

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Prevent review](#), HC 1223

Wednesday 22 March 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 22 March 2023.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dame Diana Johnson (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Paula Barker; James Daly; Simon Fell; Tim Loughton.

Questions 1 - 45

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MP, Minister for Security, Home Office; Michael Stewart, Director, Prevent, Home Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tom Tugendhat and Michael Stewart.

Q1 **Chair:** I am very sorry to have kept you waiting, Minister. We had to vote in the middle of the first panel.

Tom Tugendhat: Don't apologise; I completely understand.

Chair: It was a very important session as part of our policing inquiry. We are very glad to see you with us today. I wonder whether you and your colleague would like to introduce yourselves for everyone so we know who you are.

Tom Tugendhat: My name is Tom Tugendhat, and I am the Security Minister.

Michael Stewart: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Michael Stewart and I am the director of Prevent in the Home Office.

Q2 **Chair:** The purpose of this one-off session is to look at the review produced by William Shawcross, which was published at the end of February this year. We have about an hour for the session.

Minister, are you able to give us an overview of the current terrorist threat in this country?

Tom Tugendhat: The current threat is substantial, as you will know, and the reason for that determination is because of the level of threat we see around the nation. It is balanced, as you will also be aware, with the reality that in some areas it will be slightly higher than others, but we have to set an appropriate level that works for the whole of the United Kingdom. It is true that Northern Ireland often has a slightly separate determination. This is really something we keep a close eye on the whole time. At the moment, as I say, it is substantial.

Q3 **Chair:** Where is the threat coming from?

Tom Tugendhat: The threat is varied. We are aware, first of all, of Islamist terrorism, which has been an issue in the UK over many years, and extreme right-wing terrorism. We have seen examples of both of those, sadly. We have seen two examples even among our own colleagues in Parliament. One was Jo Cox, who was so brutally murdered in 2016, and the other was David Amess, who was murdered only just over a year ago. Even here we are experiencing it.

Of course, six years ago today was the utterly brutal attack on Westminster Bridge that took the life of a few people, but particularly close to us was PC Keith Palmer, who paid with his life for his extraordinary courage. We should all pay tribute to him today.

Q4 **Chair:** Absolutely; at the start of our first session, we remembered him and the people who died on Westminster Bridge as well. You may also



HOUSE OF COMMONS

want to mention Rosie Cooper. As a former Member of this House, her life was threatened by one of the extreme right-wing terrorist groups.

Tom Tugendhat: You are absolutely right. There are others in this House whose lives have been threatened in a different way. As we know, Baroness Smeech required police protection due to antisemitic threats. Others have faced extreme ideological violence against them and have required police assistance to keep them safe. I am afraid this is not a problem that has gone away. While it is certainly extremely present, sadly, among the parliamentary community, it is also present in the wider community.

We are seeing an increasing connection between state violence and terrorism and ideological connections. You will be aware that we recently identified the threat that Iran-connected activists pose to the Jewish and Israeli community in the United Kingdom. Sadly, the level of antisemitism has increased in recent years, as we all know.

Q5 **Chair:** Prevent is about trying to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorist activity. While the review said it was broadly right in its objectives and admirable in its intentions, and there was a lot of good effort going in, there were concerns raised about how Prevent was actually operating.

One of the concerns was about the number of referrals into Prevent. Do you want to say something about that? The Government have accepted all the recommendations from the Prevent review. Could you say something about that particular issue?

Tom Tugendhat: I will, absolutely. It is important to note that the number of referrals is high. Some 3,800 have been referred and have come out the other end. It is not only high; it is also productive. This is a system that has worked. It has diverted mostly young people away from extremist ideology. In that sense, it has protected not only the whole of society but also those individuals who could otherwise have been radicalised into violence.

We should see this very clearly for what it is, which is an attempt to protect everybody in our society, including most particularly those who are referred. Ironically, they are the ones who are first protected and then others are protected by association. This is something we have led on in many ways. In conversations with colleagues around Europe and elsewhere, it is quite clear that others are looking at the work we are doing, not just in Prevent but in the other elements of the CONTEST strategy, to learn from it and to see how they can adapt and improve it for their own circumstances.

