Prevent duty, safeguarding and agency

The impact of the statutory Prevent duty on enacting professional groups

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Executive summary

The statutory Prevent duty is an integral part of the UK counter-terrorism strategy. Its introduction has had an impact on an uneven landscape of professional groups from different sectors, working within their own framework of concepts and standards. This report focuses on the challenges and concerns that professionals encounter when enacting the Prevent duty.

While empirical evidence indicates that, by and large, professionals have come to terms with Prevent duty, a review of research studies and other sources shows a number of gaps and open questions. Professional bodies have rarely issued detailed statements or positions regarding Prevent. Research has strongly focused on the educational sector, with far fewer studies on local authorities and healthcare, and a marked scarcity of evidence, at least in the form of dedicated studies, from the Police and the Prison and Probation Service.

A key concept that determines how professionals approach and implement Prevent duty is safeguarding. Differences between sectors follow differences in a definition and understanding of safeguarding, for example when comparing Education and Healthcare, and broader definitions make it easier to integrate the requirements of Prevent with existing practice.

The enactment of Prevent duty happens to a large extent independent of professionals' understanding of radicalisation and terrorism and other key concepts. Compliance with Prevent in the absence of such understanding depends instead on a more general understanding of safeguarding. Staff training seems to have only limited effect on this.

A sense of agency, especially in Education, is therefore derived from the professional confidence to ensure safeguarding and not from expert knowledge and training relating to radicalisation specifically. Any effects of increasing staff understanding of such issues, for

example in the type and volume of referrals under Prevent, are to date under-researched and unclear.

Despite an ideologically neutral orientation of the Prevent framework, in terms of official wording and general presentation, a main concern among educators is that of discrimination against Muslims. In contrast, there are no clearly formulated perceptions of extremist right-wing activity captured by research in the education sector.

Other issues of relevance, such as reconciliation of Prevent with Freedom of Speech in Higher Education, have not to date led to clearer guidance or significant data-driven research. Similarly, Prevent duty can only partially address online engagement and online influences, the most dominant forms of information exchange in radicalisation processes.

Summary of policy and practice recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, we make seven recommendations:

1. Profession-specific briefings and training materials should be created to ensure that the Prevent duty aligns with sector-specific ways of work. Particular consideration should be given to working definitions and practitioner understanding of safeguarding and agency.

2. Further professional alignment of the Prevent duty should be undertaken if/when it is expanded to other sectors ensuring training and support build on the professional practice of that sector.

3. Create bespoke discussion spaces to allow for an understanding of radicalisation and related concepts, such as extremism and terrorism, to develop. This may mean a shift away from overly neutral and depoliticised concepts of radicalisation and extremism. This can take the form of expert professional panels sponsored by the Home Office and hosted within professional bodies, to strengthen the integration of Prevent duty into professional standards and guidelines.

4. Both Islamist fundamentalist and extremist right-wing parties need clearer description and definition for professionals to operate with. Embrace societal asymmetries in how extremist ideological orientations are represented and acknowledge the perceived imbalance between these two main ideological sources of radicalisation.

5. Bring together a working group to explore the messages and interpretations surrounding the Prevent duty that contribute to a high and unfocused volume of referrals. In Education, the sector with highest numbers of referrals, particular challenges to consider are the broadly defined concept of safeguarding and an established "better safe than sorry" approach that does not focus on radicalisation only.

6. For the enactment of the Prevent duty, guidance, training and discourse need to acknowledge gaps, or grey areas, clearly where they exist, to empower professionals to exercise their own judgment on specific topics, for example Freedom of Speech and Prevent in Higher Education.

7. Develop training content that directly addresses signs of online radicalisation and the potential observable indicators of it in professional settings. To this end, media literacy tools can be used to increase both knowledge and skills among professionals.

Introduction and context

Prevent is one of the four main work streams of the current UK counter
-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, and designated as the stream "to stop
people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism" (Home Office
2023). Prevent was first implemented in 2011. In 2015, under the
Counter-Terrorism & Security Act, Government made significant
changes to Prevent and the new statutory duty was created focussing
on the five sectors of education, health, local authorities, police and
criminal justice agencies (Allen 2017; Home Office 2023). A core aim of
Prevent is to refer at-risk individuals through a process known as
Channel, for further scrutiny and intervention where necessary. This
report will focus on the impact of Prevent duty on professional groups
and how this statutory duty has been understood and implemented by
these groups.

To this end, it is important to recognise the ongoing evolution of
Prevent duty and the current context. Prevent has often been criticised
across the public sphere in the UK. Concerns include its perceived
incompatibility with basic human rights (Amnesty 2023), its
disproportionate impact on Muslim communities, and the 'pre-criminal
space' the policy inhabits in sectors such as education and healthcare
(Ghaemmaghami & Jabbar 2023). In response to criticism and to
evaluate the effectiveness of the Prevent program, the UK Government
commissioned an independent review, published as the Shawcross
Report (Shawcross 2023). The report recommended substantial
changes to Prevent in the form of a total of 34 recommendations.

Government has accepted all of the recommendations and has in
February 2024 published an interim report on progress with
implementation (Home Office 2024). Further, 2024 has also seen a new
definition of extremism unveiled by Government in order to
strengthen their approach to counter extremism in the wake of
"increased extremist threat since October 7 terror attacks in
Israel" (HM Government 2024).

