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Confusion on the Ground?

Prevent in operation

Introduction: Orders from above

In outlining the origins, design and development of the *Prevent* strategy, Chapter 3 highlighted a number of issues and tensions inherent in the approach taken to this ‘hearts and minds’ element of the CONTEST counterterrorism policy. These issues and tensions were apparent in the early days of *Prevent*, and remain alive today, despite significant modifications in the intervening years. Principal among those problematic features, from the perspective of this book, has been the stark contradiction to the overarching policy drive for community cohesion, integration and stronger common identities outlined in Chapter 2, of a *Prevent* policy that has been targeted in a monocultural fashion at Muslims as an undifferentiated, faith-based community understood through only that ‘Muslim’ identity. Chapter 4 analysed the highly negative results of such a misguided approach, suggesting that *Prevent* has inadvertently hardened that singular Muslim identity, both through the monocultural approach mediated via layers of religious, ‘community leaders’ and through the antagonism understandably provoked among many British Muslims at such a blatant focus on one ethnic community at the same time as highly questionable foreign policy interventions in Muslim countries and assaults on civil liberties at home.

As the post-2001 community cohesion analysis highlighted, such monocultural, ethnicity-based policy approaches also inevitably provoke envy and resentment from other ethnic and faith communities. The fact that *Prevent* was jointly operationalised by the security-focused Home Office and the community cohesion-focused DCLG until 2011 only exacerbated that basic tension between monocultural focus on a ‘suspect’ community and community cohesion, between security and surveillance on the one hand and community engagement and development on the other. Arguably, the ‘values-based’ government rhetoric around the need to confront Muslim ‘extremism’, rather than simply ‘violent extremism’, which accompanied the *Prevent* relaunch in June 2011, has only deepened that problematic focus on Muslims as a community and the associated tension between *Prevent* and community cohesion.

Chapter 3 also identified the top-down manner of *Prevent*'s design and execution, with a rapid operationalisation on a demographic basis selected by national government and enforced through the use of government monitoring and evaluation procedures such as 'National Indicator 35' (NI 35) in relation to local authorities. That operationalisation of *Prevent*, principally through local authorities, but also via higher and further education institutions, prisons and YOTs, is the focus of this chapter. The role of the Police and Security Services in *Prevent*, and their centrality to the sustained allegation that *Prevent* has been little more than an elaborate surveillance and intelligence-gathering operation, is explored in more detail in Chapter 6, although this chapter inevitably starts to raise some of those important issues around the relationship between *Prevent* policing and democratically elected local authorities that the subsequent chapter will explore further. In addition, issues already highlighted around the relationship between Muslim communities and arms of the local and national state attempting to implement *Prevent* will be explored further here. In doing this, two important issues need to be borne in mind. The first is that too often generalisations about the state of ethnic relations and experience across Britain have been made on the basis of localised academic study, and that the varied and contingent nature of local ethnic relations needs to be remembered. Second, there is always a significant 'space' between policies identified and funded by national government, and how they are actually implemented on the ground. For instance, there is a significant gap between national political discourse around community cohesion, and how it has actually been understood and practised. The evidence discussed in Chapter 2 on that practice in areas such as Oldham suggests that community cohesion implementation has been both more complex and more progressive than academic analysis of the national policy documentation and discourse suggests. That fact argues for more nuanced understandings of how *Prevent* has actually played out in practice, and this chapter draws on the empirical evidence on *Prevent* practice available, some of it by the author and colleagues, to analyse the experience of *Prevent* in practice.

Local authorities and *Prevent*

Despite the suggestion of Chapter 3 that *Prevent* had been some time in the planning by national government, the initial phase of 'Pathfinder' *Prevent* funding to 70 identified local authorities emerged rapidly, with little time for planning and preparation on behalf of the local authority elected members and officers involved. Husband and Alam (2011), in their thoughtful analysis of the interplay between community cohesion and *Prevent* work by the five West Yorkshire local authorities, talk of 'the indecent speed with which *Prevent*, and

specifically the Pathfinder initiative, were introduced'.¹ That was highlighted in my own evaluation of learning from the initial Pathfinder year of *Prevent* funding in Kirklees, one of those West Yorkshire authorities, with one of the key local authority officers highlighting how short a time span their chief executive was given to react by national government: 'it was pretty late on in the year – very close to the new financial year ... Basically, he said, "we'll need to pull something together very quickly, some kind of proposals, and we'll need to go to DCLG for them to have a look at and for them to approve"' (Local Authority Officer 1). The unrealistic timescale for this initial *Prevent* year ironically meant that many local authorities passed funding to precisely the older, mosque-based 'usual suspects' of traditional Muslim community leaders that the national *Prevent* strategy was keen to avoid, and who the local authorities often privately acknowledged as problematic in terms of moving forward with both the *Prevent* and cohesion agendas.

The initial reaction of local authorities to *Prevent* was largely negative, not only because of the short run-in time but also because they immediately saw it as problematic to the community cohesion agenda that they had already accepted and were attempting to operationalise within their range of services:

[There were] some very crude responses which actually we saw here as doing more damage than good. And therefore we were quite careful distancing the council and other local partners from the national approach to Preventing Violent Extremism ... it was overly focused on particularly young Muslims, which we saw as driving a lot of people deeper into themselves, away from their peers, into a more introverted position, which was damaging to the long-term interests of those individual and society as a whole. (Senior manager, Kirklees Metropolitan Council)²

Chapter 3 outlined national government's position that *Prevent* is of necessity distinct from wider community cohesion policy operations, but from the start the Association of West Yorkshire Authorities struggled to see the distinction. Nevertheless, both West Yorkshire-based evaluations of *Prevent* outlined above identified how local authorities got on with this new challenge, building on their existing work. The very significant pressure from national government to participate and adopt NI 35 meant that there was no practical alternative. NI 35, 'Building Communities Resilient to Violent Extremism', asked local authorities to focus and report progress on the following:

- understanding of and engagement with Muslim communities;
- knowledge and understanding of the drivers and causes of violent extremism and the *Prevent* objectives;
- development of a risk-based preventing violent extremism action plan, in support of delivery of the *Prevent* objectives; and
- effective oversight, delivery and evaluation of projects and actions.³

