



# EX POST PAPER

## UK Prevent Strategy

**During this study visit the Home Office presented key elements of the UK Prevent Strategy, conditions that influenced the development, lessons learned and ongoing challenges both within the UK and across Europe with regard to developing and implementing a national CVE strategy.**

### Introduction

In designing the RAN in 2011, UK policies on preventing radicalisation to VE were inspiring and to some degree even guiding. Many practitioners from other Member States (MS) benefited from experiences of their UK peers, through RAN, especially at the beginning of the Network. During that period, the UK's **comprehensive approach to the national coordination** of the Prevent Strategy and the **success to commit all key sectors of government and civil society** was inspiring. This study visit shows that the Prevent Strategy continues to fulfil such a role. However, in line with RAN DNA, other MS recognised that **local context is key**, and certain aspects of the Prevent Strategy would not work in their own national context or would need adjustment. Different threat levels, cultural and political differences demand a different approach. Even though the UK's Prevent Strategy is regarded as one of the most developed prevention strategies across Europe, it has received criticism as well, both at home, from stakeholders in other MS and even beyond (UN). Prevent is said to be deployed to serve law enforcement too much, frustrating genuine care for individuals at risk. Also, breaches of privacy were said to follow from the approach. This ex-post will **firstly discuss the general structure and objectives** of the Prevent Strategy. Secondly, it will describe some of the **key elements and programmes** in more depth, covering objectives, critique and ongoing challenges. Finally, it will **compare some of the strengths and weaknesses** of Prevent with the national CVE strategies of several other EU MS.

## Overview of the UK Prevent Strategy

Even though the UK government has been actively countering terrorism for a few decades, the focus on the prevention side is more recent, i.e. around ten years. The Prevent Strategy, which was presented in its updated version to the British Parliament in June 2011, is a constitutive part of the British counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST). **It aims to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.**

Prevent addresses all forms of terrorism but continues to prioritise according to the threat they pose to our national security. Radicalisation and attempts to recruit, constitute a common feature of almost all terrorist groups. The Strategy recognises the importance of understanding **root factors in order to effectively prevent radicalisation.**

According to the Prevent Strategy there are at least three categories of factors which facilitate radicalisation and violent extremism: **ideology, propaganda and personal vulnerabilities** which make in turn ideology and propaganda more attractive. Evidence indicates that support for terrorism is associated with rejection of a cohesive, integrated, multi-faith society and of parliamentary democracy. Therefore, the success of prevent work depends on effective integration strategies, i.e. the development of a sense of belonging and support for core values. Integration alone will not meet Prevent objectives. And Prevent must not assume control of or allocate funding to integration projects which have a value far wider than security and counter-terrorism: the Government will not securitise its integration strategy. This has been a mistake in the past.<sup>1</sup>

The Prevent Strategy identifies three sets of objectives:

*1. Challenging the ideology that supports terrorism and those who promote it.*

In conjunction with communities, the challenge of ideology must be proportionate and focused. The Prevent Strategy makes it clear that it does not mean to change the attitudes of people, rather to disprove the claims made by terrorist groups and to **challenge terrorist and associated extremist narratives**. The Strategy identifies two channels to do that: through projects in education, communities and the criminal justice system (prison and probation); and through support for experts where ideology misrepresents theology and requires a detailed response.

*2. Protecting vulnerable people.*

In order to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, the Prevent Strategy aims firstly at building on the success of the multi-agency '**Channel programme**', which identifies and provides support for people at risk of radicalisation. The purpose of that support is to **dissuade them from engaging in and supporting terrorist-related activity** by removing them from the influence of and

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office UK 'Prevent Strategy Review' (2011, p.28)

from contact with terrorist groups and sympathisers, and to challenge any support they have for them. Due to some allegations on the work of the previous Strategy, the revised Prevent Strategy underlines that safeguards are put in place to ensure integrity of the programmes and protection of data.