It is worthy of note that recent developments and changes have done
little to alleviate some of the public concerns, especially from a human

rights perspective. Controversies remain over the appointment of William Shawcross as independent reviewer, a general shift of focus from far-right to Islamist fundamentalist forms of extremism and, specifically, a call for a stronger response to non-violent Islamist fundamentalist extremism (Amnesty International UK 2023).

This report will focus on the five professional groups that were outlined above and how statutory Prevent duty has been understood and implemented by these groups. It will consider firstly the guidance provided by the Home Office as to what Prevent duty entails for each sector, before discussing key points from the 2024 interim report. The report will then briefly discuss what positions have been taken by regulatory bodies in each professional sector, before outlining the academic research that has been conducted since 2015 with these professional groups. It will discuss the embedding of Prevent within a safeguarding framework, implications of a 'better safe than sorry' approach, the persistent lack of understanding where radicalisation and terrorism are concerned and notions of agency within the Education sector.

Prevent duty guidance

The role of the statutory Government guidance on Prevent duty for professional groups has been summarised as follows:

The Prevent duty requires specified authorities such as education, health, local authorities, police and criminal justice agencies (prisons and probation) to help prevent the risk of people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. It sits alongside long-established safeguarding duties on professionals to protect people from a range of other harms, such as substance abuse, involvement in gangs, and physical and sexual exploitation... The duty helps to ensure that people who are susceptible to radicalisation are supported as they would be under safeguarding processes. (Home Office 2023)

This section will outline some of the key points from this statutory guidance in its current form (Home Office 2023) that are specific to each professional group.

Local Authorities

Prevent duty for local authorities applies to child and adult social workers, family workers, early help workers, youth workers and support workers. These frontline staff are expected to complete government Prevent duty training while those with specific Prevent responsibilities are expected to complete ideology training. Frontline staff are further expected to be able to make a Prevent referral within the local authority or to police, if severe.

Each year, the Home Office undertakes a prioritisation exercise to review the relative threat across the country, and this has implications for additional funds allocated to some counties and city boroughs. Areas receiving additional funding will have a Prevent team which includes a Prevent co-ordinator, supported by additional staff, as required. Areas which do not receive dedicated Prevent funding should have a Prevent lead embedded in a relevant team within the local authority that carries out similar functions.

Education

Prevent duty applies to educators from primary through to higher education. Educators are often in a unique position, through interacting with learners on a regular basis, to be able to identify concerning behaviour changes that may indicate susceptibility to radicalisation. Additional challenges, however, arise from this position.

Children and young people continue to make up a significant proportion of Channel cases, and in recent years there have been concerns regarding increased numbers of learners being arrested for terrorism-related offences. For instance, as many as 2029 primary-aged children were referred to the scheme between 2016 and 2019 alone (da Silva, Fontana & Armstrong 2021).

Educational settings should be alert to both violent and non-violent forms of extremism, including certain divisive or intolerant narratives which can reasonably be linked to terrorism. This emphasis is closely aligned with the outcomes of the Shawcross report, and the 2024 Interim report consistently calls for the inclusion of non-violent extremism in training programmes and the better monitoring of non-violent extremism. (Home Office 2024)

Teachers are expected to understand the factors that lead people to support terrorist ideologies or engage in terrorist-related activity. Sufficient training should be provided to enable teachers to recognise susceptibility to terrorism and know the internal Prevent referral arrangements. The Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) or Prevent lead in the setting should receive additional in-depth training, including on extremist and terrorist ideologies, how to make referrals and how to work with Channel panels.

Specific to educational settings is the notion of 'building resilience through the curriculum'. Educators should support learners in acquiring the knowledge, skills and values that will prepare them to be citizens in modern Britain. As part of this, in England, staff are required to actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

While primary and secondary education are easier to address as one continuum of educational settings, the focus when addressing higher education is moving to freedom of speech and academic

freedom. Trustees of student unions, for example, should actively manage the risk of speakers or literature breaking the law by encouraging or glorifying terrorism, inciting hatred on grounds of race, religion of sexual orientation, inciting criminal acts or public order offences. Regarding external speakers and events more generally, in both schools and higher education, Prevent leads are required to consider the extent to which these activities pose a radicalisation risk. In higher education, every setting needs to balance its legal duties in terms of both securing freedom of speech and academic freedom and protecting learner and staff welfare.

Striking a balance is the general aim in educational contexts. Prevent duty should not limit discussion of sensitive issues. Instead, educational settings should be spaces in which people can understand and discuss such topics, including, where appropriate, terrorism and the extremist ideas that are part of terrorist ideology, and learn how to challenge them.

Healthcare

Prevent duty applies to all healthcare professionals in NHS Trusts, Foundation Trusts and Local Health Boards (Wales). Similar to educators, healthcare professionals are assigned a key role in Prevent because they will meet and treat people who may be susceptible to radicalisation. This includes not just radicalisation leading to violent extremism but also non-violent extremism, such as narratives used to encourage people into participating in or supporting terrorism. A significant proportion of work under the Prevent duty in healthcare therefore relates to the safeguarding of vulnerable people at risk of exploitation or abuse. Vulnerability is defined in different ways by different organisations and services. This may impose safeguarding duties, for example, relating to age or certain mental or physical health conditions. It can also include wider vulnerabilities related to personal, family or social circumstances.