This is a programme that depends on responding to the ideology that is prevalent at the time, so we are constantly working to keep it up to date. If we were talking about this 50 or 60 years ago, we would be talking about violent republican ideology particularly connected to Ireland, and 100 years ago we might be talking about anarchist violence. This is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

something we would have updated at different times, and now we are updating it again. The work William Shawcross has done is to make sure we are as up to date as we can be.

Q6 Chair: He seemed to be of the view that some people were not making referrals to Prevent because they might be accused of being racist. You have accepted that.

Tom Tugendhat: I will touch on this because it is an important thing to address. The balance of referrals has not been what we would expect, given the later prosecutions and actions we have had to take against individuals. It has been over-represented, in that sense, in the extreme right wing.

Of course, it is possible that it is simply the case that those who are doing the referrals notice one and not the other, and the police later notice the other and pick it up. But it is also possible that, in a misplaced cultural relativism, people are allowing a soft bigotry to tolerate a cultural misunderstanding that pretends there is in some way a tolerance for Islamist extremism, in a way that there quite rightly should not be for right-wing extremism.

Q7 Chair: Is there evidence of that? I was trying to look at the review and see where the evidence for that was.

Tom Tugendhat: At the moment it is a supposition. We are collecting further data. The data is not exactly clear at the moment, but we are working on that. This is something that would be of grave concern.

Let us be absolutely clear. Referring people to Prevent for being radicalised into Islamism is something many in the Islamic community are doing very actively. Today is the first day of Ramadan, and many people will be getting together in family groups and, indeed, across communities for iftar in a few hours' time in order to come together as a community and to celebrate family and this religious festival.

Those who notice and who call out extremist ideology in their community are doing a service not just to themselves but to the individual and to wider society. That is something we have to get ingrained not just in mosques and community groups but in schools and other areas.

I had a conversation this morning with one of our colleagues, a Member of Parliament who I will refer to only generically, who told me about a mosque in her community where they were specifically asking for extra help in reference to Prevent because they see the benefit. We are getting to that place among many in the Muslim community. We are not quite there in some places in wider education and so on. This is one of the areas where we have to do better.

Q8 Chair: Just going back to referrals and your use of Channel, you are saying that you do not have any evidence. It is just a supposition that people are not being referred in or being put into the Channel process



HOUSE OF COMMONS

because of some view. I was not quite sure what you were saying, to be honest. Perhaps you could explain that to me again.

Tom Tugendhat: Of course. The numbers do not add up at the moment. We can see, because the numbers do not add up, that there is a lacuna. We are trying to explain the lacuna. We have some suppositions for that, and we have some anecdotal evidence for that. What we need to do is build up the evidence base. Forgive me; Michael may be able to add a bit more.

Michael Stewart: It might be helpful to make a distinction between referrals and acceptance on to the programme. In 2021-22, which is the last year for which we have published figures, there were about 6,400 referrals to Prevent. About 800 of those made it through to Channel, which is our primary intervention programme.

As the Minister says, there is quite a big difference in percentage terms between what we see in the balance of extreme right-wing and Islamist casework at both those levels—at referral and acceptance to Channel—and what we see in the Pursue system, where MI5 and CT police say that about 75% to 80% of the overall cases are Islamist and 20% are mostly extreme right wing. That is not what we see either at referral or at the stage of acceptance into Channel.

As the Minister says, the report identifies that that disparity exists. The report does not describe to us why that is so. As he has said, we are in the position of collecting a significant amount of data on that so we can understand it better.

It is also worth reflecting that William recommends something, which we are accepting, called the security threat check. In future, we will have an examination of how the risk and threat looks from Prevent and how it looks from Pursue, and seek to marry them together. That will not necessarily lead to a linear relationship in the percentage of casework, but it will help us understand whether there is a difference and, if that difference exists, why.

Chair: We might come back to that in a moment.

Q9 **Paula Barker:** In 2020-21, there were more referrals made for extreme right-wing concerns than for Islamist concerns. Why was that?

