



PREVENT:

Dividing communities and threatening civil liberties

What is Prevent?

In July 2015, the 'Prevent duty' became statutory under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act.

The act specifies that our universities, colleges, schools, NHS trusts, local authorities, child-minders, probation services and other public bodies must have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".

What is the Channel Programme?

The Channel Programme is part of the Prevent strategy. It is the mechanism by which individuals, deemed 'vulnerable to extremism', are identified and referred.

Participation in 'Channel' is presented as being 'voluntary'. However, there is no transparency behind these referrals or how records on individuals are held. Families are not given the option to seek legal advice.

Channel is presented as consisting of professionals from different services but it is co-ordinated at area level by a Channel Police Practitioner or other designated police official.

Why do so many people oppose Prevent?

Prevent has been widely discredited. It is based on the idea of a 'conveyor belt' that leads individuals who hold certain political or religious beliefs or views to commit acts of terrorism. Teachers and other professionals are given training sessions (usually just an hour or so) on how to identify "non-violent extremism". However, it is impossible to agree a definition of what this is.

Individuals who have not committed



Photo: Josh Koonce @ Flickr

Baroness Ruth Lister and Karen Armstrong OBE, in a joint statement signed by 280 academics observed: "Prevent will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent." They concluded that by suppressing discussion "Prevent will make us less safe."

any criminal offence, even children as young as four, are cast under suspicion.

Proponents of Prevent claim to support free discussion. However support for Palestine, or identifying innocent victims of war in the Middle East are seen as signs of "grievance justification", and indicators of "non-violent extremism".

Far from "safeguarding" our young people, Prevent can increase the risks.

Who has opposed or criticised Prevent?

Opposition to Prevent is extremely wide and includes:

The **National Union of Teachers**, (NUT) which voted unanimously in favour of the withdrawal of the Prevent duty from schools at their national conference in March 2016.

The **National Union of Students** and the **University and College Union** of lecturers oppose Prevent.

Liberty, the respected civil liberties organisation believes "Prevent is misconceived in its core remit and... worryingly clandestine in its operation."

Statements calling for the Prevent duty to be withdrawn have been signed by over a thousand university professors, leading lawyers, civil rights and anti-racist organisations.

The Muslim Council of Britain and many Muslim organisations believe Prevent has failed and have called for it to be withdrawn.

In Newham, a statement with diverse signatories including 18 local Imams, protested at Prevent's "deeply divisive impact".

Dal Babu, a former chief superintendent with the Metropolitan police called Prevent "a toxic brand".

David Anderson QC, the government's own Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, has called for an independent review of the Prevent strategy, citing the widespread "mistrust and fear in Muslim communities".

Despite wide and diverse opposition, critics of Prevent have been accused of giving cover to extremism and terrorism, in terms that are often Islamophobic and racist.

Prevent undermines democracy and free speech

The NUT reports that Prevent has led to pupils being afraid to discuss sensitive political issues in the classroom.

Parents have warned children not to discuss political or religious views in school.

There is evidence to show that Prevent has been used to intimidate young people with strong opinions on controversial issues. Others have fallen under suspicion

just because they are Muslim.

Schoolboy Rahmaan Mohammadi was referred to anti-terror police under Prevent for wearing a Free Palestine badge. Another 14 year-old was questioned for referring to “eco-terrorism” in a discussion on climate change. His mother insists that this would never have happened to a non-Muslim.

A post-graduate student at Staffordshire University studying a course on terrorism was interrogated because he took out a book from the library on the subject.

A family of a four year old were questioned because their child misspelt “cucumber” and staff somehow read it as referring to a bomb.

These examples are the inevitable result of targeting a community as suspect. Lawyers and campaign groups report that this is just the tip of an iceberg as very few of those targeted feel confident to go to public.

Prevent targets Muslims as a suspect community

The underlying assumption of Prevent is that Muslims form a suspect community.

Teachers and other professionals are expected to be able to differentiate “good Muslims” from “bad Muslims”. Prevent funding is targeted at Muslim areas and referrals to the Channel programme are disproportionately Muslim.

Prevent training is highly biased and based on Prevent’s own narrative. There is no attempt at objectivity or any reference to expert opinion. Many staff feel under pressure to report on individuals “just in case”.

Referrals to Channel have escalated. The number for the first six months of 2015 was double that for the previous year.

The BBC found that 1,839 children under the age of 15 had been referred over four years, 400 under 10 years old.

In Waltham Forest, parents protested after a school survey that racially profiled Muslim primary school children between nine and 11.

Staff are told that all kinds of behaviour and conditions may indicate vulnerability to extremism.

These include teenage changes in behaviour, such as the way they dress or whether they start or stop studying!

People with mental health conditions are demonised as potentially vulnerable to extremism.

Some schools have given staff quite common Islamic terms as potential indicators of support for ISIS.



Photo: Hossam el-Hamalawy

The Waltham Forest Council of Mosques has boycotted Prevent, calling it “an ill-conceived and flawed policy. It is racist, and overtly targets members of the Muslim faith.”

No other community is targeted in this way. Defenders of Prevent often say that examples of right-wing extremism are addressed. However, it is only Muslims that are targeted *as a community*.

Occasional examples of right wing extremism are not used to cast the white British community as “suspect” in the same way at all.

Prevent divides communities and increases the risk of Islamophobia and racism

Muslims are widely represented as a threat. This has led to a rising tide of racism. Prevent only reinforces this narrative.

Hostility towards Muslims extends beyond Europe. The US presidential candidate, Donald Trump, wants to ban Muslims from entering the US.

Islamophobic hate-crime is rising, particularly against Muslim women.

But doesn’t Prevent reduce the risk of people being drawn to terrorism or absconding to Syria?

Laws already exist against criminal and terrorist activity. There are already strong procedures for safeguarding young people and others from risk of harm.

Teachers and public service workers are trained to refer individuals if someone may be at risk of harm.

However, Prevent does not address such risks. It targets individuals for their *beliefs* and *opinions* and operates in what is called in Prevent-speak, “the pre-criminal space”.

“Vulnerability” to terrorism cannot be identified by political or religious belief. Terrorism is a *strategy* based on the idea

that violence against innocent people can be used to achieve political ends.

It is not an ideology. It has been used in the name of all religions and none. It has been used in the name of both left wing and right wing political causes, animal rights and anarchist ideas. Sometimes it has even been covertly supported by governments, police and military forces.

There is no evidence that particular religious, political, or cultural beliefs lead to terrorism.

Prevent is discredited, divisive and discriminatory

We are calling for school heads, school governors, parent organisations, college and university principals and local councillors to join the call for the withdrawal of Prevent before further damage is done to our communities.

That call now includes the National Union of Teachers, the National Union of Students, the University and College Union, hundreds of professors and academics, Muslim organisations, civil liberties and anti-racist campaigns including Stand Up to Racism, that have called for Prevent to be withdrawn.

We can also:

- Spread information such as this factsheet about the nature of Prevent
- Insist our schools and public services remain places where people can express legitimate opinion freely
- Insist that Prevent training sessions are open to debate and challenge
- Call for staff training on Islamophobia awareness and promote Islamophobia Awareness Month

Unite Muslims and non-Muslims against all forms of racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism!

Stand Up To Racism is a broad based organisation made up of anti-racists, students, trade unionists and faith groups. We organise various activities and events aimed at challenging the rise of racism. For more information and to help with our campaigns, please get in touch:



standuptoracism.org.uk



@AntiRacismDay



‘Stand Up To Racism’



info@standuptoracism.org.uk