In healthcare, preventing someone from being radicalised into terrorism should be managed in the same way as other safeguarding responsibilities within healthcare – for example, child abuse or domestic violence. Prevent is a key strand of NHS England's safeguarding arrangements, and GOV.UK Prevent training is delivered to all professionals who provide services to NHS patients. Healthcare senior management should engage with the

police and local authority Prevent leads, and where a Prevent referral is adopted, healthcare providers must co-operate with local authority-led Channel panels so far as appropriate and reasonably practicable.

Special consideration is given to data protection, and healthcare establishments should ensure they comply with legal requirements. This also underlines the importance for healthcare professionals to understand how to balance patient confidentiality with the Prevent duty.

Police

Prevent duty applies to police forces generally, Police and Crime Commissioners, British Transport Police, Port Police Forces and the Civil Nuclear Police Authority. The police are uniquely placed to tackle terrorism and therefore are seen to play an essential role in most aspects of Prevent work. They hold information which can help assess the risk of radicalisation and disrupt people engaged in radicalising others. Recognising the parallels between radicalisation and other forms of harm, Prevent should be embedded into all aspects of policing including patrol, neighbourhood and safeguarding functions.

There are specific police resources designed as Prevent – such as the Counter Terrorism Policing network – but fulfilling Prevent duty should also apply to all suitable police resources. Police should work with multi-agency partners to develop local Prevent action plans, support LA Prevent leads in developing Prevent-related projects on community resilience, ensure Prevent considerations are fully embedded into counter-terrorism investigations and provide support to Prevent Case Management.

Beyond operational responsibilities within the Prevent process, community-facing activity is also considered. Officers who engage with the public should understand what radicalisation means and why people may be susceptible to extremist ideologies and being radicalised into terrorism. They need to be aware of what the terms 'radicalisation' and 'terrorism' mean, and of how to escalate any concerns within their force. Those with Prevent responsibilities are expected to have a good understanding of extremist ideologies as a key driver of radicalisation and should complete any required ideology training.

Criminal justice agencies (prison and probation)

Prevent duty applies to all aspects of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), including prisons, young offender institutions, secure training centres, secure colleges, and probation service providers. HMPPS has responsibility for public protection and reducing reoffending and therefore has a clear role in working with people convicted of terrorism or terrorism-connected offences, and in preventing other people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. This is reflected in the specific forms of training provided to staff.

In prisons, the Prevent awareness training should ensure that all staff understand the terrorist risk and threat, and how to recognise, report and respond to it. Training should cover intelligence systems used to report concerns to enable them to report on people susceptible to radicalisation and terrorist risk behaviours. In probationary settings, mandatory Prevent training is delivered by HMPPS and regional Probation Counter-Terrorism teams. Regarding youth custody, HMPPS's Regional Counter-Terrorism teams should provide specialist advice and support to all Youth Custody Service sites, and all staff working on secure estates should receive mandatory counter-terrorism training.

A strong precautionary principle should be applied to risk assessments, as engagement in risk reduction programmes or interventions does not, in itself, indicate a reduction in risk. On this basis, probation staff should adopt an investigative stance in undertaking risk assessments, as they should in all cases, and be alert to instances of dishonesty. In prison, policies may be used to disrupt radicalisers, such as limiting radicalising influences, such as by using separation centres or identifying and removing materials, including books, magazines and audio CDs, that could be used to spread harmful, radicalising ideology.

Recent changes concerning professional groups

The 2024 interim report (Home Office 2024) on progress with the implementation of recommendations adopted from the Shawcross report (Shawcross 2023) lists several measures that are likely to affect members of professional groups. The interim report release date was 20 February 2024, and lists work on 30 of the 34 recommendations as complete. Of particular concern for professional groups is the roll-out of a new face-to-face training package, which was projected for May 2024. However, at the time of writing, no further Home Office information was found that would provide an update on this. In addition, there is some indication that Prevent duty will be extended beyond the professional groups in focus to date, with work under way to provide Prevent training to the Immigration & Asylum and Jobcentre sectors. The recommendation on duty extension, however, was for exploration and has therefore been noted as complete for the time being.

Training measures in general have received scrutiny, and a stronger consideration of the role of ideology in radicalisation has been stressed. Online training packages were updated in August/October 2023 and the new face-to-face training package for frontline staff is, at the time of report, also being piloted before being rolled out nationwide. Training measures include bespoke ideology training developed with support of the Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE).

For prison and probation (HMPPS) staff, a new counter-terrorism training package has been developed intended to increase staff skills and expertise in spotting signs of radicalisation. It includes the use of training videos to highlight key ideological drivers and a new codified list of terrorist risk behaviours.

Understanding further training needs of the higher education sector has been prioritised, specifically with regards to on-campus events involving external speakers. Further guidance on training is to be issued when the main provisions of the Higher Education (Freedom of

Speech) Act 2023 come into force in August 2024.

In terms of further counter-measures, ideology again is given a role as a central concept. Prevent funding will be restricted to groups and projects which clearly challenge ideology. Criteria for CSO project activity and funding decisions has been strengthened, as have due diligence processes for intervention providers (including police checks, extremism checks and mandatory government security checks).

A new Prevent Communication & Engagement plan will encourage and support friends, family members and those within the community who have concerns about someone being radicalised. While community engagement is emphasised as a critical component of the plan, the implications for professional groups are not explicitly addressed.

Finally, a dedicated unit was set up within Homeland Security to rebut misinformation about Prevent in May 2023; to tackle inaccurate claims about Prevent, equip partners and stakeholders to challenge Prevent myths and related extremist narratives, and rapidly rebut misinformation/ inaccuracies by the media or on social media. The team has produced an internal communications strategy, social media content and a communications toolkit for all partners. They will also work with CSOs to further enhance their capability to counter those that demonise Prevent and to counter extremist narratives in communities.

