

UK's anti-terrorism scheme too PC to prevent terror: Prevent programme is so fearful of seeming racist it may be unfit for purpose

In 2018, the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) (*also called the 'Nudge Unit', well known now during the pandemic for less than subtle nagging to wear a mask, get a vaccination, obey the rules, be good and Father Christmas might allow you something nice...But back in 2018 mostly they were known for efforts to make people do their PE and eat up their veg.*) – headed by Professor David Halpern, a former chief analyst at No 10 – produced a report, commissioned by the Home Office, to evaluate the effectiveness of deradicalisation programmes introduced in the wake of 9/11.

Among these was the multi-million-pound flagship Prevent scheme. This is the programme, it has been widely reported, that Ali Harbi Ali, 25, who has been charged with the murder of MP Sir David Amess, was referred to when he was 17, although he is not understood to have been placed on the part of it (Channel) for those deemed most at risk of radicalisation.

The findings in the unpublished report – by researchers from BIT – was damning.

In short, they concluded that a culture of political correctness has stopped Prevent carrying out the very work it was created to do, in many of the grassroots projects they scrutinised. They do not actually use the words 'political correctness' but you cannot read their findings and come to

any other conclusion.

Sources familiar with the review have told *The Times* that it will criticise the multi-agency approach to decision-making as too soft on intervention. The role of community representatives such as teachers, NHS workers and religious leaders should be limited in deciding when an individual should be pursued, the independent review of the Prevent scheme is expected to say.

Those referred to Prevent are screened by local authority panels, which can include teachers, NHS workers, psychiatrists and representatives from religious groups as well as the police and security services. Those most at risk are subsequently passed to Channel, a scheme that provides ideological mentoring, extra-curricular activities and other counter-extremism programmes. Involvement is voluntary.

The review of Prevent, led by William Shawcross, who chaired the Charity Commission, has found that decision-making panels are too big, often up to 20 people. . . the review, which is due to report by the end of the year, said that it would recommend limiting the number of panel members to five. It will urge the government to prioritise places on the panels for MI5 and counterterrorism police officers. They are described as “more hawkish” than others who make up panels.

A security source said: “Police and security-focused agencies are more likely to put people on to support programmes. The NHS, schools, local authorities and other agencies are often much weaker at intervention because they don’t want to antagonise faith groups.

“They’re more likely to see the best in people and be less cautious about the risks. That is why they’re going to recommend cutting the number of panel members because it takes in far too many people from far too many agencies, many of which are far too reticent at intervening, particularly with

cases involving people from overseas.” *That’s a tactful way of putting it.*

[In some instances](#) in the southeast of England, councils have even appointed Prevent co-ordinators opposed to the strategy entirely, according to sources close to the review.

Dr Antonio Silva, a senior adviser with BIT who conducted the research with colleague Simon Ruda, *evaluating Home Office data*, found programmes had been let down by ‘facilitators who were uncomfortable dealing with sensitive topics and would often refuse to engage if they were brought up’ . . . teachers who were ‘afraid to bring up race or religion with their students’ for fear of appearing discriminatory . . . and reported success rates of 90 per cent which were ‘not believable’ and not backed up by a ‘sufficiently robust standard of evidence’.

Silva and Ruda presented their findings to the Society of Evidence Based Policing conference at the time. The findings were reported in the trade publication Police Professional in 2018. . .the Home Office has never released the report, which received little coverage outside the article in Police Professional. The Home Office says it ‘does not recognise’ the findings and insists Prevent is a success at steering participants away from the threat of radicalisation.

One of the people who attended the conference was Peter Neyroud, a former chief constable of Thames Valley Police. He said he was shocked by the lack of openness when he spoke to us this week. ‘There needs to be transparency,’ said Dr Neyroud, who is studying deradicalisation programmes on behalf of the so called Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.S. and the UK. ‘If you cannot publish the data – an explanation of what you are doing and the outcomes you are getting – it does not encourage people to get involved in it.’

Now a review into the Prevent strategy conducted by William Shawcross, due to be presented to Home Secretary Priti Patel shortly, is expected to recommend that counter-terrorism police are given a much greater say on whether people at risk of radicalisation are placed on anti-extremist programmes, because they are likely to be less cautious about antagonising faith groups or intervening in cases involving people from ethnic minorities.