Tom Tugendhat: This is partly the point we were just addressing with the Chair. It is hard to be absolutely certain, but we think people in some communities are more likely to refer extreme right-wing terror concerns than they would Islamist terror concerns. There are many suppositions as to why that might be the case.

One is that there is a misunderstanding of what is culturally acceptable and what, therefore, might be an inspiration to radical ideology in some communities rather than others. That is what I mean by the bigotry of low expectations. We have to be very careful that we are not just holding



HOUSE OF COMMONS

everybody to the same standard—that is quite clearly the right thing to do—but also protecting everybody equally.

It would be quite wrong to have a programme like Prevent, which can protect people from falling victim to ideological indoctrination, and use it only to protect some members of the community and not others. That is a danger we have to address. That is one of the things Mr Shawcross identifies in his report, and there is more work to be done on it.

Q10 Paula Barker: How long will the analysis take on that? He does identify it. He says the RICU operates different standards for what it highlights as Islamist and extreme right-wing threats. How long will the analysis take?

Tom Tugendhat: I do not think RICU operates different standards. It is a slightly different challenge. I know Mr Shawcross mentioned it, but the challenge we are seeing is that interpretations of it vary. That is a different challenge. There is a lot of work to be done on that. I will ask Michael for the timeline, if I may.

Michael Stewart: I would say two things on that. As the Minister has rightly pointed out, the RICU conversation is a slightly different one. Chair, it is important to reflect that RICU works directly for me so I have a specific interest in this.

For those of you who have looked at the 2018 CONTEST strategy, there are three bits to Prevent. The bottom bit of the triangle is the tackling causes space, and that is mostly where RICU speaks. William's observation on that was that we have been out of balance in the products we put forward, with more analysis of right-wing and less analysis of Islamist in comparison with the threats they present.

That is a slightly different question than understanding the middle bit, which is the conversation we have been having about the relative disparity of casework. There are three aspects to understanding that middle bit. Work is going on now, led by my teams, to look into cases that have taken place mostly over the last year, in a dip-sampling way, to give us a better understanding of that. I have already touched on the security threat check process, which we will begin this year. Both of those pieces of work will definitely be done and will give us a good sense within six months and certainly within a year.

It is also important that there is some independent verification of that beyond me, and that will be a more involved academic process, which we are discussing now. That will take over a year.

Q11 Paula Barker: Can I ask about the recent announcement about the Government service that will warn if there is danger to life nearby—the tech service? Why is that being brought in now? Is there any specific reason?

Tom Tugendhat: It is capability.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Paula Barker: There is no reason other than capability.

Tom Tugendhat: These programmes sometimes take a while to get online, and it is now online.

Q12 **Paula Barker:** It is stated that it could address flooding, fires and extreme weather. Could you see it being used in a terror situation?

Tom Tugendhat: It is something we have considered. You will be aware that public information is essential in moments like that. Quite how and where it is deployed will depend very much on what the challenge is.

There has been a lot of work done by psychologists in recent years on the old analogy of shouting "Fire!" in a crowded cinema. You do not want to do that and cause a stampede or further harm. How and where it would be used is something that still requires work. If you are sending out a text message, you cannot assume everybody sees it at the same moment. There is an awful lot of information that you have to assume is not treated equally.

It is a different challenge to have an immediate threat as opposed to a longer-term one. A flood that may come in 24 hours may be more amenable to this service than an immediate threat in other areas.

Paula Barker: That is helpful. Thank you.

Q13 **Chair:** Minister, I wonder whether you had a chance to read the Intelligence and Security Committee report on extreme right-wing terrorism. They say, "The continuing rise in the number of referrals to Prevent for concerns around Extreme Right-Wing activity does not necessarily signal a similar increase in the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism threat, rather it indicates a greater awareness of the potential risk and the greater focus being placed on this issue." That might be the explanation.

Tom Tugendhat: That is one of the possible explanations. That is right.

Q14 **Chair:** That would be quite a reasonable explanation, rather than people being worried about being racist.

