recognised factors for making someone vulnerable to radicalisation or potentially vulnerable to radicalisation is a crisis of identity which may be triggered by things such as racism or discrimination.' So the software is programmed to treat anger at injustice not only as illegitimate but as a sign of potential extremism.³⁷

The Muslim Council of Britain collected a number of examples of discriminatory treatment of Muslim pupils, and penalisation of their religion, and presented them to the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation.³⁸ Some of these cases are set out above, in the section on freedom of expression. Additionally, teachers had told the MCB that, matters as disparate as anti-Semitism and an interest in nuclear fission were treated differently in Muslim and non-Muslim children. The earlier example of the Muslim boy being asked about ISIL when he mentioned 'eco-terrorism' in a French lesson is also suggestive of differential treatment.

Other reported cases:

* A 10-year-old pupil at Parkfield Community School, Birmingham, was referred to Prevent when he complained at the lack of a prayer room on a residential trip, and told Muslim girls to cover their faces with a headscarf. He had not raised these issues at school. The head said he also made comments about the Charlie Hebdo attack, and that the school had conducted a discussion with the boy's parents, who 'understood our concerns'. The primary school has referred three pupils in the past year.³⁹

* A London schoolboy who was frequently late for registration and used the excuse of morning prayers (he did not want to reveal that he was being bullied, the real reason for his lateness) was referred to social services when, asked to bring meat in for a cookery class, he said the government had banned halal meat and questioned further, added that it hated Muslims.⁴⁰

* A 14-year-old London boy, AU, a devout Muslim, stopped participating in music lessons because he felt it was incompatible with his religion. It was informally raised with his father when he dropped him off, then when AU continued his non-participation he was taken out of class to meet someone who turned out to be a Prevent officer. This was without warning or consent. A meeting at the school requested by his sister revealed no other grounds for intervention and no information, but the family were told that he would have to continue to see the officer unless he resumed participation in music lessons.⁴¹

These are cases where teachers have seen expressions of religious piety, or anger at perceived discrimination, as indications of a 'pre-terrorist' mindset warranting intervention.

6. Non-recognition of parental and community rights and responsibilities

Art 5: protects respect for responsibilities, rights and duties of parents, extended family and community ... to provide ... appropriate direction and guidance.

Art 18: recognises that parents have the primary responsibility for children's upbringing and development. States parties shall render appropriate assistance and ensure development of institutions, facilities and services for care of children.

There is no requirement in Prevent to work with parents/carers, or even to obtain their consent for a referral of a child to the Channel panel. The parents of the seven primary schoolchildren at Greenleaf Primary School, referred on the basis of the questionnaire on religious beliefs (reported in section 2 above), were not informed, and parents concerned about the BRIT project were told that it was 'not about Prevent' or extremism.⁴²

Although the Channel packages offered to referred children are not compulsory, the fear is that, in the climate of fear and suspicion engendered by the programme, parental refusal could easily be interpreted as an indicator of risk to the child, warranting further intervention and potential removal of children. In the case of the 8-year-old referred because of his apparent fascination with guns and violence (cited by PREVENT Watch), the boy's parents were put under pressure to agree to his undertaking the programme.⁴³

There have also been complaints that local communities were not consulted before Prevent schemes were put in place. Imams in Newham, for example, complain that they were not consulted before an intensive and intrusive programme was established in the borough.⁴⁴ And as Tony Stanley observes, 'community- and family-based alternative approaches are unexplored'.

The centralised nature of the Prevent strategy means that:

'stakeholders with clear links to communities, such as elected council officials ... and local community safety partnerships are passive recipients of the Prevent strategy ... unable to provide their insight and understanding of extremism and political violence at the local level. The calculation of 'risk' ... is not based on dynamics within communities or reports from citizens or even local officials. Instead, in the current Prevent environment, deviance from the Prevent strategy's highly prescriptive definition of 'British values' is a form of extremism. Instead of frontline staff, including teachers, professors, and health professions being involved in identifying genuine threats in their communities, they are the recipients of a prescriptive, centralised system by which 'risky' and 'vulnerable' people are identified.'

7. The language of safeguarding – but it feels like policing

Art 17: recognises the role of the mass media, protects access to information and material from diverse national and international sources. It requires State parties to (e) encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of children from information and material injurious to their wellbeing.

Art 19: requires protection of children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse including:

(2) effective processes for establishing social programmes to provide necessary support for children and carers and prevention, identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of children's maltreatment.

It is of course vital to protect children from the threats to which they might be exposed, including the lure of terrorism, and this is a central function of education. But the issue is how to do this. What is the most effective way of safeguarding children from what senior police liken to 'grooming'? Will schools' monitoring of children's internet use, proposed by education minister Nicky Morgan at the end of 2015,⁴⁵ safeguard children, when the same material can easily be accessed at home or on mobile phones, or will children end up alienated from their teachers, the very adults that they should trust? Many educationalists and social workers do not believe that monitoring children of a particular religious faith, reporting them to a police-dominated panel as people in a 'pre-crime space', let alone on the basis of exhibiting normal childish or teenage behaviour, is an effective way of safeguarding them: it is more likely to upset and alienate them, in addition to stigmatising them and fuelling Islamophobia in society. In addition, it risks inhibiting real discussion in the classroom, depriving children of the tools of critical judgment and analysis which are the real safeguards against any poisonous ideology.