Whilst some local authorities chose not to adopt NI 35, all were required to report against it. Lowndes and Thorp (2010), in their study of how three different local authorities within one English region approached the initial 'Pathfinder' year of *Prevent*, highlight how one of the three authorities did not adopt NI 35 for 2008/09. They identify positive processes of consultation regionally over the content and focus of NI 35, but 'the final version of the indicator was Home Office-led, and therefore incorporated new elements as well as those discussed at the regional steering group'.⁴ Leicester City Council, in its submission to the CLG Select Committee Inquiry, suggested that *Prevent* should also be measured against NI 12, 'sense of local belonging', which local authorities had primarily been using to measure their progress on community cohesion, but this was not accepted by government, and Lowndes and Thorp identify NI 35 as being used by national government from 2008/09 onwards to produce increasing conformity from local authorities who had shown local creativity in the initial 'Pathfinder' phase. This analysis is supported by Husband and Alam's study of another English region, with them concluding that 'our data shows an inability of central government to yield up this level of local autonomy'.⁵ The decision by the coalition government in June 2011 to remove the local authority-focused DCLG from *Prevent* operation and have all future *Prevent* activity in the new 25 target areas sanctioned and monitored directly by the security-focused Home Office suggests that local autonomy over *Prevent* will reduce further.

Local variations

Notwithstanding the national government pressure via NI 35 for involvement in and conformity around *Prevent*, there have nevertheless been significant variations in how local authorities have actually so far operationalised the programme and how they have actually allocated the *Prevent* funding coming from central government. Chapter 3 highlighted the information on local *Prevent* funding allocations revealed by Freedom of Information requests by campaigners as diverse as the left-leaning IRR and the right-of-centre TPA. Those requests put public pressure on some local authorities, with some, such as the London Borough of Newham, refusing to divulge the detail of their £1.3 million spending. In response to allegations from the TPA of secrecy, Newham, which is generally viewed as having a strong record on community cohesion, commented that 'just as we do not wish to favour single groups through public policy and services, as this can foster mistrust and extremism, we also believe that we need to focus on where extremist views exist, rather than stereotyping people from particular backgrounds'.⁶

Despite substantial initial misgivings around *Prevent*, such as those expressed above by Newham, local authorities have formally cooperated but

in practice have demonstrated a wide range of responses. A small minority, some of which have received very substantial funding, have been vociferous in their support for *Prevent*,⁷ but a large number seem to have subverted the funding to a significant extent: ‘many statutory and community partners have been uncomfortable with direct counter-terrorism work and have sought to employ the funds for other ends.’⁸ An example of this was Bradford, an authority determined that *Prevent* would not negatively impact on community cohesion, as a senior manager explained: ‘we have not even called our funding stream *Prevent*, we’ve called it around capacity building within communities. For both round one and two we’ve actually focused on giving the money to communities.’⁹ The Regional Improvement and Effectiveness Partnership (RIEP) research on the local implementation of community cohesion and *Prevent* in West Yorkshire, carried out by the University of Huddersfield, concluded of Bradford that ‘*Prevent* is seen as a potentially dangerous and inflammatory initiative for the local authority and its partners, so that whilst structures are in place to identify and address issues around violent extremism, other aspects of the *Prevent* agenda have been absorbed into the wider community cohesion one’.¹⁰

With such *Prevent* allocations made by ‘Local Strategic Partnerships’ that bring local authorities and other key public sector bodies together, local approaches have varied significantly. For instance, Dudley council in the West Midlands passed all of their £277,000 *Prevent* allocation directly to the local third sector ‘British Muslim Forum’ for them to commission activities,¹¹ with a similar approach taken in Bolton, Lancashire. Such approaches could be seen as the logical end point of the rationale for *Prevent* described in Chapter 3, whereby Muslim communities should join in partnership with the state and take positions of leadership and responsibility in addressing the threat of violent extremism, but the approach of Dudley and Bolton could also be seen as evidence of local authorities washing their hands of responsibility. A much larger number of local authorities have provided some funding for and work with local Muslim communities, funding that inevitably emphasises the ‘Muslimness’ of community groups, given the monocultural focus of *Prevent*.

The initial ‘Pathfinder’ year in Kirklees, West Yorkshire saw the funding largely utilised by the local authority itself, and only a small number of external organisations involved, an inevitable product of the short time frame for implementation. Local Muslim community groups *did* want to be involved, but this initially raised issues of capacity to deliver, especially if work was to be targeted at young people viewed as being ‘at risk’:

I think we just need to be careful ... because from experience we know there are people who could very effectively deliver on the agenda, but there will be others who are not ready yet – it’s how you build the capacity of those individuals and organisations to be involved in this. (Local Authority Officer 1)

Husband and Alam (2011) suggest that the CTU involvement in, and scrutiny of, local *Prevent* funding bids via local authorities has inevitably influenced those local authorities to play safe in terms of who and what they fund. An approach taken strongly in Kirklees has been one of funding and support by the local authority for capacity building within local Muslim communities. This included committee skills training for mosque committee members, and training and support for people running madrasahs, mosque schools for young people. This training has included child protection, health and safety and committee skills training, as well as how to introduce and use materials on citizenship within the madrasah programmes. That very considerable investment in local mosques and madrasahs was highlighted when some local Muslim community groups criticised the local authority for seemingly not passing on *Prevent* funding. That criticism was partially possible because of the downplaying of the title and source of the *Prevent* funding highlighted in Chapter 3: ‘very quickly we decided that we’d take the word *Prevent* out as quickly as possible because it gives out wrong messages’ (Local Authority Officer 2). The focus on citizenship within Kirklees madrasahs, utilising national citizenship material supported by *Prevent* funding, was mirrored by local *Prevent* work with young people in the community, which focused on ‘active citizenship’. Largely, but not exclusively, targeted at Muslim young people, this work used a variety of activities to engage young people, such as the production of DVDs and radio programmes, and a project on ‘slavery’. As with much of the *Prevent* activity supported by DCLG via local authorities to date, it is not immediately obvious how such work with young people addresses the specific goals of *Prevent*, but such activity builds relationships with young people who might otherwise be isolated and vulnerable within communities, and starts to build skills of democratic engagement and activity: ‘Through the Active Citizenship module, there’s things around looking at the media, how the media portrays this. While there was focus on the extremism side, there were also things about religion and ways of life’ (Local Government Officer 2).