### *3. Supporting sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation*

The Prevent Strategy underlines the importance of **working with all sectors and institutions involved in the prevention of radicalisation**. Therefore, the Government aims at working with education and healthcare providers, faith groups, charities and the wider criminal justice system, as well as those working in the internet domain.

Finally, the Strategy describes the structures that are in place to ensure effective coordination, oversight and accountability and how Prevent will be delivered locally. The Home Office, responsible for Prevent vis-à-vis the Parliament, funds dedicated Prevent coordinators to coordinate local delivery. The Strategy also recommends to set up local partnership structures which ideally include social services, policing, children's services, youth services, UK Border Agency, representatives from further and higher education, probation services, schools, local prisons, health and others as required by local needs.

This ex post paper will now discuss in more detail some of the key elements and programmes of Prevent that were mentioned above.

## **Channel**

Channel forms a key part of the Prevent strategy. The process is a **multi-agency approach** to identify and provide support to individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism<sup>2</sup>. The individual being referred for the Channel approach cannot be under police investigation, although there can be cases in which for example the person is coming up for release from prison and there is a need to put in place some form of intervention or support prior to or following release. Participation is voluntarily and confidential. Every local government is required to ensure that a multi-agency panel exists in their area.

The programme uses a multi-agency approach to protect vulnerable people by:

### *1. Identifying individuals at risk*

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<sup>2</sup> HM Government 'Channel Duty Guidance' (2015, p. 3)



Referrals are often likely to be made in the first instance by professionals who come into contact with vulnerable people. Many of these professionals have received the **WRAP training**. The WRAP training was developed by the Home Office to raise awareness of Prevent among first-line practitioners and leave them with the ability to understand what might make individuals susceptible to radicalisation, as well as the confidence and ability to raise their concern when someone may be at risk.

### *2. Assessing the nature and extent of that risk*

If a referral is made, the nature and extent of the risk will be assessed. Not all referrals are actual cases of radicalisation or suitable for the Channel programme. The preliminary assessment is led by the Channel Police Practitioner and will include their line manager and, if appropriate, senior personnel of panel partners. The case is assessed on three levels: 1. Engagement with a group; cause or ideology; 2. Intent to cause harm and 3. Capability to cause harm. This is done using the '**Vulnerability Assessment Framework**'<sup>3</sup>

### *3. Developing the most appropriate support plan for the individuals concerned.*

If the referral is indeed deemed suitable for the Channel programme the Channel Panel will develop a package to support the needs of the individual and use the information to inform the assessment and mitigation of any risk posed to potential support providers. Under the Data Protection Act, several possibilities exist to share information between the partners. Within Channel, a Memorandum is used to share information confidentially and all partners have to sign this document. As a general rule, only information is shared in as far as this is necessary to assess the case.

The panel can consist of multiple agencies like the local authority, social services, police, school etc. These are only statutory partners, not community members.

### *4. Support*

The **support package** can be very varied ranging from anger management or health awareness training to the development of career skills. Research shows that 40-60% of the cases referred for Channel support have a mental health issue element.

There are ideological and theological mentors available which have been selected and approved by the Home Office. These range from imams to ex-cage fighters and speak a large variety of languages. The mentors are trained and guidance provided but the details of the mentoring are left to them and their mentee. There is one rule: extremist arguments cannot be used to 'beat' other extremist arguments.

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<sup>3</sup> Home Office 'Channel Duty Guidance' (2015, annex C, p. 30)



The Channel programme is intended to be a safeguarding measure. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults is everyone's responsibility. This is a responsibility that is part of the daily tasks of many the professionals that are involved in Channel. However, Channel and the Prevent Strategy have been criticised that it serves law enforcement too much, is used to spy on communities and frustrates genuine care for individuals at risk<sup>4</sup>. Also, breaches of privacy were said to follow from the approach. A great part of the criticism is related to the Prevent Duty.