Educationalist Bill Bollothen observes that there is 'simply no empirical evidence at all to support the idea that terrorism can be correlated with factors to do with family, identity and emotional wellbeing':

'Beneath the jargon on 'risks', 'vulnerabilities', 'engagement factors' and 'psychological hooks', is an invitation to limitless racial and religious profiling in which normal teenage behaviours, or a young person's beliefs, can be seen as indicators of being on the pathway to violent extremism. In fact, again, studies show that there is no direct link at all between religious observance, radical ideas, emotional wellbeing and violent acts.'⁴⁶

If Prevent is encouraging teachers to refer on the basis of 'symptoms' which have no bearing on risks of violence, what it offers those so selected is equally ill-thought out. As Stephanie Petrie notes, 'Channel guidance conflates the abuse of children and young people with prevention of terrorism initiatives in gravely misleading ways.'⁴⁷ Channel support packages are, she believes, a:

'rag-bag of quasi-therapeutic interventions that have little coherence or any indication of how standards of professional expertise will be ensured ... careers and health advice should be made available to all young people as standard anyway; many of the others, such as cognitive and behavioural therapies, have the potential to cause enormous damage if their provision is not properly regulated and supervised. Merely describing interventions into the lives of young and vulnerable people as "support" and "protection" doesn't automatically make them so.'⁴⁸

The preferred solution is to provide anti-extremism education for all children, rather than focussing on a small group of 'at risk' pupils, definable by their religion, with all the potential for discrimination and stigmatisation of Muslim pupils that this entails. Thus Peter Tatchell:⁴⁹ 'instead of being focused upon people with 'extremist' views tipping over into terrorist acts, we need a program of citizenship and human rights in all our schools and colleges to help inoculate young people against ideas based upon intolerance and violent change'. London Assembly member Jenny Jones argues that:

'we should broaden this to provide a robust case for democratic values. If we dump Prevent

and all its ideological baggage, then extending a teacher's duty of care to cover children in danger of being sucked into a culture of political violence, is both less toxic and more effective ... give [teachers] reassurances that any student referrals won't end up on an MI5 database and they will deal with it the same way they deal with child abuse, domestic violence, racism, severe bullying and the long list of other issues which are a regular part of their professional lives.⁵⁰

Her concerns are echoed by many in teaching,⁵¹ and the network 'Education not Surveillance' set up by educationalists, is founded on a statement of principles about what education should be providing to children to protect them from recruitment into terrorism.

Conclusion

It is early days to provide a full assessment of the effects of making Prevent compulsory. But in the cases and observations we have noted, all the indications are that the strategy is undermining professional standards, educational independence, children's rights to freedom of thought, expression and association and principles of non-discrimination, and is alienating Muslim young people and communities. This is not surprising: the foundation on which the statutory duty was built was a programme which has never been independently evaluated and has caused profound disquiet in the Muslim community in particular, in the period of its operation. Its hasty and ill-considered imposition has created a further wellspring of concern and opposition from professionals in the fields of education and social work, who are beginning to see the difficulties and dangers it poses for their pastoral and educational work and for the welfare and development of the children in their charge.

With these observations in mind, the government should be encouraged to conduct a major review of the Prevent policy and its effects. It is of vital importance that, in attempting to fight terrorism and safeguarding children from becoming caught up in it, the government does not employ methods which alienate the children they seek to protect, their parents or carers, and their communities. Prevent is not the way to win 'hearts and minds' in the fight against terrorism. It is elementary that what is needed first and foremost in such battles is community support and community cohesion, which the government needs to reinforce, not undermine.

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¹ [Guardian](#), 8 October 2015.

² [Independent](#), 10 July 2015

³ *Hansard* HL, 28 January 2015, cols. 286-7.

⁴ Stephanie Petrie, 'How anti-terror guidance could violate children's human rights', [The Conversation](#), 22 July 2015.

⁵ [Independent](#), 1 December 2015.

⁶ [Waltham Forest Guardian](#), 1 June 2015; [Claystone](#), *Building Distrust: Ethnic profiling in primary schools*, 22 September 2015.

⁷ *Hansard* HL 28 January 2015, cols. 271-2.

⁸ [Islington Gazette](#), 1 October 2015. The boy's mother took a judicial review, which was rejected.