In summary, professional groups are likely to benefit from updated training, clarification in terminology, more detailed and extended guidance, and streamlining of referral processes. Some groups, notably HMPPS staff, seem to have received more attention than others. The changes, however, do not touch upon the fundamental nature of the Prevent duty and the need to integrate, and reconcile, the duty with professional settings and activities. As the next sections show, guidance from professional bodies on this matter is far from detailed while research involving professionals helps to identify concerns and needs that have not been fully addressed so far.

Position statements and guidance from regulatory bodies

Regulatory professional bodies are normally well suited to provide further guidance on professional standards and conduct. It was not possible, however, to identify position statements, or any document for that matter, on Prevent and Prevent duty from all regulatory bodies across the professional groups in focus. Statements that could be found regarding the Prevent strategy varied greatly.

A 2015 document created by the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC), the regulatory body for nurses and midwives, constitutes a response to an initial consultation with the Home Office regarding Prevent duty. The documents states that "given our remit we have little opportunity to gain an insight into registrants' beliefs" and therefore the "proposed general duty sits somewhat uncomfortably with us" (NMC, 2015). No further position on or statement regarding Prevent could be found from the NMC.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC), however, the regulator of health and social care services in England clarified their position in a statement in 2019. The statement outlines three objectives that will be delivered through the 'Prevent Delivery' model and repeats essentially the government guidance document for local authority and healthcare sectors at the time. It is, however, stated that "CQC does not wish to duplicate existing established governance processes around Prevent by also holding NHS providers to account". Therefore, the CQC will not set up own procedures to monitor the undertaking of Prevent duty by staff and organisations.

In comparison, the Office for Students (OfS), the regulatory body for Higher Education, currently provides online information on a Monitoring Framework for Prevent duty. The framework details "how providers demonstrate due regard to the OfS and how we assess compliance" (OfS 2023) among other aspects such as reporting changes or serious incidents and promotion of further improvement. In 2021, 301 established higher education providers were required to submit an accountability statement and submit data on their activities

relating to core areas of the Prevent duty to the OfS. The OfS website also provides six guidance documents relating to Prevent duty on top of the existing government's statutory guidance.

Research, academic discourse and evidence

This section examines the existing research on Prevent duty, how it is understood by each of the professional groups that fall under the duty, and how it impacts their professional roles. Although Prevent as an arm of the counter-terrorism strategy was launched in 2010, the duty with regards to professional groups was only introduced with the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (CTSA) in 2015, and as such this review covers work from 2015 onwards. The focus is on empirical work in the sense of data-driven analyses involving human participation. Since the aim of this section is to provide a general impression of published arguments and evidence, no rigorous methodology of literature identification was applied. An iterative search, however, did quickly converge and reach a point of saturation. This is no doubt also due to the specific topic area and the clear global-temporal focus, i.e., Prevent duty as it applies in the UK to five different professional groups since 2015.

An initial search found a wealth of literature within the Education sector and a distinct lack of literature on Prevent and the other four sectors: Local Authorities, Healthcare, Police and Prisons & Probation. Given the comparatively short span of time from 2015 until the present, there is still limited empirical research across all sectors. There have, however, been a number of data-driven studies on Prevent duty in Education (Busher et al. 2017; Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019; Bryan 2017; da Silva, Fontana & Armstrong 2021; Jerome & Busher 2020; Lakhani 2020; Lundle 2019; Qurashi 2017) together with a substantial literature review (Jerome, Elwick & Kazim 2019). The majority of these studies are at primary, secondary and college education level rather than within higher education (excepting Qurashi 2017), and they tend to focus more on secondary and college than primary level.

It is important to note that there is crossover in many of these studies between Education and Local Authorities, given their close partnership with regards to safeguarding and Prevent. For example, some studies report interviews and/or surveys with both educators and Local

Authority Prevent staff that work to support schools and colleges (e.g. Busher et al. 2017; Ghaemmaghami & Jabbar 2023). The lack of research on local authorities, therefore, refers to work outside an educational context.

The limited empirical studies involving staff as participants in other sectors are as follows: Local Authorities (Ghaemmaghami & Jabbar 2023; Stanley, Guru & Coppock 2017), Healthcare (Heath-Kelly & Strausz 2018; 2019), Police (Dresser 2019; 2021) and Prisons & Probation (Hawkins 2018). Within Higher Education specifically, there were multiple empirical studies that used methods not involving staff input, for instance using Freedom of Information (FOI) requests (e.g., Whiting, Campbell & Awan 2020) or analysing the public statements and websites of Higher Education Institutions (Spiller et al. 2022). The search also found numerous non-empirical articles on Prevent duty within Local Authorities, Education, Policing and Healthcare. Within the Healthcare sector, many professionals have used the bulletins of academic and professional journals to comment (typically by voicing concerns) with regards to Prevent duty in the NHS (e.g. Bhui 2016; Summerfield 2016). No academic journal articles or professional reports could be found with regards to Prevent duty and the Prisons & Probations sector, and the only literature in this sector that is cited in this report is a master's thesis (Hawkins 2018).

Across all five sectors there is a recognition that empirical research is limited, and there are frequent calls for further empirical evidence on Prevent duty and its impact on professionals.