Such work has also been targeted at young people viewed as being at risk of involvement in violent extremism, such as a large group of Muslim young men in one area of Kirklees whose racially based ‘turf war’ with white youth in the area had started to spiral towards more serious and organised levels of both violence and religious/racially based abuse and Internet-based propaganda:

Out of the group of 25 to 30, I think there’s the element of 2 or 3 who are hard core, the rest are like sheep ... we want to help all of them ... even the ones on the fringes who can end up going in the wrong directions. (Local *Prevent* police officer)

Lowndes and Thorp (2010) identify distinct approaches to *Prevent* by each of the three city-based local authorities they studied in one region of England,

so emphasising the importance of the local context and circumstances, and the possibility of constructive practice in the name of *Prevent* at ground level, with their evidence revealing ‘surprisingly creative outcomes, reflecting locally specific and highly dynamic “settlements” between the local state and Muslim communities’.¹² The theme highlighted above of capacity building and coordination within Muslim communities was a key focus here for City A, with the creation of a stronger local Muslim forum being an empowering, Muslim-led process that gave those Muslim communities an important role in the allocation of *Prevent* funds. In contrast, City B’s approach was distinctive within the region for being strongly led by the city council and embedded in a well-established ‘community cohesion’ narrative’,¹³ which Lowndes and Thorpe suggest enabled a gradual sanitisation of the *Prevent* label and encouraged strong Muslim commitment and involvement. That cohesion-based approach involved both work aimed at the identity and self-confidence of Muslim young people, and cross-community work that even involved activities that largely catered for non-Muslims. City C was ‘reluctant to highlight *Prevent* as a discrete policy area’,¹⁴ and did not agree to adopt NI 35, but also had weak and underdeveloped community cohesion activity, so struggled to demonstrate clear progress. However, it did focus heavily on greater uptake by Muslim young people of youth activities offered by the city’s Youth Service, so creating a building block for the future of relationships and engagement.

Not all bad news?

The empirical case study evidence summarised here from both West Yorkshire and the region studied by Lowndes and Thorp on the operationalisation of the early stages of *Prevent* suggests some caution is needed before *Prevent* is condemned. Both case studies identify the strengthening of civil society within Muslim communities through training and professionalisation, alongside the creation of new ‘governance spaces’ of representative organisations within Muslim communities. In their evidence to the CLG Select Committee, the local government think tank the New Local Government Network highlighted that ‘some local authorities are clear that *Prevent* has played a key role as a catalyst for enabling them to engage with communities with which they had no previous contact’,¹⁵ something acknowledged also by both the CLG Select Committee and the June 2011 *Prevent* review. The reality of national funding being available, and the possibility, as highlighted by the case study evidence discussed above, of constructive work with that funding, meant that, in practice, both local authorities and Muslim community groups have largely engaged with *Prevent*. Husband and Alam (2011) identify how, although four of the five West Yorkshire local authorities initially refused to adopt NI 35 and so fully embrace *Prevent*, they all accepted the *Prevent* funding

through until 2011. Similarly, at a time when national government funding for community groups through other funding streams was starting to slow down, ‘participation in *Prevent*-related activity by Muslim organisations has thus to be seen in the context of the changing funding environment’.¹⁶ Indeed, despite the positive connection between *Prevent* and community cohesion in City B reported by Lowndes and Thorp, some Muslim community groups felt that it was inappropriate to use *Prevent* money for wider cohesion activity: ‘This became a source of tension within the co-ordinating body: as one Muslim community representative put it: “hands off – this is Muslim money”’.¹⁷ This local engagement with a source of funding, no matter how controversial, meant that the major revision to the focus of *Prevent* in June 2011, with funding now only targeted at 25 local authorities of communities deemed to be ‘at risk’, received a mixed response from two local authorities in the north of England who were no longer to receive *Prevent* funding:

Mixed views on *Prevent*. It’s obviously good news that we’re not viewed as a high risk area, but there is still work to be done and it would be helpful to have the additional funding to do it with. We’d have been surprised and concerned if we were in the top 25, so on balance I’d prefer to be lower risk with less money. (Local authority officer, Greater Manchester region, June 2011)

I think as an Authority we should be involved; we have done some excellent work in xxxxxx which we can build on. The work that we have done has contributed greatly in involving young people in positive activities and providing safe spaces for debate and discussion. (Local authority officer, Yorkshire and the Humber region, June 2011)¹⁸

Not where we would have started

Such support for a local continuation of *Prevent* funding does not mean that local authorities nationally, or many Muslim community groups, have not continued to have profound doubts about *Prevent* and its lack of congruence with wider policy attempts to encourage greater cohesion and integration. The tensions over funding identified above illustrate the dangers of such a blatantly monocultural policy drive and funding stream. Evidence of a ‘white backlash’ against such *Prevent* funding was highlighted in Kirklees: ‘People have said, “why is it up to us to know more about Muslim and Islam, what about the opposite of that?” ... and we get that feeling a lot in the xxxxxx area, that’s where more conflict happens’ (Local Authority officer 2).

Husband and Alam (2011) report a very similar sentiment being expressed by another local authority manager in West Yorkshire: ‘From the white community there’s a resentment and a perception that resources and attention goes to the Muslim community at the expense of those white communities’.¹⁹ For the New Local Government Network, the operations of *Prevent* and its impact,

as analysed in both Chapters 4 and 6, can undermine cohesion and give hope to those that oppose greater integration: ‘the *Prevent* agenda and community cohesion should support and foster one another. Many in local government fear that this is not currently the case.’²⁰ The CLG Select Committee Inquiry Report echoed such fears, not only calling for greater distinction between *Prevent* and cohesion activity, but for much greater resources and political support for cohesion-based approaches that undermine the appeal of violent extremism based on separate identities. The empirical research into the operationalisation of community cohesion and *Prevent* outlined here clearly shows real progress on the ‘embedding’ and mainstreaming of community cohesion across the functions of local authorities and the desire of local authority staff to work with, and encourage, more complex and intersectional understandings of identity which they see as reflecting reality,²¹ but the inflexible monocultural focus of *Prevent* has been at odds with this.