- ⁹ [Al Jazeera](#), 23 July 2015; 'Why is the Scottish government not standing up to Westminster's toxic anti-radicalisation laws?' [Sunday Herald](#), 9 August 2015.
- ¹⁰ Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims are coming!*; quoted in *A decade lost: rethinking radicalisation and extremism*, [Claystone](#), January 2015.
- ¹¹ [PREVENTwatch](#): school library book (February 2015).
- ¹² [PREVENTwatch](#): reflective homework piece (March 2015).
- ¹³ Anderson, [The Terrorism Acts in 2014](#), September 2015, Annex 2.
- ¹⁴ Homa Khaleeli, 'You worry they could take your kids: is the Prevent strategy demonising Muslim schoolchildren?' [Guardian](#), 23 September 2015.
- ¹⁵ Owen Jones, 'Government policy will seal the mouths of Muslim pupils', [Guardian](#), 1 July 2015.
- ¹⁶ Rebecca Riddell, 'Counter-extremism measures may restrict speech in the classroom', [Human Rights Watch](#), 23 October 2015.
- ¹⁷ Jane Shallice, 'Who guards the guardians?' *Education for Liberation*, 11 Autumn 2015.
- ¹⁸ Sukarieh and Tannock, 'The deradicalisation of education', [Race & Class](#) (2015).
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, col. 292.
- ²⁰ [Community Care](#), 25 August 2015.
- ²¹ Simon Hooper, 'Toddlers targeted by UK 1984-style anti-terror laws', [Al Jazeera](#), 20 September 2015.
- ²² Yahya Birt, 'Channel referrals are shrouded in too much secrecy', 17 July 2015, referring to an ACPO analysis of referrals under the voluntary scheme between 2006-2013. The pressure on teachers and social workers to comply with the Prevent duty means we are likely to see far more wrong and unfounded referrals.
- ²³ *Hansard* HL 28 January 2015, cols 286-7.
- ²⁴ 'A letter to my sons, who are growing up in a Muslim family', [Guardian](#), 4 July 2015.
- ²⁵ Murtaza Hussain, [The Intercept](#), 9 November 2015.
- ²⁶ Anderson, [The Terrorism Acts in 2014](#), September 2015.
- ²⁷ Yahya Birt, '[Safeguarding little Abdul](#): Prevent, Muslim schoolchildren and the lack of parental consent', 4 June 2015.
- ²⁸ UNHRC 7th report, August 2015 (para 10).
- ²⁹ Survey by *Show Racism the Red Card* (Racism and anti-immigration views held by children revealed in schools study', [Guardian](#), 19 May 2015.
- ³⁰ *Environment of hate: the new normal for Muslims in the UK*, [IHRC](#), November 2015.
- ³¹ 'My teachers' reaction to the Paris attacks shocked me', [Guardian](#), 24 November 2015.
- ³² Personal communication from teacher.
- ³³ [Guardian](#), 6 December 2015.
- ³⁴ 'Bradford citizens must stand together against extremism, conference told', [Telegraph & Argus](#), 1 August 2015.
- ³⁵ Barnsley MBC, school governing body [agenda item](#), autumn 2015.

- ³⁶ In 2010, Quilliam made a list for HO counter-extremism head Charles Farr of groups and individuals they considered 'shared terrorist ideology'. The list included moderate Muslim groups such as the Muslim Council of Britain, the Islamic Human Rights Commission, the Islam Channel, the Muslim Safety Forum, the Muslim Association of Britain, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies, the Cordoba Foundation, the Muslim Welfare House and Scotland Yard's Muslim Contact Unit, and politicians including Salma Yaqoob 'Islamist-backed'. Its list was condemned as 'straight out of a Stasi manual' by Muslim groups. [Guardian](#), 4 August 2010.
- ³⁷ 'When counter-extremism policies target Muslim children, the fall-out hurts us all', [Media Diversified](#), 15 June 2015.
- ³⁸ Anderson, [The Terrorism Acts in 2014](#), September 2015, Annex 2.
- ³⁹ [Telegraph](#), 12 October 2015.
- ⁴⁰ [PREVENTwatch](#): social services (nd).
- ⁴¹ [PREVENTwatch](#): the music lesson (March 2015).
- ⁴² [Claystone](#), *Building Distrust: Ethnic profiling in primary schools*, 22 September 2015.
- ⁴³ See note 12 above.
- ⁴⁴ [Guardian](#), 6 December 2015.
- ⁴⁵ [Guardian](#), 22 December 2015.
- ⁴⁶ 'Education not surveillance', [IRR News](#), 22 October 2015.
- ⁴⁷ Stephanie Petrie, note 4 above.
- ⁴⁸ Stephanie Petrie, 'The Channel programme: helping young people or nudging them towards radicalisation?' [The Conversation](#), 9 October 2015.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted by Jenny Jones, see below.
- ⁵⁰ Jenny Jones, 'Why it's time to get rid of Prevent', [Left Foot Forward](#), 20 October 2015.
- ⁵¹ See eg 'Rules to fight extremism "creating fear among teachers and pupils"', [Guardian](#), 12 January 2016.