Prevent as safeguarding

There is a marked difference between all five professional groups in terms of their history of involvement or non-involvement in counter-terrorism matters. A link across groups, however, is provided by the framing of Prevent duty as safeguarding, a concept that can serve to promote a shared understanding. At the same time, some differences in research findings can also be seen as a consequence of the different conceptualisations of 'safeguarding' in different sectors. This is best illustrated when comparing professional groups within Education and Healthcare.

Prevent and safeguarding in education
For some professional groups within or close to education, the successful embedding of the Prevent duty is largely attributed to its

framing as 'safeguarding' (Busher et al. 2017; Whiting et al. 2020; Hawkins 2018). In primary, secondary and college education, Prevent duty has been largely accepted and adopted without any deeper questioning or contestation, at least, as far as implementation is concerned. Indeed, research in primary, secondary and college education has found that the framing of Prevent as a safeguarding issue has rendered the duty more recognisable without necessarily raising certain political and ethical concerns (Jerome, Elwick & Kazim 2019; Busher et al. 2017). It is suggested that this framing may have helped public sector workers navigate their newfound security roles (Jerome, Elwick & Kazim 2019) and has aided the uptake of Prevent considerably (Ghaemmaghami & Jabbar 2023).

Busher, Choudhury and Thomas's (2019) survey of 225 primary, secondary and college educators found that 86% of respondents 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' that "the Prevent duty in schools/colleges is a continuation of existing safeguarding responsibilities" (p. 453), and this is also backed up by their interview data. da Silva, Fontana and Armstrong's (2021) survey of 345 primary educators supports this finding, with 67.2% of respondents agreeing with the statement: "The Prevent duty is just safeguarding. It is the same as safeguarding pupils from domestic abuse and sexual abuse" (2021: p. 266). Ghaemmaghami and Jabbar's (2023) study found that depicting radicalisation as a process akin to grooming has allowed Prevent managers to align themselves more effectively with schools. Research has also found good confidence among teachers in their ability to implement the duty: 76% of respondent teachers stated that they felt confident to implement the policy (Busher et al. 2017), a level also reflected in other research findings (da Silva, Fontana & Armstrong, 2021; Jerome, Elwick & Kazim 2019; Bryan 2017). Busher et al. (2017) argue that it is the engagement with Prevent duty as safeguarding that underpins the relatively high levels of confidence displayed by teachers with regards to implementing the duty.

Safeguarding is loosely defined as a 'protective intervention' in the educational and social care sectors (Heath-Kelly & Strausz 2019), and this very broad definition is likely a key facilitating factor for an integration of Prevent duty within a safeguarding framework in these sectors. The loose conception of safeguarding, together with the general acceptance of the Prevent duty within it, also explains in part why a substantial majority of the national referrals has come from the formal education sector (Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019). Indeed, since the CTSA in 2015, the police are arguably no longer the main

stakeholder tasked with identifying radicalisation, with Education having the highest referral rate for any sector (Dresser 2019).

At the same time, there has also been marked criticism of Prevent duty being embedded within a safeguarding framework, most notably in the Higher Education sector. Much of this criticism is not directly connected to empirical findings, where these exist, but is instead more of a conceptual concern – however this notion is revisited in the section on 'A Lack of understanding'. Regardless, several authors have suggested that framing Prevent duty as safeguarding in Education serves to depoliticise the notion of radicalisation. Qurashi states that "the safeguarding approach to radicalisation and terrorism ignores the deeply political dimension of these social issues and so serves a depoliticising function" (2017: 204). It has further been stated that Prevent duty within a safeguarding framework sees radicalisation as a 'contagious virus', while ignoring the political context (Qurashi 2017: 204). Viewing radicalisation and terrorism in this way, the argument is continued, essentially means that "being peer pressured into terrorism is little different from the peer pressure associated with underage drinking and smoking" (Qurashi 2017: 204). The safeguarding approach therefore disengages with macro explanations of terrorism (e.g., economic inequality, foreign interventions) in favour of the micro factors such as alienation and rejection (Whiting, Campbell & Awan 2020). Finally, Jerome, Elwick and Kazim's literature review notes that "safeguarding seems to operate as a mechanism for removing the politics from a process which is fundamentally about evaluating young people's emerging political views" (2019: 834).

Prevent and safeguarding in healthcare
In contrast to Education stands the healthcare sector where safeguarding concepts are more tightly defined (Heath-Kelly & Strausz 2019). Healthcare safeguarding is designed to protect those with care and support needs, such as learning disabilities, drug addiction or dementia, where they cannot protect themselves, but Prevent duty calls for safeguarding protocols to be activated in cases where none of these defined support needs exist (Heath-Kelly & Strausz 2019). The requirement to report concerns relating to individual 'vulnerability' to radicalisation have been interpreted by many as a deviation from previous safeguarding practices (Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019; Heath-Kelly & Strausz 2019). The introduction, therefore, of the Prevent duty as a form of safeguarding protection has led to a clash between medical ethics and the need to report suspicions and has resulted in

professional dissonance (Heath-Kelly & Strausz 2019). Similar to the conceptual criticism voiced in the Education literature, the notion of a depoliticisation of terrorism through its embedding in safeguarding frameworks has been echoed in the Healthcare domain by Heath-Kelly (2017), who heavily criticises a conception of counter-terrorist 'safeguarding' that sees terrorism as a product of preventable abuse.

