

1. Asim Qureshi, Research Director of CAGE Advocacy Ltd, an independent advocacy organisation working to empower communities impacted by the War on Terror.
2. CAGE is answering the Commons Select Committee call for submission on the inquiry into extremism in Britain, answering how effective the PREVENT strategy is and what have been the problems with it?
3. CAGE will provide a case based approach on why the PREVENT strategy should be questioned through an operational lens, and focus on PREVENT case referrals in the education sector which illustrates the pattern and issues in other areas.

#### 4. **SUMMARY**

- 4.1 CAGE's findings have uncovered a pattern of conduct which is disturbing. This trend if not checked will increase distrust between targeted communities and State institutions which defeats the objective of working with communities to combat 'terrorism'.
- 4.2 Alienating and making targeted communities feel as though their children are under surveillance will only nurture negative reactions.
- 4.3 There is clearly a lack of training, consistency and expertise provided to those required to implement the PREVENT duty, as trivial markers of extremism have been reported such as reading books on terrorism; questioning the government's stance on halal meat, and not participating in music lessons.
- 4.4 Now that a legal duty has been imposed the number of cases has increased and the likelihood is that the incidents of unlawful discrimination due to an overzealous and misguided interpretation of the legal duty will lead to further alienation.
- 4.5 In the circumstances, a new sensitive and dialogue based approach led by the communities targeted needs to be implemented to avoid the negative experience and perceptions around the Prevent framework. The law is a blunt instrument to use to tackle the radicalisation issue and the committee is therefore urged to recommend that the government abolishes the legal framework and works with all relevant stakeholders to design an approach which is educative and only requires legal intervention in exceptional cases. This would permit free debate so as to challenge unacceptable views with the aim of creating norms of behaviour sanctioned and led by the communities affected.

Until there is that sense of ownership the problem will not go away and we fear will go underground and become more problematic.

## 5. Prevent officers assessing children without parental consent

**3.1 CAGE's experience on monitoring the operational implementation of PREVENT has uncovered that schools are referring children to PREVENT officers, or permitting children to be questioned on ideology, politics and religion without consent from parents or guardians. In an event of a case referral, the PREVENT officer questions the student and determines whether the student is at risk. Although there is a system of consent taken into account in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA 15) regarding Channel Programme under section 36 (4);<sup>1</sup> those under the age of 18 are engaged by receiving consent of parents, whereas those over the age are required to give their own consent.<sup>2</sup> However, there appears to be no regard for taking consent from parents when PREVENT officers question children in schools. The following case-based evidence demonstrates the operational implementation of PREVENT in educational institutions.**

### 5.1 Case Study AA – 'Halal Meat'

**5.1.1** AA was referred to social services by his secondary school because he was perceived to be on the path to becoming radicalised. In one of his Home Economic classes, the teacher requested all students to bring in meat or poultry, but AA said to his teacher in front of the class, *"but government is banning halal meat!"* The teacher questioned why, and AA replied, *"...because government hates Muslims"*. Additionally, AA would frequently turn up late for registration at school in the mornings, and when questioned by the teacher, he replied, *"because of morning prayer"*. The mother said to CAGE that AA had lied to his teacher. Morning prayers are much earlier in the day, and the real reason for going to school late was connected to him being bullied. AA did not, however, want the teacher to know about this because he feared the bullying would become more severe. The school believes that AA is on the path to being radicalised. Social services were contacted by the school though no contact has yet been made by them. The mother said of the situation, *"I can't believe the school contacted social services to speak to my son like that, without telling me!"*

**5.1.2** What AA's case demonstrates is that his perceived political views rather than being challenged by the teacher in the classroom, were used to infer

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<sup>1</sup> Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2014, Section 36 (4) (a) – (f)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.cageuk.org/sites/default/files/reports/cage\\_cts.pdf](http://www.cageuk.org/sites/default/files/reports/cage_cts.pdf)

radicalisation, and led to his referral to an external agency without the consent or knowledge of his parents. The nature and simplicity of this case assumes that referrals are being made without due cause, which is highly concerning on a policy and practical level for the children. The fact that AA was encountering difficulties at school through bullying suggests that his ideas and views may have been influenced by these difficulties he was faced with – something which should have been further investigated by the teaching staff before any referral was made. It is critical that already existing mechanisms are used to support students to ensure their issues, grievances and ideas are addressed internally rather than escalated to external agencies where no criminal activity is taking place. Moreover it is unclear to what extent the incident has been recorded in school records or with other agencies so that it adversely affects AA's future career.

