

## **Quakers in Britain response to the Prevent inquiry, December 2019**

### **2. How effective do you think Prevent is in meeting its objectives to tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism, and why?**

Not effective for two main reasons.

1) Prevent has shrunk the space for meaningful democratic engagement. In their studies on Islamophobia, Massoumi et al. found that Prevent and other programmes have made it 'increasingly difficult for Muslims to engage in politics or public life.'

The Prevent duty causes decreased trust between student and teacher, making it harder to explore the very issues it seeks to address. Through our work on peace education, Quakers in Britain have seen examples such as schools citing Prevent as a reason not to host Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors.

Prevent uses a confused definition of the word 'extremism' – 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values'. The values cited are neither fundamental nor distinctly British. As they are framed as that which an extremist opposes', they cannot be subject to classroom discussion, because to question them is to display vulnerability to radicalisation. This can result in referral to the police which is distressing and frightening.

2) Violence by the UK state informs the context in which Prevent operates and is understood. For example, brutal military interventions in majority Muslim countries (e.g. Iraq) have caused immense suffering and bitterness. The former head of MI5 Eliza Manningham Buller told the Iraq inquiry that the security services warned the UK government that the invasion of Iraq would increase the threat of terrorism against UK targets. US-based research has established that the threat of terrorism is directly related to military interventionism, and that the number of terrorist suicide attacks sharply increased following the invasion of Iraq. By presenting the threats as primarily inherent in violent individuals, the Prevent strategy is hindering the understanding of the wider causes of violence and conflict. It is also a barrier to real security and peace. Quakers in Britain campaign against state violence, seek to understand and explore the drivers for violent conflict in order to offer alternatives. Through our interfaith and peace work we are listening carefully to affected communities in order to assist in representing their views.

### **3. How effective do you think Prevent is in meeting its objectives to safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support, and why?**

Not effective for four main reasons.

1) The UNCRC recommended that the UK independently review Prevent to ensure it does not have a 'discriminatory or stigmatising impact on any group of children.' Through our work on peace education, we have seen how Prevent has harmed the wellbeing of children and young people, particularly Muslims. Academic analysis (e.g. by Julian Hargreaves) has found that Prevent normalises Islamophobia.

2) Safeguarding existed before Prevent, and the introduction of Prevent has not enhanced it. It was already a statutory duty to train for safeguarding and for professionals and volunteers to pick up on signs of abuse and vulnerability. It is our view and our experience that any diligent teacher, nurse or social worker would act on clear evidence of a person being influenced to participate in violence. But in 2015, Prevent turned safeguarding into a form of surveillance, implying that those at risk are criminals. Safeguarding relies on trusting relationships, which are compromised if figures such as teachers and nurses are expected to be informants. People who are ideologically or mentally troubled will avoid seeking help for fear of stigma and punishment. This reinforces a cycle of alienation. Alienation is known to be a causal factor in people being vulnerable to malign influences.

3) Through our work on peace education, we have heard reports that some professionals, in seeking the best support for people, may falsely frame a concern as extremism because they know it will be addressed more urgently.

4) The 'warning signs' of 'vulnerability' to radicalisation in the Prevent guidance are questionable. While some are legitimate safeguarding concerns, 'converting to a new religion' is prejudiced and offensive as a cause for concern. Evidence of violence such as 'joining or trying to join an extremist organisation' would be referred to the police regardless of Prevent.

**5. What, if any, alternative objectives would you propose for a strategy aimed at safeguarding those vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, and why?**

Quakers in Britain regard Prevent as seriously flawed and would encourage the introduction of a strategy of dialogue, education and action.

**Dialogue:**

Many individuals and communities feel vulnerable and marginalised in the UK today, and we all, including government, needs to listen to their concerns. Safety and security threats come from a range of sources including inequality, misunderstanding and fear whipped up by social media. From the people of Grenfell to diaspora expatriates of other nations, many have threats to their security more pressing than non-state terrorism, but which go unaddressed. Community forums, citizen assemblies, and intercommunity dialogue can all build trust.

Education:

The UK has committed to Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, which requires lifelong learning to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence. The Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) has compiled a list of key competences that could make up a curriculum to resist violence. If the government wishes to effectively prevent violence it should provide statutory support for peace education and the work of organisations in the Peace Education Network, Peer Mediation Network and groups such as Amnesty International and Stonewall. This will help develop a culture of peace and nonviolence.

Action:

Prevent, despite its name, is reactive – spot “extremism” then cure it. More usefully there could be a focus on addressing the causes of injustice and marginalisation, rather than telling people they are extremist for feeling marginalised.

## **6. How effectively does the current Prevent strategy respond to the factors that make someone vulnerable to radicalisation (i.e. the drivers)?**

Not effectively.

Marginalisation and discrimination have been identified by the UN as drivers of radicalisation. Prevent is positioned as challenging racism. Yet it has enabled racism, cultural violence and stigma towards Muslims, as shown by Rights Watch (UK)’s 2016 report, ‘Preventing Education? In 2018 the UN Special Rapporteur on racism raised concerns about Prevent. The government’s own statistical evidence and a report by the Runnymede Trust show that Muslims have been disproportionately reported and these referrals almost always proven unfounded.

Through our work on peace education, Quakers in Britain have seen examples such as: teachers directed to monitor Pakistani students more closely than their peers; the ethnic targeting of Somali parents for Prevent training in London; and young people prevented by teachers from acting under concern on social justice issues in their school communities (e.g. some pupils have experienced censure and harassment by school authorities for carrying pro-Palestinian badges).

The Prevent policy has created distrust and fragmented communities. According to ‘Why Inequality Matters’ by My Fair London and The Equality Trust, Britain scores sixth lowest on trust out of 23 developed countries.