Heath-Kelly and Strausz's (2019) survey of 329 NHS staff found that only 47% reported agreement with the statement: "Prevent is just safeguarding. It is the same as safeguarding people from domestic abuse, financial abuse and sexual abuse" (p. 102). The authors argued that this rate may be even lower if it was not for safeguarding experts emphasising how their everyday (non-Prevent) safeguarding practice also sometimes exceeds the bounds of the Care Act. As a consequence, staff may therefore already have been attempting to mitigate the imperfect fit between the Prevent duty and safeguarding protocols. Just as Heath-Kelly and Strausz (2019) highlighted the discord between medical ethics and reporting radicalisation suspicions, Stanley, Guru and Coppock's (2017) research in the social work field found that Prevent duty was seen to pit the privacy of families against safeguarding duties and delivering the Prevent duty. Therefore, the authors argued that "the Prevent duty has produced serious implications for delivering the ethical and humane promise of social work" (Stanley, Guru & Coppock 2017: 113). It is, however, worth noting that Hawkins' (2018) study based on interviews with 12 prison clinicians found these to hold a largely positive attitude to Prevent duty as a 'safeguarding' measure.

'Better safe than sorry'

A key finding across the empirical research on primacy, secondary and college education is a default attitude of 'better safe than sorry' adopted amongst teachers (da Silva, Fontana & Armstrong 2021; Lakhani 2020; Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019). It was found that many teachers raised Prevent duty-related safeguarding queries 'just to be on the safe side', passing on responsibility to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) to make the decision (da Silva, Fontana & Armstrong 2021; Lakhani 2020). A significant reason for this approach is the reported lack of understanding of radicalisation among teachers, compared to a better depth of understanding among (trained) DSLs (Lakhani 2020). However, it is also due to the operationalisation of safeguarding logic in the Prevent duty.

Dresser's (2019) research on Prevent police officers crucially found that

not only were police officers encouraged to use 'gut feeling' as a decisional basis to act or report information, but professional partners (Local Authorities, Education and Healthcare) were encouraged by the Prevent police team to trust their own subjective judgements of 'instinct' and 'gut feeling' when it came to reporting concerns. Dresser reports how the simplicity of 'gut feeling' as a decisional basis to act ensured that professional partners could quickly understand and relate to the simplified risk calculus (Dresser 2019). Participants regularly used the strap-line "it might be nothing, but…" (Ibid: 616) and this phrase was planted into the operational logic of the police's professional partners similarly to the existing logics inherent in safeguarding; the 'better safe than sorry' approach (Ibid). Therefore "the Prevent team re-appropriated Prevent as a safeguarding endeavour to help secure the "buy in" of frontline agencies" (Ibid: 616). Dresser finds that this in turn was said to decrease partners' dissonance and resistance towards Prevent (Ibid). It is important to highlight that embedded across the Prevent police officers' accounts was an understanding that they had "a requirement to "sell" the Prevent agenda to institutional partners through a "sales pitch" approach" (Dresser 2021: 751).

The way that safeguarding has been operationalised to fit with Prevent duty has likely encouraged an attitude of 'better safe than sorry' with regards to referrals, at least in Education. This approach is compounded by teachers' fears of 'missing the signs' (Busher et al. 2017; Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019; Lakhani 2020). Busher, Choudhury & Thomas (2019) found that teachers expressed concerns over the perceived difficulty of identifying 'genuine' cases, and that these concerns were fuelled by high profile cases where no 'warning signs' had been present. General anxieties were magnified by fears of the repercussions of missing 'genuine' cases for themselves, their students or their colleagues (Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019). As the authors state, "this left some staff navigating their way through competing fears – on the one hand, "terrified to miss something" that could be a sign of vulnerability to radicalisation; on the other, worrying about stereotyping minority students" (Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019: 449). This analysis needs to be further discussed in the context of a lack of understanding of the radicalisation process amongst teachers, something which takes place in the next section.

An immediate result of a 'better safe than sorry' approach has been higher referral numbers, and this has been, as already states, most prominent in the Education sector (Dresser 2019; Busher, Choudhury &

Thomas 2019). Dresser highlighted that the Prevent team preferred responding to a wealth of reports and referrals, rather than missing crucial opportunities, and therefore more referrals from partner professionals was considered an operational benefit. The result of greater referral numbers for the Education sector, however, is a greater workload. Busher, Choudhury and Thomas found that 54% of the 225 teachers surveyed reported that Prevent duty had increased their workload, and 35% said it had increased budgetary pressures (2019). Busher et al. outline that whilst on one hand they found narratives around how little Prevent changed everyday practices at schools, they also encountered "evidence of a substantial additional workload burden and hidden costs for educational institutions following the duty's introduction" (2017: 65). The existence of both narratives likely ties to the finding that Prevent-related needs and demands are not evenly distributed across the country (Lakhani 2020). Therefore, in some geographical areas at least, teachers and other staff in the education sector are disproportionately affected by the 'better safe than sorry' approach.

At present, Government (Home Office 2024) has outlined "a plan to improve the quality of referrals around revised core objectives". This concerns guidance that "referrals should be made where there is a genuine concern of radicalisation, and that ideology should be a critical consideration." Whether such clarification will have the desired effects remains a matter of future evaluation.