### **Prevent Duty**

The Prevent Duty was implemented in 2015. The Prevent Duty places a duty on local authorities and all statutory partners with sectors and institutions<sup>5</sup> where there are risks of radicalisation, in the exercise of their functions, to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". The difference with before is that although the different partners were already working on these issues, now this is part of legislation. There are three themes throughout the sector-specific guidance: **effective leadership, working in partnership and appropriate capabilities**.

In other MS similar programmes are in place, like the SSP structure in Denmark or the Dutch Safe House. However, these are not communicated as a separate project, 'forced upon workers' or embedded in CT legislation. This could be a factor why communities, professionals and media are not as critical and reluctant. Positive effects of the Prevent Duty that were presented during the study visit were, among others: increased referrals for the Channel Programme, increased training of professionals, more local prevent projects, a new higher education body and a new prison and probation network for CVE.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/sep/23/prevent-counter-terrorism-strategy-schools-demonising-muslim-children>

<sup>5</sup> All local authorities, schools, universities and colleges, NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts, police, probation services and prison

## Wider counter-extremism programme

In the RAN ex post paper ‘The Refugee and Migrant Crisis: Challenges for CVE Policy’<sup>6</sup> polarisation, racism and xenophobia are deemed as potential fuel for radicalisation and violent extremism. Following this argument, countering such forms of extremism, without a direct risk of violence, are relevant to CVE as well. The UK also recognized this challenge and developed a **Counter-Extremism Strategy**, released in October 2015, to complement the Prevent Strategy.

*“We define ‘extremism’ as vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.”*

The counter-extremism programmes rest on four pillars to deal with the broad challenge of extremism<sup>7</sup>:

1. *Countering extremist ideology*  
Confront and challenge extremist propaganda, both offline and online.
2. *Building a partnership with all those opposed to extremism*  
Build the capacity of mainstream individuals, community organisations and others in our society who work every day to challenge extremists and protect vulnerable individuals.
3. *Disrupting extremists*  
Create new targeted powers, flexible enough to cover the full range of extremist behaviour, including where extremists sow division in our communities and seek to undermine the rule of law.
4. *Building more cohesive communities*  
Review, understand and address the reasons why some people living here do not identify with our country and our values. A new Cohesive Communities Programme will help those communities most at risk of isolation.

Counter extremism efforts to date have achieved significant results: a greater understanding of radicalisation, over 300 community groups’ relations, exclusion of 100 hate preachers from the UK and removal of over 180,000 pieces of terrorist related content online since 2010. One of the biggest challenges at this moment is the rapid growth of hate-crime. The Home Office is currently developing a hate-crime action plan to cope with this challenge.

At international level the following actions to disrupt extremism flows of people, money and ideology are being developed and implemented: relationships have been built with third countries

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<sup>6</sup> RAN CoE ex post paper ‘The Migrant and Refugee Crisis: Challenges for CVE Policy’ 14 April, Vienna (AT)

<sup>7</sup> Home Office ‘Counter-Extremism Strategy’ (2015. p. 17)



helping to avoid certain individuals from entering the UK whilst the UK supports the development of some third countries' national programmes and strategies to address the drivers and enablers of extremism.

### Extremism analysis unit

The Counter-Extremism policy team works closely with the extremism analysis unit. This is a cross governmental unit that supports all government departments and the wider public sector to understand wider extremism issues so they can deal with extremists appropriately. The unit also has an international component that looks how extremism outside UK affects the nation. The unit **analyses extremism that falls short of terrorism**, which is the task of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC). Possible themes are among others; islamophobia, risks on communities, drivers to non-violent extremism. It can also investigate specific groups and organisations in order to inform government decisions on engagement and potentially disruption. RAN participants support the value of the extremism analysis unit and Counter-Extremism Strategy but also recognise complicated challenges: democracy allows a broad range of values, also ideas that many find undesirable. A democratic government is bound to uphold this liberty or will lose legitimacy. The definition of 'the fundamental British values' is therefore both crucial and troublesome.

