Preventing Extremism through Education

April 2021

Hud CRES | Huddersfield Centre for Research in Education and Society

Why the research is important

The UK's Prevent counter-terrorism strategy gives prominent roles to educators and to the communities they work with. Since 2015, British educators have had a legal responsibility under the **Prevent Duty** to identify and report those vulnerable to radicalisation, whilst the vital role of communities in preventing extremism and terrorism has been repeatedly stressed.

This HudCRES policy briefing details **key messages and recommendations** from HudCRES research into;

- How educators in schools and colleges are implementing the Prevent Duty, and;
- What can be done to support community members in reporting concerns about family and friends, who may be involved in terrorism.

Recommendations from the research

What needs to be done to implement the Prevent Duty effectively and support educators?

- Reconsider the 'Fundamental British Values' formulation and its current place within Prevent's focus on preventing extremism through education.

- Offer additional training and support for educators in schools and colleges on successfully having 'difficult conversations' with students about issues of identity and politics.

- Undertake more research amongst students around whether they perceive the Prevent Duty's operation to have impacted on their willingness and ability to debate and discuss issues.

What needs to be done to ensure Community Reporting is working effectively for everyone?

- Maintain and develop the 'Act Early' campaign and other safeguarding-based community initiatives which recognise that 'care and concern' for an intimate will motivate them to report concerns.

- Recognise that **community organisations** have a vital role to play as brokers and supporters in the 'staged process' of community sharing of concerns – these organisations should been seen as partners by **government** and **the police**.

- Ensure that the reporting process for community members is local and personal and make information around how to share concerns much more visible and available.

The Prevent Duty

The Prevent Duty placed responsibility on educators to identify students at risk of radicalisation, and to uphold 'Fundamental British Values'. This prompted significant allegations of damaged relationships with students, but such concerns lacked evidence.

The research

This led HudCRES's Paul Thomas (with Coventry and Durham Universities) to design the first national research study of how educators in schools and colleges were implementing Prevent.

> I've always seen Prevent as being a model of safeguarding. I don't see it as much different from safeguarding, and indeed we've had a line in our safeguarding [policy] for extremism for many, many years, so it's been a part of our safeguarding.
>
> (R20, Designated Safeguarding lead, college, West Yorkshire)
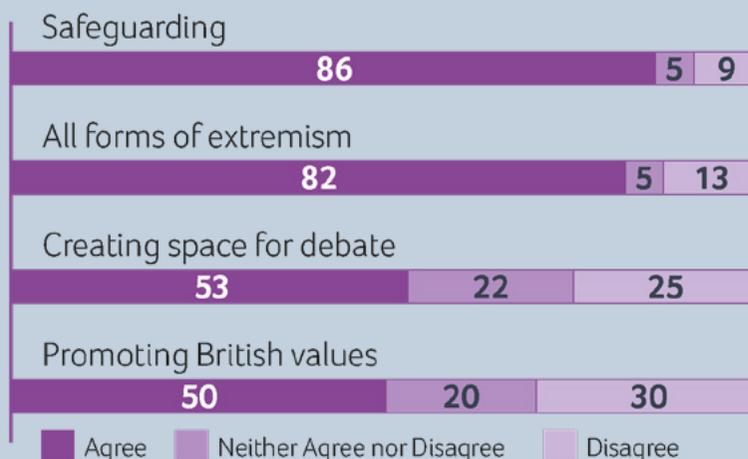
Key findings: Communication

- Some educators expressed discomfort and uncertainty around the role of promoting 'Fundamental British Values' in relation to Prevent and concern about how this can be translated in to inclusive curriculum content and practice.

- For some, 'difficult conversations' with students remained challenging, although most expressed fairly high levels of confidence on this.

- Educators had taken measures to avoid student debate and discussion being silenced by the Duty but had concerns that Prevent, if implemented badly, could damage community cohesion.

Key findings: Support

- Educators viewed the Prevent Duty as a legitimate response to radicalisation, identifying it as representing significant continuity with existing practices.

- Educator confidence in implementing Prevent was underpinned by Prevent being integrated within safeguarding mechanisms.

- Educators agreed that Prevent addresses all forms of extremism. In some schools/colleges Prevent was used to strengthen work around racism in terms of addressing the threat of far-right extremism and to avoid stigmatisation of Muslim students.

Responses to question: 'The Prevent Duty is about' (%)

	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
Safeguarding	86	5	9
All forms of extremism	82	5	13
Creating space for debate	53	22	25
Promoting British values	50	20	30

70 / **225**

This study interviewed 70 educators alongside an on-line survey of 225 educators.

Community Reporting Thresholds

The first people to suspect someone is involved in planning terrorism will often be those closest to them: friends or family members, who are ideally placed to notice warning signs. Their willingness to share concerns with authorities is thus crucial to terrorism prevention.

However, previously little was known about what reporting suspicions of an 'intimate' meant for them, particularly around approaching the police.

The research

HudCRES researchers Paul Thomas and Shamim Miah addressed this through research with Deakin University, Australia. Funded by the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, they interviewed young adults, community educators and Police officers to investigate whether respondents would report concerns about 'intimates' and what would help them to report. The research findings supported the development of the national 'Act Early' Campaign by Counter Terrorism Policing.

Key findings

From community members:

- Community respondents would report an 'intimate', motivated by care and concern.
- Respondents would go through a 'staged process' of help-seeking from family members or trusted community figures before eventually reporting.
- Respondents wanted to report to police locally, face to face.

From professional practitioners:

- There is a need for stronger partnerships between communities and the authorities.
- There is currently insufficient recognition of the role of communities in safeguarding against radicalisation.
- More policy support is needed for community brokerage models.

Is a good friend coming under a bad influence?

If you're worried that someone you know is being radicalised, visit actearly.uk

ACT | ACTION COUNTERS TERRORISM

" I'd go to the people I know first, maybe talk to the family priest or whoever who'd keep the confidential, go to these ladies here who I know, the social workers, to the ladies who work here. And then take their views, what is happening, they'd actually ask me that question as well, make sure first, a hundred per cent, if we're really sure about something, and then we report it, then they'd help me, wouldn't they? "

(CR09, Muslim female, West Yorkshire)

Find out more about the research

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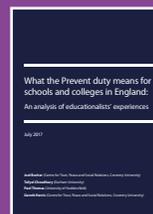
About the researchers :

Professor Paul Thomas is Professor of Youth and Policy. His research focuses on how educators such as youth workers and teachers understand and implement policies around community cohesion and the prevention of extremism.
https://pure.hud.ac.uk/en/persons/paul-thomas

Dr. Shamim Miah is Senior Lecturer in Education. His research is concerned with the framing of race and religion in public policy.

https://pure.hud.ac.uk/en/persons/shamim-miah

What the Prevent duty means for schools and colleges in England: An analysis of educationalists' experiences. (July 2017).

Authors: Joel Busher (Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University), Tufyal Choudhury (Durham University), Paul Thomas (University of Huddersfield), Gareth Harris (Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University)

Community Reporting Thresholds. Sharing information with authorities concerning violent extremist activity and involvement in foreign conflict A UK Replication Study. (2017).

Authors: Paul Thomas (University of Huddersfield, UK), Michele Grossman (Deakin University, Australia), Shamim Miah (University of Huddersfield, UK), Kris Christmann (University of Huddersfield, UK)

Contact us

HudCRES@hud.ac.uk
+44 (0)1484 478249

hud.ac.uk/research/education
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