In contrast, the *Prevent* review of June 2011 criticised the local authority operationalisation of *Prevent* precisely for approaches that ‘encouraged the convergence of *Prevent* and cohesion programmes’.²² For past and present national government, ‘cohesion’ activity is not an effective tool against radicalisation and violent extremism, and ‘as a general rule, the two strategies and programmes must not be merged together’.²³ In fact, the empirical case study material quoted above, and the government’s own audit of local authority activities during the ‘Pathfinder’ phase nationally, has clearly shown that the vast majority of *Prevent* activity has *not* been ‘cohesion’, that is, activity which creates genuine cross-community dialogue and partnership, but rather monocultural Muslim youth activities and community capacity-building initiatives for Muslim community groups only. That is why I have previously suggested that *Prevent* has been ‘between two stools’,²⁴ being neither focused on anti-extremism political education with young Muslims nor meaningful community cohesion work that involves substantial cross-community contact. Here, some local authorities have attempted to use the ‘space’ of local operation to nudge *Prevent* activity towards genuine cohesion, but they have been constrained by central government control via NI 35 monitoring and regional Government Office officials, and by the regional counterterrorism policing infrastructure outlined in Chapter 6, which have all demanded an explicit Muslim focus and engagement with a counterterrorism agenda. That ‘security’ perspective was clearly outlined by a senior police officer in West Yorkshire:

There’s no two ways about it, it [*Prevent*] is part of a counter-terrorism strategy, it’s about hugely violent criminal offences. And that’s what *Prevent* is about and yes, it’s got something to do with cohesion, you can have that debate ... But actually it’s about violent extremism and that’s the most serious crime that this country can encounter which goes way and above community cohesion if that makes sense?²⁵

Lowndes and Thorp (2010) identified a range of local authority responses to the relationship between *Prevent* and community cohesion, something mirrored in West Yorkshire: 'in some authorities, the responsibility for managing *Prevent* and community cohesion was being effectively combined, both departmentally and operationally, while in others they remained distinct entities.'²⁶ Certainly, in Kirklees the original aim was to integrate *Prevent* with cohesion: 'I think they need to be both done; I don't think it can be just one or the other' (Local Authority Officer 1), but later research by the author and University of Huddersfield colleagues into the operationalisation of cohesion and *Prevent* policies in Kirklees and Bradford by local authorities highlighted the problematic impact of *Prevent* on cohesion.²⁷ This research showed that whilst positive work was being done with communities in the names of both cohesion and *Prevent*, the strong pressure downwards from central government to engage with the *Prevent* agenda had had a clear and negative impact on community cohesion. This was not only about the negativity of *Prevent*'s monocultural focus, or its damaging impact on the status of the Muslim community, but rather how it had sidelined developing community cohesion debates and local structures in the rush to respond to the central government diktat over *Prevent*. The University of Huddersfield Regional Improvement and Effectiveness Partnership (RIEP) research found well-developed and constructive local *Prevent* structures, the so-called 'Gold', 'Silver' and 'Bronze' multiagency coordination groups:

The structures supporting Prevent are in place in Kirklees, including the Gold and Silver groups (Gold provides strategic direction and overview and has senior representation from all statutory stakeholders and Silver provides implementation), a Prevent Round Table and Reference Group, intelligence sharing mechanisms which enable a quick response to incidents, work with the Counter-Terrorism Unit, the Channel process, and the informal reference to NI 35.²⁸

However, the research could find less evidence of clear cohesion structures and process, suggesting that *Prevent* has 'crowded out' the development of creative cohesion practice at a local level. This implication is supported by Husband and Alam's research across the five West Yorkshire local authorities: 'the data provides substantive support for the concerns that have been expressed elsewhere regarding the damaging impact of *Prevent* on community cohesion initiatives.'²⁹

The national government pressure to avoid genuine cohesion activity under the name of *Prevent* has produced programmes of activities nationally that have neither been cross-ethnic cohesion work nor educational activity clearly focused on the risks of violent extremism. The latter failing has been because of the basic tensions first identified in Chapter 3 as to what *Prevent* both wants to achieve and is actually capable of achieving, alongside questions of the training, confidence and clarity of professional practitioners asked to implement *Prevent* work with young people and communities.

Professionals in the spotlight?

A key issue here has been the skills and confidence of the practitioners on the ground actually charged with operationalising *Prevent* in their work with Muslim young people and their communities. Chapter 4 highlighted how previous attempts to promote anti-racist thinking and behaviour among white young people attracted towards racism and acts of racial violence often foundered in the past on the lack of confidence and clarity among teachers and youth workers as to what they were actually being asked to do. There is significant evidence that a similar process of professional hesitation and ‘avoidance’ has been underway within local authority *Prevent* activity and that this is a significant part of why *Prevent* activities have at times appeared bland and ‘safe’. This was highlighted in the ‘Pathfinder’ phase of activity in Kirklees, West Yorkshire: ‘The problem is we don’t have people who are experienced enough and who have understanding around this kind of agenda, that they [young people] can actually debate with confidently’ (Local Authority Officer 1).

Given that a genuine engagement with young people around the threat of violent extremism could well involve robust discussion around highly contentious political issues such as Israel/Palestine, British foreign policy and Islamic theological interpretation, all in a climate where the media and politicians are eager to seize on signs of ‘extremism’, such practitioner lack of confidence is highly understandable. The University of Huddersfield RIEP research into how Kirklees and Bradford local authorities had implemented cohesion and *Prevent* clearly identified that local authority staff, and staff in partner agencies, wanted more training, ‘safe spaces’ to discuss these difficult issues, on both *Prevent* and the equally complex issues of cohesion.³⁰ The need for training programmes that help practitioners feel clear and confident in taking on ‘hearts and minds’ work with young people around violent extremism was highlighted to the CLG Select Committee Inquiry by the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP). The UKYP had previously run the innovative, *Prevent*-funded ‘Project Safe Space’ highlighted in Chapter 4, and this experience had indicated an urgent need to upskill youth workers on this issue. However, UKYP’s application to run a national programme of youth worker training around the content and approaches of *Prevent* educational work had not been accepted by government.³¹ It is also clear that *Prevent* has had highly problematic impacts on Muslim-origin staff working for local authorities and other organisations implementing *Prevent*. It has already been acknowledged above that *Prevent* has facilitated the building of stronger relationships between local authorities and their Muslim communities in many areas of the country, but in the process of building such relationships, local authorities have often relied heavily on the knowledge, or even the personal standing and contacts, of their Muslim staff. Husband and Alam’s study in West Yorkshire identifies ‘a strong assertion of ignorance about

the local Muslim communities within the local authority that resulted in a dependency on their Muslim colleagues to work with those communities'.³² Not only does such a role expose Muslim professional to pressure from two sides, from employer and local communities, but it also emphasises their 'Muslimness', rather than their more generic professional skills and experience. Beyond this, such an exposed role has put Muslim professionals working in both the local authority and voluntary sectors in the spotlight of the Police and Security Services, with Husband and Alam (2011) reporting a resulting 'chilling affect' of Muslim professionals being very reluctant to take any risks in relation to *Prevent* activity for fear of being scrutinised over their political and religious attitudes and positions. Chapter 6 highlights how such a position is very understandable, given the documented cases of scrutiny of professionals such as youth workers by CTU Police and Security Service officers.