A lack of understanding

Next to a 'better safe than sorry' approach, a general lack of understanding with regards to radicalisation and terrorism is another crucial factor that determines the impact of Prevent duty on professional groups. Studies have consistently highlighted a lack of such understanding amongst staff in education, healthcare, and even the police (Busher et al. 2017; Bryan 2017; Heath-Kelly & Strausz 2018; HMICFRS 2020). Both Busher et al. (2017) and Bryan (2017) discuss the finding that teachers do not have a good understanding of the radicalisation process. Bryan states that: "worryingly, no teacher interviewed could articulate a process of radicalisation" (2017: 223). A government report on Police contribution to Prevent in 2020 found that not all officers could recognise the signs of radicalisation, even those who had recently had training (HMICFRS 2020).

It is important to note, that across all of the studies reviewed, there is no particular mention of online-specific radicalisation. This is of note

given the prevalence of the online domain in the radicalisation process for many (Kenyon, Binder, & Baker-Beall 2022). Heath-Kelly & Strausz's research with healthcare staff further highlighted a concerning finding: "only one in three respondents considered themselves confident to tell the difference between radicalisation and an interest in Middle Eastern wars and politics" (2019: 106). Busher et al. also found that teachers raised concern over their lack of awareness of foreign policy, international conflicts and Islamist extremist organisations (Busher et al. 2017).

The general lack of understanding noted is particularly relevant when compared against the general confidence levels found for staff as far as safeguarding is concerned. As already outlined, commentators have pointed to the depoliticising effects of embedding Prevent duty within professional safeguarding frameworks. Both Busher et al.'s (2017) and Bryan's (2017) research found that teachers were simultaneously confident in their ability to safeguard children from radicalisation without being confident that they understood the process of radicalisation and showing sufficient awareness of foreign policy, conflicts and extremist organisations. The combination of this depoliticisation together with a lack of understanding then leaves Prevent open to a great deal of interpretation, for instance, teachers utilising the procedures in place to address perceived problems in their local communities (Jerome, Elwick & Kazim 2019). Heath-Kelly & Strausz's (2018) research highlighted concerning trends that healthcare staff associated radicalisation with philosophy possession and with health speech, viewing illiberal attitudes and beliefs as associated with radicalisation. The authors point out that Prevent training modules do not identify these factors, and instead, due to the depoliticising logic, staff are inserting popular culture stereotypes and understandings of radicalisation and terrorism into the space left open to interpretation.

The current assessment of Prevent by Government (Home Office 2024) recognises the need to "develop expertise and instil better levels of understanding of extremist ideology and radicalisation across the system". Terminology regarding ideology has therefore been updated and checked for accessibility. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the core need for a well-founded understanding of the topic has been met.

Agency and education

A review of the literature shows that Education is the sector where staff

have been best able to articulate concerns about negative impacts of enacting the Prevent duty. Such concerns are closely coupled with the level of agency that educators perceive to hold in the context of Prevent.

The most prominent concern in education was related to the potential stigmatisation of Muslim students (Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019). The other key concern expressed by teachers was that Prevent duty was making it more difficult to foster socially cohesive educational institutions at a time when racial, ethnic and religious identities were increasingly a source of societal division (Busher, Choudhury & Thomas 2019). However, Busher, Choudhury and Thomas (2019) also did find that teachers expressed confidence in their ability to manage both of these concerns within their professional practice. Teachers described not only risk-mitigation strategies but identified how the duty had led them to reinvigorate work on "active citizenship, human rights, democracy and equality" (Ibid: 456-7). Indeed, multiple institutions were reported to use Prevent duty to strengthen work related to racism, prejudice and inequality, either to combat far-right extremism, where this was perceived to be a pressing issue locally, or to avoid the stigmatisation of Muslim students (Busher et al. 2017). Furthermore, concerns over increased stigmatisation were often directed at other institutions, or a greater contextual level, as most educators felt they were managing this issue in their own institution (Busher et al. 2017). Although some teachers did seek to comply in the most straightforward way (Bryan 2017), research has often highlighted that there is a perceived degree of agency, albeit a constrained one, amongst teachers' enactment of the Prevent duty (Jerome, Elwick & Kazim 2019), for instance through their responses to the concerns outlined. The extent to which teachers' agency emerges is affected by factors such as school population and local context, the agenda of Prevent advisors and managers, and the availability of resources (Priestley et al. 2015).

Closely related to the topic of Prevent at schools is the delivery of fundamental British values (FBV) within the school curriculum. Research has also shown that there is great variation in how FBV are understood and implemented in teaching. Some teachers were happy to offer superficial, naïve or trivial portrayals of 'Britishness', others avoided direct promotion of FBV and some depoliticised FBV to promote school values, while others problematised the notion of Britishness (Jerome, Elwick & Kazim 2019). Vanderbeck and Johnson's (2016) review of Ofsted inspection reports indicated that inspectors

were recognising schools' ability to devise their own interpretations of FBV (see also Jerome, Elwick & Kazim 2019). Therefore, teachers have been adopting a variety of different positions towards the teaching of FBVs and displaying varying degrees of both personal and institutional agency.

Finally, turning to Higher Education, Spiller et al.'s (2022) study of HEIs webpages and documentation found that many have made clear efforts to reassure prospective students and their families of the freedom they hold in implementing the Prevent duty. Some institutions have publicly contested the negative impacts of PD or sought to reassure the audiences as to the good intentions of the duty.