## 6. Case Study AU – 'Music Lesson'

6.1 AU is a 14 year old teenager, and currently studying in year nine in a mixed state school. AU is a devout Muslim, and regularly attends his local mosque, and takes a proactive approach in increasing his religious spirituality. Although AU is the youngest in his family, his eldest sisters and parents see him as an inspiration because of his attempts to increase his religious practices. AU's academic achievements are impressive, and he is a good, well-mannered student. However, in March 2015, the school referred AU to a PREVENT officer, without the consent of his parents or guardian. In great concern from learning of this, AU's sister proactively contacted the school and asked for a formal meeting as she was angered by the situation, and could not comprehend how not taking part in music lessons warranted the school in contacting a PREVENT official. In the meeting between AU's sister and school teacher, it was made clear that the only ground for referring the case to PREVENT was due to AU not proactively participating in music lessons. AU's sister said *"why did the teachers contact PREVENT to interview my brother? [AU]... he's harmless. I feel that my brother is vulnerable in school now, and dropping him off won't be the same again"*. It is clear that AU deems there to be a tension with music and his interpretation of Islam, hence he does not wish to partake in music lessons.

6.2 AU's case illustrates how there is no real ground for referring an individual to PREVENT. It must also be questioned on what evidential basis not engaging in a music lesson is a marker for radicalisation/extremism. The fact that no consent was sought from AU's parents or guardian in referring him to PREVENT – even during his mandatory schooling hours – illustrates how PREVENT is operating

under the radar and without the appropriate checks and balances. This is a common trend that CAGE has observed in other cases too and suggests that there may well be several cases across UK where parents have no knowledge that their children are being questioned by PREVENT personnel.

7. CAGE has uncovered a trend of PREVENT cases mapped across the UK where children and young students are being examined on their personal beliefs, ideas and religious practise without consent from parents. Parents and guardians do not have knowledge of the questioning until after the fact, and only if their children tell them personally. The schools involved in these cases have not sent letters home or called for consent from parents.
8. The PREVENT duty is being branded as a safeguarding issue, and it may be assumed that all parents have given implied consent by default – and should any guardian object to this, it may be deemed as supporting one falling into extremism or radicalisation. This is a concerning development on the implementation of the PREVENT duty, and must be questioned whether the strategy has created clear guidelines on questioning those who within school settings. Parents and young students should not have to self-censor their personal views since this impedes the development of ideas and discussions and debate as part of the learning process, or being monitored on religious practice. Students should feel confident to engage their views in class, and explore ideas and theories in an educational setting.

8.1 Schools have a duty of care to their students, and it is important that this duty of care does not entail the reporting of an individual to an external agency without reasonable cause. The PREVENT duty has turned educational settings to view children and students through a security lens as opposed to a teacher-to-student relationship. Such a shift in dynamics will impact trust between parents and teachers, particularly if their children are being referred to police, PREVENT or local council personnel to examine religious and/or political views.

8.2 On one hand children are being examined by PREVENT without consent of parents, and seeking parents to voluntarily monitor children at home for signs of extremism and radicalisation. The PREVENT strategy is sending mixed messages to the targeted community that will bolster negative policy implications. The distrust that is inflamed is counterintuitive to messaging projected by police to work with PREVENT in spotting signs of radicalisation within the home. Failing to engage students internally and referring them to external agencies, as happened in the case of AA, increases the likelihood that they will move into closed spaces, particularly online, in a bid to make their ideas and views heard.

## 9. Problem: The dangers of unlawful discriminatory treatment

**9.1 Those posed with the PREVENT duty are blurring islamophobic perceptions with the PREVENT duty, and hence questionable referrals are being made to PREVENT officers. The following cases highlight the problem with PREVENT on an operational level.**

### 9.2 Case Study – MF: Climate of Islamophobia, extremism and PREVENT

**9.2.1** On 23 March 2015, a postgraduate student in Terrorism, Crime and Global Security at Staffordshire University was approached by two female staff while in the library – the three had a brief discussion on Shari’a, British values and democracy – this conversation was initiated by the female staff and is questionable whether it was a test for extremism. The tense conversation ended, and after a short while a security guard approached the student, confirming that he had received a complaint from staff members. The staff told the security guard that *“there is a man, who is Asian and with a beard, who is not a student and is reading book on terrorism”*. The staff went further to say, *“check him out”*, as she suspected he is a *“radical terrorist”*. The security guard approached and recognised the student, and did not take any further action.

**9.2.2** The student was deeply offended and filed an internal complaint due to the discrimination he faced. In the internal complaint procedure, MF asked the teachers why they chose to question him, the only Muslim with a beard, holding books on terrorism. The teachers refused to answer any of the questions. In response to the internal complaint submitted, the Academic Registrar and Director of Student Experience responded by acknowledging that the university has “a commitment to “secure freedom of speech and to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.” Moreover, in reference to the duty imposed by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act [2015], the Academic Registrar described it as *“very broad, devoid of detail.”* In reference to the statutory guidance which underpins the statutory duty, the Academic Registrar described it *“insufficient detail to provide clear practical direction in an environment such as the University’s.”*

**9.2.3** MF also received a letter of apology from the teacher that wrongfully questioned him. The teacher said *“I do not possess any particular knowledge or experience of terrorism and radicalisation, and I have only attended a short training session on how to identify students who might be at risk of being radicalised.”* She further asserted, that a *“combination of the content of our discussion and my lack of experience in this arena caused me to consider whether this was something that may fall within the ‘prevent agenda.’”*

**9.2.4** MF’s case illustrates how individuals are targeted based on their appearance and ethnic and/or religious background. Due to the climate of fear that already exists with extremism, it is concerning whether those imposed with the PREVENT duty will blur lines between Islamophobia, extremism and radicalisation. The policy guidance to monitor students for radicalisation can be conflated with other issues of Islamophobia. This will then lead to disproportional reporting that may potentially lead to referrals to PREVENT and Channel.