Summing up: Local authorities in a bind?

The result of much of the *Prevent* activity via local authorities to date, as discussed above, has usually been positive and diversionary youth activities for Muslim young people only, activities that are well meaning but neither good cohesion work or genuinely focused on the issues and drivers central to violent extremism.³³ The Association of Police Authorities (APA) (2009) commented in its evidence to the CLG Select Committee Inquiry that 'many Police Authorities question whether, in practice, there is any real difference between *Prevent* and community cohesion'. The problem here, though, has been that this activity is monocultural and so ineffective in terms of cohesion, just as it has had little demonstrable focus on factors and issues likely to lead some individuals towards violent extremism. For APA, the solution was a tighter focus on Muslim 'extremism', with some evidence from 2009 onwards that police influence was being used to block *Prevent* support for more general youth activities.³⁴

What that pre-coalition government reality on the ground exposed, as highlighted by the CLG Select Committee Inquiry, was the biggest tension within *Prevent* – the conflict between the two national government departments delivering *Prevent*, DCLG and the Home Office. Each department contributed some of the overall 2007–11 budget, with DCLG 'owning' some of the *Prevent* strategy objectives, whilst OSCT/Home Office 'owning' the others.³⁵ It is clear that the operationalisation of *Prevent* was built on real interdepartmental tensions over purpose and priority, as identified by the Local Government Association: 'Tension between OSCT and CLG on the nature of the focus of *Prevent*, and the activity which should flow from that, can be a problem at times',³⁶ with lack of consistency identified as a result. It is clear that a 'turf

war', something far from new in the history of counterterrorism policies,³⁷ has been taking place, based on significantly different views of effective ways forward, as the CLG Select Committee Inquiry process exposed:

We in local government support John Denham's view of *Prevent* as distinct but necessarily situated within the broader context of community cohesion and equalities ... Police and the security services will necessarily see things from a different perspective ... these messages need to be properly aligned across government.³⁸

From this perspective, the very limited and nuanced changes in *Prevent*³⁹ and the associated launch of the Connecting Communities Fund made in 2009 can actually be understood as hard-won concessions in the right direction by a minister with a clear track record of support for community cohesion,⁴⁰ and the Inquiry by the CLG Select Committee as an attempt to bolster and support those moves, whilst the Home Office 'arm' of *Prevent* demanded more robust scrutiny and surveillance of, and judgements on, Muslim communities and organisations. This suggests that *Prevent*, as it stood prior to the 2010 General Election, had few friends even within government, with both DCLG and the Home Office profoundly dissatisfied with it, but for very different reasons, so introducing instability in local policy design and delivery. That instability has been subsequently addressed by the June 2011 review of *Prevent*, which cut DCLG out of the picture and so apparently created a greater demarcation between *Prevent* and cohesion. However, *Prevent* activity will still take place locally via local authorities but be directly controlled and funded by the Home Office/OSCT. Arguably, this is actually a recipe for a sharper clash over exactly what *Prevent* is about, how it impacts on DCLG-led cohesion work and what it can realistically expect to achieve.

Extremists on campus?

The very significant focus on further and higher education institutions within *Prevent* is unsurprising, given what Chapter 1 suggested about both the nature of the ideology of violent extremism and the backgrounds of many of the people attracted towards it. That chapter highlighted Roy's (2004) assertion that Islamism, and the radical or even extreme versions that it takes for a minority, is a very modern phenomenon, a result of, and a response to, globalisation. Roy suggests that radical Islamism is closer to Leninism than religion, both in its essentially political analysis and in its revolutionary vanguardist approach to political mobilisation. Social movement theory clearly shows the importance of universities, and radicalised young intellectuals, to the growth of radical political movements, and many British radical Islamists have both been well-educated and had previous involvement in left-wing and anti-racist political

movements. This leads to a surprising consensus across the political spectrum about the importance of universities to the threat of violent extremism, with right-wing columnist Melanie Phillips suggesting that 'British Universities have been exceptionally important breeding grounds for Islamist radicalism'⁴¹ and left-of-centre writer Kenan Malik asserting that 'it is not Mosques but Universities that provide the real recruiting ground for Islamists'.⁴²

There is some strong evidence to support this, with the BBC highlighting in 2010 that six different members of University Islamic Student Societies in Britain had been convicted of terrorist offences.⁴³ These included some of the 'Crevice' plotters who made plans whilst students at Brunel University in west London. In addition, 7/7 bomber Shezad Tanweer was studying at Leeds Metropolitan University, whilst Roshonara Choudhry, who stabbed MP Stephen Timms in 2010, was coming to the end of her undergraduate degree course. The incident which highlighted the link between universities and violent extremism more than any other was the so-called 'underpants' bomber, Farouk Abdulmutallab, who attempted to explode a bomb on a plane about to land in the United States in December 2009. The Nigerian Abdulmutallab was a previous president of the Islamic Students Society at University College London (UCL) and was not the first Islamist terrorist to have links to UCL. This prompted UCL to establish an independent Inquiry, and the umbrella body Universities UK to set up its own working party.⁴⁴

The *Prevent* review of June 2011 highlighted the importance of higher education, saying that 'more than 30% of people convicted for Al-Qaeda-associated terrorist offences in the UK between 1999 and 2009 are known to have attended University or a higher education institution'.⁴⁵ However, such a proportion is fairly consistent with the number of British young people who now experience higher education. Universities UK suggest that this expansion towards a mass higher education system is not just about size, but has fundamentally altered the student experience, as many students now live at home, and some study part-time, so significantly reducing the distinction physically and culturally between 'university' and 'society'. Jason Burke (2008) believes that the university link is overplayed, with only a proportion of violent extremists having experienced higher education and a number of those dropping out before completion.