Grounding for future research

Research indicates that the Prevent duty has largely been accepted by professional groups, especially the Education sector, and this has predominantly been a result of the embedding of the duty within the safeguarding framework. However, research has also shown that the framing of Prevent duty as safeguarding serves to depoliticise the notion of radicalisation, with studies pointing out that educators can be confident in implementing the duty without being confident in their understanding of radicalisation and extremist organisations. Further, Prevent as safeguarding is not as straightforward in Healthcare as the sector has a narrower, much better defined understanding of safeguarding, one which poses challenging to reconcile with medical ethics (Heath-Kelly & Strausz, 2019). Finally, it can also be argued that the broader understanding of safeguarding found in Education therefore allows for a degree of agency in the way that educators implement the Prevent duty, albeit one that is constrained by a range of factors that were discussed.

In order to understand more about the impact Prevent duty has on different professional groups, sector-specific concepts of safeguarding and agency need to be considered alongside other professional standards. This can be expected to lead to a better understanding of Prevent referrals, and the pressures and motives associated with referrals (as in a 'better safe than sorry approach'). Importantly, the actual understanding of radicalisation and terrorism is likely, at first, to be unconnected with the enactment of Prevent duty, and therefore it is important to investigate any gains in effective enactment as such understanding becomes more nuanced and developed. The present review and analysis are intended to provide the grounding for further research along these lines.

Recommendations for policy and practice

Based on the findings of this report, seven recommendations for policy and practice are made. These represent either extensions of the changes implemented recently or novel directions; yet, they all emerge from a consideration of the perspectives of the professional groups under Prevent duty.

1. Profession-specific briefings and training materials should be created to ensure that the Prevent duty aligns with sector-specific ways of work. Particular consideration should be given to working definitions and practitioner understanding of safeguarding and agency.
While professional groups such as HMPPS staff have recently received expanded and updated materials, safeguarding and agency as core working concepts for the practitioner-professional are important elements to recognise for the integration of Prevent into routine work. To this end, the diverse landscape of professional groups affected needs to be acknowledged and embraced. For groups within HMPPS and the Police, safeguarding and agency will be much more closely aligned with, for example, the risk assessment of individuals with the potential to commit an offence. For other groups, safeguarding and agency are focused on very different aspects when dealing with others.

2. Further professional alignment of the Prevent duty should be undertaken if/when it is expanded to other sectors ensuring training and support build on the professional practice of that sector.
Following directly on from the first recommendation, an expansion to other professions should consider the sector-specific understanding of safeguarding and agency.

3. Create bespoke discussion spaces to allow for an understanding of radicalisation and related concepts, such as extremism and terrorism, to develop. This may mean a shift away from overly neutral and depoliticised concepts of radicalisation and extremism. This can take the form of expert professional panels sponsored by the Home Office and hosted within professional bodies, to strengthen the integration

of Prevent duty into professional standards and guidelines.
Over and above recent updates to terminology, including counter-terrorism training for HMPPS staff, active discussion among professionals and their involvement will be needed to address a potentially wide-spread lack of understanding. Without such contextual understanding, Prevent duty is likely to continue to be exercised by professionals in an ad hoc and uncertain manner. Given the unclear role so far of professional bodies, the creation of expert panels can provide an avenue towards consolidating and passing on knowledge and interpretation.

4. Both Islamist fundamentalist and extremist right-wing parties need clearer description and definition for professionals to operate with. Embrace societal asymmetries in how extremist ideological orientations are represented and acknowledge the perceived imbalance between these two main ideological sources of radicalisation.
Next to an analysis of the various sources of threat and harmful ideologies in the UK, the perceptions of these sources among professionals, and within society, need further attention. The representations of the two main ideological strands of concern, Islamist fundamentalist and extremist right-wing, differ substantially from each other and in such a way that discourse, perception thresholds and concern are more strongly drawn towards the former.

5. Bring together a working group to explore the messages and interpretations surrounding the Prevent duty that contribute to a high and unfocused volume of referrals. In Education, the sector with highest numbers of referrals, particular challenges to consider are the broadly defined concept of safeguarding and an established "better safe than sorry" approach that does not focus on radicalisation only.
Next to the present efforts to make referrals more effective and relevant, the underlying factors contributing to a better safe than sorry approach on the side of professionals are worthy of attention. Referrals are made because of fears over individual oversights and errors, because of a desire to meet other perceived needs in the community, because of a lack of understanding, as already highlighted, and because of the interpretation of signals given in training and briefing.

6. For the enactment of the Prevent duty, guidance, training and discourse need to acknowledge gaps, or grey areas, clearly where they exist, to empower professionals to exercise their own judgment on specific topics, for example Freedom of Speech and Prevent in Higher Education.

Due to the evolving nature of radicalisation threats and societal concerns, it is clear that some aspects of the Prevent duty will be more prescriptive and others more indicative. An inevitable drawback of tighter guidance is a loss of autonomy for those who are enacting a statutory duty. Professionals are likely to benefit from a clearer idea of their own autonomy, especially for the more complex and contentious aspects such as Freedom of Speech.

7. Develop training content that directly addresses signs of online radicalisation and the potential observable indicators of it in professional settings. To this end, media literacy tools can be used to increase both knowledge and skills among professionals.

While professionals are bound to their respective work settings when enacting Prevent duty, radicalisation is a complex phenomenon that unfolds outside these settings. Online environments and activities in particular pose a core challenge when countering radicalisation. They are largely unobservable for professionals and often require an insight into online sub-cultures for accurate interpretation. More knowledge is therefore needed and to be communicated to professionals on indicators of concerning online engagement. Digital media literacy can provide a concept for diagnosing and addressing the needs of professionals in this context.

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