## **10. PREVENT Officer Harassment**

**10.1** **PREVENT officer questioning has turned into harassment cases across the United Kingdom. CAGE has monitored several cases where clients have sought legal assistance to stop harassment from PREVENT. Instead of PREVENT assessing individuals in a control manner, the lack of checks, balances, due process and transparency has led to individuals being harassed. This is a disturbing development, and strongly illustrates how PREVENT is a problem that accelerates distrust between targeted communities and British government.**

### **10.2** **CASE Study – X: PREVENT in partnership with mothers?**

**10.2.1** The case of X illustrates how a mother did not recognise that her son or herself was being harassed by PREVENT officers. This symbolises the difficulties that PREVENT poses to mothers, as they try to balance fear and love.

**10.2.2** In this case, a mother was approached by a PREVENT officer over the course of six-months, visiting the family home 3-4 times a month regarding her eldest son ‘X’, who is currently studying for his A-levels. PREVENT was successful in attaining the mother’s cooperation. When questioned why she cooperated with PREVENT officers, she replied *“I have nothing to hide of my sons, and if I don’t answer their questions,*

*they'll think I'm hiding something, and things will get worse.*" PREVENT officers have systematically harassed 'X' to the extent that X would anticipate contact via text or phone call at 07:00am to see if X was awake, and offer him breakfast!

- 10.2.3** On one occasion, the PREVENT officers took him to the local ice-cream parlour, and spoke about Islam, ideology and political issues related to the Islamic state. Again, due to the climate of fear that already exists within communities impacted by the War on Terror, 'X' felt helpless and could not say "no" or refuse the PREVENT officers. X knew that he was being harassed by PREVENT, but did not have the confidence to deal with the systematic questioning.
- 10.2.4** The PREVENT officers in this case did not approach the father, but rather proactively contacted the mother and involuntarily made her a point of contact. This may indicate that PREVENT officers are utilising mothers as a monitoring tool against their own children to effectively police signs of radicalisation and extremism. The mother in the case eventually recognised that the PREVENT officers were not *"...here to help [X]"* and thus received legal assistance to stop the harassment.
- 10.2.5** The PREVENT duty guidance for England and Wales states that *"the success of Prevent work relies on communities supporting efforts to prevent people being drawn into terrorism and challenging the extremist ideas..."*<sup>3</sup> Should the government wish to truly understand the casual factors to radicalisation and extremism, they must recognise the contributing factors on a domestic and international realm. Before this can be achieved, the gates for dialogue need to be opened with the same communities that may feel targeted by domestic counter-terrorism and extremism policies.

## 11. Markers for radicalisation

- 11.1 PREVENT and those posed with the duty are referring cases without any credible marker for radicalisation, which questions the effectiveness of the strategy.**
- 11.2 Case Study – ZM: School library books, a marker for radicalisation?**

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<sup>3</sup>[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/417943/Prevent\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_England\\_Wales.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417943/Prevent_Duty_Guidance_England_Wales.pdf) (See: page 26)

- 11.2.1** ZM is 16 years old, and currently in year 11 in a school located in Portsmouth. PREVENT officers have heavily engaged with this school on “extremism” and “radicalisation” issues. There is a strong climate of PREVENT officers visiting the school regularly, questioning students within and outside of school. ZM’s mother described her son as disinterested in Islam, and she was surprised that PREVENT officers would approach him.
- 11.2.2** On 23 February 2015, ZM intended to take out a library book on the topic of terrorism, among three other books. However, the librarian observed ZM’s book selection from afar, and took the books away from ZM’s possession without his knowledge. The librarian then informed the principal of the school, which led to a referral to the local PREVENT officer.
- 11.2.3** It is important to note that the terrorism book in question was a school library copy, and hence there should be no tensions or worries of extremism. The PREVENT officer then visited the mother of ZM in his family home, and said that there were concerns of extremism.
- 11.2.4** This case illustrates the trivial nature of referrals to PREVENT officers, without any credible or concrete indicators of extremism or radicalisation. The librarian referred the case to the Head teacher believing that there was an issue of concern, when evidently the item was a school library book. The PREVENT strategy instructs schools to take the initiative to monitor students, however if school books are made a marker for radicalisation, the whole strategy then becomes questionable. If students are not permitted to freely study and read in libraries, then this will disenfranchise them, leading them to self-fulfil the prophecy that PREVENT seeks to dilute.

**END**