Nevertheless, it is clear that further and higher education campuses have been important sites for Islamist radical activity and recruitment in Britain. Shiraz Maher, a former HUT leader, was recruited whilst a student at Leeds University and now regards HUT and similar Islamist groups as 'gateway organisations', which can provide the environment that encourages some individuals to move further towards violent extremism.⁴⁶ Certainly, a number of violent extremists, including the two young Muslims from Derby who carried out suicide attacks in Israel, and Mohammad Sidique Khan, were associated with Omar Bakhri's Al-Mahajiroun organisation. Ed Husain, a former HUT

activist and now head of anti-extremism think tank the Quilliam Foundation, describes how such Islamist political organisations were easily able to operate and recruit on further and higher education campuses in London and across Britain during the 1990s, sometimes using Islamic Student Society or religious study group labels as a front. Arguably, such Islamists have still been operating with impunity at universities much more recently, with a BBC Radio documentary highlighting a meeting that took place at UCL in December 2009, chaired by key Islamist extremist Anjem Choudary, and conducting a speech via live video feed, by Omar Bakhri, who was then banned from the United Kingdom.⁴⁷ Such activity, often centring on visiting extremist speakers and preachers invited to universities by Islamic Students Societies, had prompted the 2005 report *When Students Turn to Terror: Terrorist and Extremist Activity on British Campuses*, published by the right-wing Social Affairs Unit and written by Professor Anthony Glees of the private Buckingham University. Glees alleged that terrorist recruitment and organisation, ‘subversion’ of the British state and society, was taking place on university campuses, with academic authorities turning a blind eye. Glees expanded on these allegations in evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Homeland Security in February 2010, saying that ‘some universities and colleges have become sites where extremist views and radicalisation can flourish beyond the sight of academic’⁴⁸ and suggesting that this was possible because the Security Services had lost interest in ‘subversion’ following the collapse of communism. Glees’ evidence for these allegations appears to be that some radical Islamist political groups, such as HUT, have carried out political activity at universities and that some individual terrorists have previously been university students but, as Chapter 1 highlighted, even being a member of a radical Islamist political group such as HUT is *not* predictive of later involvement in violent extremism. Rather than evidence of causal links, such perspectives can instead appear to be crude political generalisations, as shown by the perspective Glees offers on student Islamic activity: ‘I argue that particularly in the case of many student Islamic societies, they are actually mirrors, duplicates of existing student views, so Muslim students are encouraged to regard themselves as different’,⁴⁹ with the clear suggestion that this is the start of the ‘conveyor belt’ towards violent extremism.

Such concerns and allegations have shaped the debates, and arguably actions, around *Prevent* activity and further and higher education. Universities UK convened a working group in the wake of the ‘underpants’ bomber to examine these issues and their implications for the higher education sector. Their resulting report highlighted the fact that UCL’s own Inquiry had found no evidence of Abdulmutallab being radicalised whilst studying engineering at UCL. For Universities UK, it was clear that universities should take action against anyone advocating violent extremism, and should control any visiting speakers, but that ‘it is emphatically not their function to impede the exercise

of fundamental freedoms, in particular freedom of speech, through additional censorship, surveillance or invasion of privacy',⁵⁰ and radical views should be engaged and debated with, not banned. They accepted the need to identify vulnerable individuals, but stressed that radicalisation, by its very nature, takes place away from 'official' view. For the coalition government, this very highlighting of academic freedom was evidence of a lack of seriousness about the threat of violent extremism, with the government's security and terrorism watchdog Lord Carlile calling it 'weak' and detecting 'a total failure to deal with how to identify and handle individuals who might be suspected of radicalising or radicalised whilst within the university ... The universities have to get over their reluctance to be prepared to look at the issue of radicalisation'.⁵¹ This perspective featured strongly in the *Prevent* review of June 2011, which criticised some universities for failing to engage in *Prevent*. As with much of the broader 'values-based' review of *Prevent*, this claim seemed to be unevidenced. Universities UK's own survey showed 'extensive engagement with *Prevent*: two thirds of universities indicated that their institution had engaged, and several expressed a wish to do more so'.⁵² Just over half those universities surveyed had regular contact with *Prevent* police officers, around half with Special Branch, and a quarter were in regular contact with the Security Services. Even allowing for the very substantial growth in student numbers generally, and numbers of international students in particular, this represents a very significant engagement by universities with the policing side of *Prevent*.

This engagement was facilitated by guidance from the government to all further and higher educational institutions⁵³ and by funding to 40 universities to develop their *Prevent* work in conjunction with key partners such as the police and local authorities. These 40 universities were apparently selected not on the number of Muslim students they had, or on an 'intelligence/risk' basis, but on whether they were sited within local authorities selected for *Prevent* funding on a demographic basis. This meant that Durham University, for example, was not included, although it had an active HUT group over a number of years. Government claims in advance of the June 2011 *Prevent* review that '40 universities' were being complacent about *Prevent* seemed to simply refer to those that had received funding, but caused considerable alarm at those funded institutions over whether they were to be publicly 'named and shamed', even though they had engaged constructively in the *Prevent* agenda. That engagement for universities in one region of the north of England has included regular meetings across the whole region, and sub-regional meetings including the universities with substantial numbers of Muslim students. Such regional meetings have highlighted considerable variations in understanding over the nature and level of the threat of violent extremism, with universities that have a more 'traditional' student cohort of young, largely white, people living away from home less clear on how the *Prevent* agenda relates to them, so partially explaining government's frustration. For universities, the liaison with

CTU/police that *Prevent* requires is *not* a new requirement, as they already have close and largely positive working relationships with local and regional police, including over serious criminal issues that inevitably arise around large and complex student communities. For universities, 'violent extremism' can involve animal liberation violence, or far-right political activity, as much as Islamist extremism, and both university officials and Muslim student activists questioned at one northern university were very positive about efforts by the past Labour government to encourage and provide funding for community cohesion and 'good campus relations' initiatives.