This was precisely the flaw highlighted by Silva and Ruda in 2018. . . it would be hard to argue against the fact that the failings highlighted by the Behavioural Insights Team, precipitated by a culture of political correctness that seems to influence so much of modern life, make it much less likely that individuals like this are ever even picked up in the first place.

Three-quarters of offenders in prison for terror-related crimes and the vast majority of suspects on MI5's terror watchlist are Islamist extremists. Even so, they represent just 22 per cent of all Prevent referrals and 30 per cent of Channel cases (who receive ideological mentoring). By comparison, far-Right extremists make up 24 per cent of Prevent referrals and 43 per cent of Channel cases, even though they make up a much smaller proportion of the threat to national security.

The head of MI5, Ken McCallum revealed in July that a 'growing number' of terror plots were planned by Right-wing terrorists . . . But Mr McCallum stressed that Islamist terrorism remains our largest threat. *Especially when you consider how easily the label 'right-wing extremist' is hurled at those of us with conservative, traditional and patriotic views who regard our culture as worthy of preservation.*

The Henry Jackson Society, a leading counter-terrorism think-tank, says ... the Home Office has allowed its work to be swayed by false allegations of 'Islamophobia'.

Lord Carlile was the person originally chosen to carry out the review into Prevent currently being undertaken by William Shawcross, following claims by civil liberties and human rights organisations that it fostered discrimination against Muslims, something the Government has always denied.

As the independent reviewer of terrorism from 2001 until 2011, Lord Carlile was well qualified for the job.

But a group called Rights Watch UK (now Rights and Security International) objected to his appointment and took legal action against the Home Office. It was argued his support for Prevent, at least in principle, made him unsuitable for the position, because Prevent had become a toxic brand for many Muslims, with many viewing it as state-sponsored spying.

The Home Office did not contest the legal challenge. In December 2019, Lord Carlile stood down.

He was succeeded by Mr Shawcross, a former chairman of the Charity Commission, whose appointment sparked a boycott by 17 campaign groups earlier this year because, it was claimed, he held 'hostile views' on Islam.

The boycott was supported by two Muslim groups, Cage and Muslim Engagement and Development (Mend).

Sources familiar with the review's findings said Muslim Engagement and Development (Mend), a not-for-profit company that helps to empower and encourage British Muslims within local communities, is one of the groups that has been given a role on local Prevent steering committees despite its vocal opposition to the deradicalisation programme.

Their activities will be familiar to regular readers of this website. This is [Mend last week](#) on the perennial subject of islamophobia.

Hate crime is perhaps the most overt, visible and undeniable

symptom of the Islamophobia prevalent across certain segments of society. . . Islamophobia is frequently misunderstood as exclusively an issue of hostility towards religion. However, this is a misrepresentation of how Islamophobia functions and manifests itself. In reality, Muslims have become racialised to such an extent that it is frequently very difficult to distinguish whether a particular instance of Islamophobic abuse is racially or religiously motivated.

MEND noted a shift in the types of abuse that Muslim communities experienced during the pandemic. For instance, as hate crime reports dropped, MEND's Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) received an increase in reports of neighbour harassment.

Similarly, hatred online was acutely felt by many Muslims across the country, which was increasingly driven by conspiracy theories surrounding the alleged responsibility of Muslims for the continuing pandemic. A final important issue to note regarding the latest Home Office data is the impact of socio-political events on hate crime patterns. Major socio-political events, such as terror attacks and the EU referendum, often mobilise acts of hostility towards Muslims. At the same time, with the devastating killing of David Amess on Friday and emerging information regarding the identity of the killer, this is the type of event that leaves Muslims and minority communities vulnerable to attacks and abuse.

Dr Rakib Ehsan, the report's author, said: "The Prevent scheme's central aim is to reduce the UK's overall terror threat and maximise public safety. At the moment, it is failing to deliver on this front. In a broader cultural sense, it is vital that the UK is not paralysed by political correctness and identity politics when it comes to holding hard-headed discussions on the prevailing terror threat of Islamist extremism."