Since 2015 Prevent has directly linked nonviolence with extremism and therefore, there has been fear among some Quakers that we would be targeted by this provision. We note the research used by the Home Office which implied that being involved in nonviolent activism was a route towards violent extremism and wish to point out that in our experience, this is not the case. Being part of a faith community

which is active on social justice issues brings people alongside a group of thoughtful and pragmatists who would spot vulnerabilities and provide support to them. At all times, Quakers focus on nonviolence.

**12. How well is activity co-ordinated at a local level by Prevent Co-ordinators? Are there changes that need to be made?**

Channel is an early intervention safeguarding programme which is confidential and voluntary. It is the element of Prevent which provides bespoke support to children and adults identified as vulnerable to radicalisation before they become drawn into terrorism.

**13. How effective do you think the Channel programme is at safeguarding those vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and why?**

Through the Channel programme, people may well access crucial services that address their needs. We welcome attempts to mobilise resources to support people whose circumstances make them vulnerable or marginalised. However, making support available via Prevent will either attach stigma to service-users or stop them from accessing the services at all.

**16. What are your main criticisms or complaints of Prevent, and why? What is the evidence underpinning these criticisms and/or complaints?**

Quakers in Britain's primary criticisms of Prevent are:

- 1) It puts individual responsibility on people for a problem for which the state and society share collective responsibility.
- 2) It results in racism and Islamophobia, causing society to become more divided and Muslim communities in particular to become more marginalised.
- 3) It damages democratic participation and prevents students and other citizens from engaging in critical thinking and debate on issues such as 'British values'.
- 4) It stigmatises, criminalises and deters those who need help from state actors such as teachers, nurses and social workers. This erodes trust in public institutions.
- 5) It confuses religious practice with criminal behaviour.
- 6) It precludes honest discussion and debate about what drives individual and collective criminal violent behaviour.

Our evidence for these criticisms is outlined in our answers above.

## **17. How do you think these criticisms and/or complaints could be addressed or overcome?**

Quakers in Britain believe these criticisms can be overcome by abolishing Prevent and replacing it with a strategy addressing the underlying causes of violence. In relation to each of our criticisms:

1) The UK needs to focus on peaceful solutions to conflict, facilitating dialogue on a local, national and international level. As suggested by the Rethinking Security Group of which Quakers are a part, it must invest in public services and tackling climate breakdown. It must therefore stop engaging in activities, such as military intervention, which lead to anger and suffering in communities in the UK and around the world.

2) It is our view that Prevent is fundamentally flawed and racist. It intersects and reinforces a hostile environment which does not contribute to constructive behaviour either individually or collectively. We need to focus on building dialogue and trust between individuals and communities and encourage open discussion about what makes for violence and how it can be countered.

3) It is our view that framing moral and social education on the basis of 'fundamental British values' is unhelpful. Instead it would be constructive to invest in peace education in line with the UK's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4.7. The UNCRC has called on the UK government to 'Intensify its efforts to tackle bullying and violence in schools, including through teaching human rights, building capacities of students and staff members to respect diversity at school, improving students' conflict resolution skills...'. We encourage more investment in supporting citizenship education and the training of citizenship teachers.

4) Vulnerable and marginalised people are better served and encouraged to be good citizens through community education and provision. It has been extremely disappointing to note that former interfaith staff in Local Government are now almost entirely funded by the Prevent programme – giving them a potentially damaging biased rather than constructive role. We ask that funding be de-coupled from Prevent and restored to genuine interfaith work.

5) Investment in accurate and professional teaching of religious education including the role religion has in personal and public life to enable a wider understanding of the complete difference between religious practice and criminal behaviour.

**18. Do you think a national strategy to safeguard those vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism is needed, and why?**

Quakers in Britain believe terrorism can be prevented by addressing the underlying causes of conflict and insecurity. Quaker Peace and Social Witness is a member of Rethinking Security, a network of organisations, academics and activists dedicated to this aim.

Rethinking Security believes that natural and political environments that nurture people and their potential are fundamental to feeling secure. It calls on the government to prioritise working with communities to tackle the causes of insecurity, including climate change and inequality.

**21. Are there any other comments you would like to make about any aspect of the Prevent strategy, how it is being delivered, or its future?**

Quakers in Britain are concerned that the Terms of Reference of this review restrict us to talking about how Prevent is being delivered and its future. We believe that there are important things to be learned from how Prevent has been delivered in the past, as well as the present.

We are of the view that Prevent is fundamentally flawed. A newly framed conversation which clearly separates criminal behaviour from religious identity needs to take place.

Quakers in Britain share the aspirations of all good governments for whom safety and security of citizens is paramount, but in our experience, Prevent has not enabled a healthy public discussion among communities about what makes for a safe and secure environment.

We share the concerns expressed by Rights Watch (UK)'s challenge regarding the need for an independent individual to lead this review.

**22. If you want to upload any additional documentation to support your comments please describe them here, including details of their relevance to the Review.**

**You can upload up to three items below or provide links here.**

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/18/its-the-occupation-stupid/>

<https://research.aston.ac.uk/en/publications/what-is-islamophobia-racism-social-movements-and-the-state>

<http://rwuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/preventing-education-final-to-print-3.compressed-1.pdf>

<https://theconversation.com/prevent-counter-terrorism-strategy-remains-unfair-on-british-muslims-despite-home-office-efforts-108779>

<https://theconversation.com/prevent-counter-terrorism-strategy-remains-unfair-on-british-muslims-despite-home-office-efforts-108779>

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>

<http://www.qcea.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Peace-Education-report.pdf>

<https://ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23074&LangID=E>

<https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/>