Two specific issues in relation to *Prevent* and universities arguably show the political influence of Anthony Glee and other right-wing think tanks. One is the overt criticism by the government's June 2011 *Prevent* review of FOSIS, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies, which acts as the umbrella body for the varied Muslim student societies at different British universities: 'we judge that FOSIS has not always fully challenged terrorist and extremist ideology within the further and higher education sectors.'⁵⁴ Yet, just months before, in March 2011, FOSIS had held a national conference on campus extremism, attended by the Association of Chief Police Officers!⁵⁵ Whilst local experiences of an umbrella body such as FOSIS are inevitably mixed, there is evidence of local University Islamic Student Societies playing very positive and constructive roles, both in terms of organising Muslim students and in contributing to wider processes of democracy and cohesion. At one university in the north of England, the Islamic Student Society has played the role of both carefully 'vetting' any visiting preachers and speakers, and negotiating constructively with the university authorities over the appointment of a Muslim chaplain to the institution. Strong involvement in the wider Student's Union led to members of the Society taking up sabbatical positions through electoral support from students of all backgrounds, and to involvement in national student affairs that entailed working with students from a variety of backgrounds and political positions.

Another problematic issue is the theory and reality of academic freedom in relation to *Prevent*. Higher education is clearly about academic investigation, sometimes of highly sensitive and contentious social and political issues, by both academic staff and students. The Universities UK report highlighted the issues this raises about researchers using the Internet to search material that may be viewed as connected to violent extremism for the purposes of academic study, and how this should be handled. Many universities now have protocols for such searches to ensure that if the Security Services follow up on a 'flagged' Internet search, there is a clear and justified audit trail of knowledge and agreement. The dangers of not having such agreed and understood procedures have been shown by an ongoing issue at the University of Nottingham. This followed the May 2008 arrests by counterterrorism police officers of Nottingham research student Rizwaan Sabir, and of Hicham Yezza, who worked as a staff member

at the University's School of Modern Languages. Sabir had downloaded an Al-Qaeda manual as part of research for a dissertation and had sought Yezza's help in drafting a PhD proposal because of his position as the editor of *Ceasefire*, a political magazine. Despite the fact that the manual was apparently available in the University library, and can certainly be purchased via Amazon, the University authorities alerted the police, and the two were arrested, only being released without charge after six days. Dr Rod Thornton, a senior lecturer at the University, remains suspended after criticising the University for its treatment of the two men, and University documents released under the Freedom of Information guidelines show that University of Nottingham staff were routinely logging and filming Middle East-related political activity on the campus. The University's response is that political activity of all types on campus is monitored that way.⁵⁶ What this does show is both the problematic interface of academic study and counterterrorism policing, and how it may well be encouraging staff within institutions to take on questionable roles and positions in relation to counterterrorism.

Prisons and young offenders

Just as universities have undoubtedly been a site of Islamist radicalisation, so have prisons and YOIs, as Chapter 1 highlighted. For that reason, prisoners and young offenders at risk of incarceration have been a key target for *Prevent* activity, especially as 79 Islamist terrorists were in the British prison system as of June 2011, plus others convicted for non-terrorist-related offences. This was re-emphasised by the June 2011 *Prevent* review, which also highlighted the links between *Prevent* activity in prisons and the community by saying that 'over the next four years, 34 terrorism-related prisoners may reach their release dates'.⁵⁷ In line with the demographic and economic profiles of their communities, the number of Muslim prisoners has been growing steadily, but the government is aware of the danger of seeing all Muslim prisoners as potential radicals, meaning that 'careful judgments are therefore required to accurately assess the extent of radicalisation in prisons'.⁵⁸ A key part of *Prevent* activity in prisons has been the leadership of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) on staff awareness training to spot and combat radicalisation, and the development of reporting and referral systems when there is potential radicalisation of a prisoner or young offender. This has been built around a risk and protection framework, involving risk assessment and early intervention when required, sometimes through the significantly developed network of Prison Visiting Imams. A particular concern here has been individuals converting to Islam, and immediately embracing radical versions of it, while in gaol, with overcrowding and lack of staff awareness enabling radicals to spread their influence: 'The Prison Officers Association

has repeatedly raised concerns over the radicalisation and recruitment of such young “vulnerable” Muslim prisoners.⁵⁹ However, assessing what conversions represent is complicated by wider dynamics of prison life, as Chapter 1 highlighted: ‘there has been something of a moral panic about individuals converting to Islam whilst incarcerated.’⁶⁰ In keeping with local authority-based work, there has been real concern among criminal justice practitioners within prisons as to whether they are suitably trained for any interventions around radicalisation.

Such concerns have been heightened by the suggestion that there should be ‘de-radicalisation’ programmes within prisons. The need for such work has been shown by research around violent Islamist extremists imprisoned in Spain and the United Kingdom, which suggests that such jihadis remain a real threat to society even after conviction: ‘violent jihadists are involved in a network which has demonstrated the capability for “organisational learning”.’⁶¹ That research makes parallels with how terrorist prisoners from organisations like the IRA and ETA formed military structures and training programmes within prisons, and identifies distinct roles within personnel committed to violent extremism. Those roles include ‘strategists’, who see time in prison as a good chance to recruit, plan and train ‘team leaders’, who will then take on the leadership of specific terrorist ventures. Warnes and Hannah (2008) argue that Sidique Khan was a good example of such a ‘team leader’.

Programmes of de-radicalisation have had some success with radical Islamist extremist prisoners in other countries, notably Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In Egypt, processes of political rethinking and moving away from Islamist violent extremism among prisoners were led by ex-jihadi leaders who had renounced violence. This involved seminars and discussion, with the approach adapted by Saudi Arabia to encompass psychological profiling, Islamic teachings to highlight the un-Islamic nature of violence, and diversionary sports programmes. However, it is difficult to see how such programmes could easily transfer to the British environment. First, Britain only has relatively small numbers both of imprisoned jihadists and of imams trained and experienced enough to combat overt attempts at radicalisation. Second, the Islamists in Egypt who have been successfully de-radicalised were part of a conventional, hierarchically organised political movement with command structures making it much more akin to the IRA, than to small-cell-based ‘leaderless jihad’ of Western Islamist violent extremism – which figures of credibility and authority among Islamist extremists would lead such a process in Western countries? Nevertheless, NOMS has been developing a number of different educational programmes around radicalisation, one of which is ‘specifically targeted at beliefs and ideology related to Al-Qaeda. Following assessment, national implementation is planned in 2012’.⁶²

How *Prevent* should approach young offenders in the community through the network of local YOTs has been even more problematic, given that few,

if any, young offenders are likely to be referred to YOTs for involvement in violent extremist activity, as numbers associated with such plots are small, and the offences involved so serious. The YJB secured £8.3 million from OSCT in 2007 for *Prevent* work with young offenders, with the following main aims:

- national training and support for youth justice staff to counter violent extremism;
- expansion of existing programmes for vulnerable young people in communities where extreme views are prevalent;
- undertaking initiatives in secure establishments for young people at risk of extremism;
- initiating new schemes to develop an evidence base of ‘what works’ in preventing violent extremism among young people.

