

# UK: Children referred for “deradicalisation” under “anti-terrorist” strategy

Tom Pearce  
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Figures published this week by the National Police Chiefs’ Council reveal that in 2015, 3,994 people in Britain were referred under the Conservative government’s counterterrorism “Prevent Strategy” to the Channel programme. Channels’ remit is to protect “vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism.”

Of the nearly 4,000 people referred, 1,319 of these came from the education sector.

The figures follow those reported by the *Times* that since July 2015, 1,041 schoolchildren have been referred for “deradicalisation” to the “Channel” programme. This equates to more than five children per day being referred in England and Wales.

This is the outcome of teachers being forced to implement the Prevent Strategy. The £40 million programme was first introduced as a result of the 2005 London terrorist bombings.

Ostensibly aimed at countering the supposed threat of religious radicalisation, it centred on monitoring “vulnerable” Muslims who could be radicalised. There has been widespread criticism in the teaching profession that by targeting the Muslim community, government policy has alienated them, while creating wider anti-Muslim sentiment.

Sky News reported, based on a response to its Freedom of Information request, that in September 2015 “the number of under-18s referred was 133, of whom 43 were recorded as Muslim, and there were 99 under-16s, of whom 29 were Muslim; In October the number of under-18s referred was up to 216, of whom 79 were Muslim, and there were 160 under-16s, of whom 65 were Muslim; in November the number of under-18s referred reached 378, of whom 117 were Muslim, and the number of under-16s was 298, of whom 95 were Muslim.”

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition

government reviewed the Prevent Strategy in 2011. In a foreword, Home Secretary Theresa May, who is now the Conservative prime minister, justified the policy, stating, “Intelligence indicates that a terrorist attack in our country is ‘highly likely’. Experience tells us that the threat comes not just from foreign nationals but also from terrorists born and bred in Britain.”

In 2014, the Prevent Strategy led to the introduction of “British values” in the school curriculum. The Ofsted inspection criteria for judging schools also entrenches these values for all British citizens to follow. This includes the promotion of British “democracy” and the “rule of law,” under conditions in which civil liberties are under a sustained offensive.

The parliamentary undersecretary of state for schools, Lord Nash, claimed the policy was to “tighten up the standards on pupil welfare to improve safeguarding, and the standards on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils to strengthen the barriers to extremism.”

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 added “prevent duty” to the responsibility of schools, colleges and universities. It states, “The Prevent duty [is] to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.”

Since July 2015, teachers have been legally obliged to report any suspected extremist behaviour to police. This has turned teachers into a spying agency for the authorities with children as young as four being referred to police, leading to great unease among teachers.

Some students are afraid to discuss any issue that may compromise themselves to authorities and this has had a detrimental effect on their relationships with teachers and schools. As a result, in March 2016, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) voted to reject the

UK government's "prevent duty."

In combination with schools, "prevent duty" has also been rolled out across society in hospitals, universities and other public sector settings nationwide. Since the start of the 2015 academic year, increasing numbers of youth have been questioned over their religion, political affiliation and actions.

Basic democratic rights, including freedom of speech, are being eroded as referrals have increased in the past year, rising month on month. There have been 6,306 referrals of young people since 2007, but a quarter were made in the last year alone. The figure currently stands at 577 for under-18s, with no limit on how young the child may be.

Political views expressed by youth are also being suppressed. In February, Rahmaan Mohammadi was questioned by antiterrorism police at home when he was 16 because he wore a "Free Palestine" badge to his school in Luton. He had also asked for permission to fund raise for children affected by the Israeli occupation. According to reports, the youth said police warned him not to talk about Palestine in school, and that staff members had approached his 14-year-old brother and pressured him to tell Rahmaan to "stop being radical."

In another case, revealed in January, police quizzed a 10-year-old Muslim boy after he mistakenly wrote that he lived in a "terrorist house", rather than a "terraced house."

The BBC reported that the boy's family were left shocked by the incident and demanded an apology from both the school and police. The boy's cousin said, "You can imagine it happening to a 30-year-old man, but not to a young child. If the teacher had any concerns it should have been about his spelling. They shouldn't be putting a child through this. He's now scared of writing, using his imagination."

In other examples, a 15-year-old boy was referred to police after clicking on the UK Independence Party web site in the classroom to research immigration. A student who mentioned "eco-terrorism" when discussing the environment in a geography lesson was talked to alone by members of staff at another school.

When the policy was first introduced into schools, there was no resistance from teaching unions to the idea that teachers would have to report their own students to the police if necessary.

In contrast, teachers have been opposed to the policy, and at the NUT conference in March, delegates voted to reject the Prevent Strategy over concerns that it causes "suspicion in the classroom and confusion in the staffroom." One of the delegates said the Prevent training given to many teachers was "crude and often involves loads of stereotypes."

Across the UK, teachers have experienced training from a wide range of organizations as part of implementing Prevent. One teacher delegate said that the senior leader who led the training was clearly uncomfortable, and that staff were shocked by what they were being asked to do in the name of safeguarding children in their care.

In a statement after the conference, Christine Blower, NUT general secretary, only called for a "a review of the strategy", adding, "The NUT is calling on the government to involve the profession in developing alternative strategies to safeguard children and identify risks posed to young people."

Likewise, in May, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn called on the government to reform the Prevent Strategy. This was after Europe's human rights watchdog urged the government to engage with Muslim communities and warned that elements of Prevent contributed to the spread of "extremism." Corbyn did not call for the scrapping of Prevent, instead reassuring the powers that be, "We will of course support strong measures to give the police and security the services and resources they need but we will also support checks and balances to ensure powers are used appropriately."

As well as fostering divisions among workers and youth, the repression of freedom of speech and democratic rights via Prevent is bound up with the suppression of opposition to the government's entire reactionary agenda. This is critical for the ruling elite as they seek to impose even greater attacks on living standards, and slash the right to health, education and housing.



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