### De-radicalisation programme

The de-radicalisation programme in the UK is one of the less developed elements of Prevent. A **new programme is being developed** that focuses on terrorist offenders on probation, terrorist offenders in prison and individuals that have not been convicted but are under police investigation. De-radicalisation is the aim, but might not always be feasible. Interventions are mandatory (as compared to Channel) and can consist of: 1. Obligatory non-theological mentoring (to enhance re-integration and against setbacks); 2. Theological mentoring; 3. Family support and 4. Possibly financial support for practical assistance. The latter is challenging since voluntary cooperation is desirable but it can never appear as if terrorism and extremism are rewarded. Especially a well-developed family support programme is currently lacking in the UK as pointed out at the beginning of this paper. Lessons from the programmes of other MS like the Dutch Family Support unit or the German 'Hayat' model could provide guidance and inspiration<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> RAN collection 'Family support' [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-best-practices/ran-family-support/index\\_en.htm#/c](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/ran-family-support/index_en.htm#/c)

## Comparing National Strategies

The Prevent Strategy continues to be an inspiration for EU MS. However, not all elements are suitable for every MS given each country operates in their own institutional and cultural context. This ex post will conclude by **comparing specific elements of Prevent** with how these are being addressed in the national CVE strategies of other EU MS (where such comparisons were made during the discussions) to identify similarities and differences:

- The coordination between different levels of government and other sectors, i.e. the Channel multi-agency approach is impressive. Some of the MS recognise this as an ongoing challenge '*Sometimes there are too many cooks making the broth, sometimes too little*'. However, the national situation differs greatly per MS, each posing different challenges: Germany must for instance cope with the high level of independence of its federal states.
- The use of experts within the Channel interventions. They have a crucial role in engaging individuals at risk and often can be considered to be their 'own people' to create understanding (similar use is made in Germany and the Netherlands of such field experts).
- The UK RICU is very well developed. Such an extensively researched and complete strategic communication plan, as well as the counter-narratives that are developed within such a plan, is lacking in most other countries. However, the resources that this requires are often lacking as well.
- The community shows hostility towards Prevent implementation and considers it to be part of CT and very top-down. It could be argued that too much focus was put on Prevent being a separate issue to be addressed in vulnerable people putting them 'under suspicion' and possibly stigmatising certain cultural groups. Other MS have similar programmes as Channel but do not label it as a separate programme. It is simply embedded in existing structures and not related to CT legislation as such. On the other hand, the CT legislation has enabled the Strategy to be developed.
- Related to the above, although the Prevent Strategy is very well coordinated, it also has been criticised for being imposed on professionals and other actors. In order to truly rally first-line practitioners behind the programme a more bottom-up approach could be valuable. Belgium for example has recently developed a bottom-up approach in this respect, providing feedback from local levels to the regional level (involving education and cultural departments) up to the federal level (involving the departments for Justice and Security).
- Also, the role of the media towards the UK Strategy seems to be rather negative and the media is quick to judge the shortcomings or exacerbate elements of the Prevent Strategy.





Anti-Prevent Strategy groupings have been formed such as Prevent Watch and 'prevent' Prevent. It can be debated whether a different approach should have been taken with regard to the media's role. For example, a similar problem was encountered in Finland but over the years strategic partnerships have been formed with the media and thus they can reinforce the efforts being done at government level rather than create an obstacle.

- The family support programme has been lagging behind in the Prevent Strategy although a programme is currently being developed. Programmes in other MS could provide valuable input especially with regard to how the family can be used when providing support to the individual at risk;
- Finally, it was concluded by the participants that more focus should be put on early prevention and there should be an integrated approach towards safeguarding. Education as well as other government departments have a joint responsibility in carrying this process and ensuring that teachers for example have the appropriate tools and means to communicate with children and youth on global issues and support this target group when they get affected by world events such as wars, refugee crises and terrorist attacks. However, several MS explained that it is challenging to get different government levels to work together and that one department needs to take the initiative in order to start the process. In the Netherlands this challenging process has taken place over several years and now four different government departments (education, health, social affairs and justice) sit at the same table understanding the issues concern a shared problem.