The OSCT had identified 53 YOTs and YOIs as being at the highest risk of violent extremism, presumably on the same geographical location basis by which the 40 funded universities were identified. These YOTs were ‘invited’ to bid, but in practice had already been selected by OSCT, who exercised considerable oversight in relation to the design and content of local activity. As with *Prevent* funding for local authorities, this stream of funding emerged quickly, and many YOTs took a considerable length of time to start their funded *Prevent*-funded activity. The YJB commissioned the University of Huddersfield to evaluate its *Prevent* programme through a process of interview-based case studies and documentary analysis, and the initial findings of that research were highlighted by government in its review of *Prevent* published in June 2011, which commented, ‘The University of Huddersfield have noted that all of the projects found it difficult to measure impact ... Many of the problems identified by the University of Huddersfield could have been overcome with greater clarity from the outset.’⁶³ As a result of this emerging evaluation picture, the OSCT ceased funding for 33 YOTs and YOIs in October 2010, and asked the remaining 20 to focus more directly on de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation activity, requiring them to refer more effectively to the Channel process, discussed further in Chapter 6, and advocating further training for front-line staff to help them do this.

It is clear from this emerging picture that *Prevent* work via YOTs had very similar problems to that funded via local authorities in relation to purpose, effectiveness and practitioner confidence: ‘there was a perceived lack of clarity of what was needed and a strong emphasis on cohesion or integration-type work.’⁶⁴ Some of this work seems to have been with young people in the community with no offending background at all or with young people of all ethnic/faith backgrounds around issues of racism, identity and violence – good generic youth work, but a significant distance from the supposed aims

of *Prevent*, as government noted itself: 'In common with many other areas of work, we consider that OSCT should have provided greater clarity on what was required from the outset from the YJB interventions and exercised greater and more consistent levels of oversight and monitoring.'⁶⁵ Similar issues were identified in a more localised evaluation of the *Prevent* activity by the 10 YOTs in the Greater Manchester area conducted by the Greater Manchester Youth Justice Trust. It was clear that these Youth Offending Services (YOS) in the Greater Manchester area had used *Prevent* funding to develop a variety of positive activities and interventions with young people, and developed greater understanding of the issues around violent extremism, but the evaluation concluded that

Prevent is an uncomfortable companion to the YOT/YOS in Greater Manchester. Whilst it is accepted that involvement in criminal activity is one of many causes (or indeed a result) of certain vulnerabilities, it does not follow as neatly as suggested by this funding stream, that this will lead to extremism ... it is not possible to ascertain to any degree how many young people have been diverted from adoption of extreme attitudes or behaviour through the effects of the projects.⁶⁶

The lack of distinction between community cohesion and what *Prevent* can be in practice was an issue for youth justice practitioners in Greater Manchester, as it has been for many local authority practitioners: 'Respondents are unsure of the stated delineation between PVE and community cohesion as set out by the DCLG. Many see their work as a cohesive intervention that may have a preventative impact on violent extremism, should it be there. Projects have struggled to clearly identify a target group for PVE work for this reason.'⁶⁷

Conclusion: Local complexity

This chapter has drawn on a range of empirical data around the actual implementation and experience of *Prevent* activity on the ground to help make sense of what such activity looks and feels like in practice. The chapter started by advising caution over generalisations around the reality of any governmental policy programme, with both local variations, and the ability of local policy makers and practitioners to exploit 'space' within national agendas, both contributing to a more nuanced picture than some critics of *Prevent* would suggest. It is clear here, as should be expected with such a significant public spending commitment, that some positive things have been achieved, and the chapter has attempted to highlight some of those. For instance, there have been significant programmes of engagement with Muslim young people, some of them not previously engaging in positive work, offering both diversionary and educational activities, and personal development in the broader sense of

‘citizenship education’. *Prevent* funding has also enabled stronger relationships between local authorities and other public sector organisations with Muslim communities, and support for stronger civil society activity within those Muslim communities, alongside greater awareness among practitioners of issues around violent extremism. However, there is significant evidence that local ‘space’ to shape and determine the content and style of *Prevent* delivery has been steadily squeezed from 2008 onwards, as national government monitoring through tools such as N1 35 and control through the very active involvement, and even leadership, of the Police and Security Services in local *Prevent* structures and decision-making has tightened. This was re-emphasised by the *Prevent* review of June 2011, which cut DCLG out of *Prevent* and made OSCT/Home Office directly responsible for the granting and monitoring of *all* local *Prevent* activity. This is in stark contrast to the anti-violent extremism policy approach adopted by the Netherlands, where local mayors have been given a great deal of control over how work against radicalisation and violent extremism is approached. That Dutch approach is supported by the international evidence available, which suggests that effective anti-radicalisation and anti-extremism initiatives have to be locally determined and managed to engage effectively with the specificities and dynamics of local communities.⁶⁸

In addition, a consistent theme throughout this discussion of local authorities, universities, and the criminal justice field has been the lack of distinction, from the practitioner perspective, between any meaningful anti-violent extremism programme and community cohesion, and the consequent damage that *Prevent* is perceived to be doing to community cohesion through its insistence on monocultural work with Muslim communities that is kept firmly apart from community cohesion activity, something that the coalition government’s new direction for *Prevent* is likely to actually exacerbate through its overt OSCT/Home Office direction from above. The other damaging impact of *Prevent* is the persistent allegation and feeling from practitioners, and the communities they work with, that *Prevent* is actually a Police/Security Service-led surveillance and intelligence-gathering programme above all, and it this issue which is explored in Chapter 6.