Tom Tugendhat: The reality is that we have a combination of possible reasons, and I do not want to discount them. I want to find the best way of keeping our society and individuals within our society safe.

The ISC has done some really important work on this; others have done work on this. I am afraid we have found, admittedly in anecdotal evidence, that in some areas people are less willing to refer when it may be Islamist in a Muslim context. I am sure you would share with me the view that it is absolutely unacceptable to suggest that Islamism is acceptable in Islam; that is as wrong as suggesting right-wing views are acceptable in any other culture.

Chair: Yes, absolutely.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q15 **James Daly:** Prevent was created in 2003, but it would be fair to say it doesn't work, wouldn't it?

Tom Tugendhat: I don't agree with that, actually, Mr Daly.

Q16 **James Daly:** Can you give us some evidence to suggest it does work?

Tom Tugendhat: Yes, I will be very happy to give you some evidence that it does work. You can see pretty clearly from the statistics that many people are referred into it and end up being completely ordinary members of society only a few years later. It is a programme that has definitely demonstrated—

Q17 **James Daly:** We are referring people into it who may not have terrorist sympathies, and after they finish they still do not have terrorist sympathies.

Tom Tugendhat: That is one interpretation. Alternatively, we are referring people into it who do have terrorist sympathies, which is what the evidence from the Channel programme shows, and then after a few years they do not.

Q18 **James Daly:** Is there a better way of doing this, Minister? You are the relatively new Security Minister. Although I accept everything you say, I cannot exactly see our European colleagues following the grand example of Prevent as being the way to address things. Is there a better way than Prevent?

Tom Tugendhat: Well, our European colleagues are following it. Nobody yet has found a better one. We are constantly looking around, and so you are right to keep challenging us. That is absolutely part of what we have to do to ourselves.

Look at the incidents of terror we have seen in the United Kingdom and the way we have been able to challenge some of this. I am not saying it is 100% successful; that would be absurd, but the way in which it has been able to divert some people away from violent extremism has to be seen as a success.

This is not an attempt to reprogramme people who may have views we do not agree with. It is an attempt to help people step away from violent extremism. It is quite a narrow aim, if you look at it specifically.

Q19 **James Daly:** In some ways, Prevent replicates services that should be there in the community. If somebody has a mental health issue, which is one of the main reasons why they have been referred into it, it seems odd that Prevent is how we address that mental health issue rather than through other services in the community.

Tom Tugendhat: You are completely right. There are some instances of referrals that frankly should not be referrals to Prevent, but referrals to mental health clinics. That is completely accurate. It is certainly true that there is some evidence of overlap between extremist views and mental health issues.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sometimes there should be referrals to mental health clinics; sometimes there should be referrals to Prevent; and sometimes, I am afraid, there should be referrals to both because the reality is that the overlap is very high. We need to make sure we are getting people into the appropriate level of care.

The challenge we have is to make sure, when we refer people who may have mental health issues as well, that we are not putting people who would care for them into positions of severe vulnerability when we know they may have terrorist sympathies as well.

Q20 Simon Fell: Thank you for joining us, Minister. I am interested in incel culture—not personally, I should say. Shawcross argues in his review that people who are influenced by that culture, fixated on school massacres and areas like that, should not be covered under the Prevent programme. Do you agree with that?

Tom Tugendhat: Mr Shawcross quite rightly challenges us on that. Involuntary celibacy is very often an indicator, but we are very far from convinced that it is in itself violent extremism. The reason I am slightly cautious about this is that we have seen incel-related attacks in other countries. We have not seen it in the UK, but we have seen it in other countries. The same is true of school shooting. Thank God, we have not seen school shootings in the UK for many, many years now. I am glad our gun laws make that particularly difficult and therefore more unlikely. We are keeping our eyes open to the different ideologies that motivate in different ways.

Q21 Simon Fell: The reason I ask is that we have had briefings as a Committee looking at incel culture and how it may start as involuntary celibacy, but the individuals involved in it move across the spectrum, essentially looking for an outlet of hate that best serves them. Organisations like the Community Security Trust and others have done—

Tom Tugendhat: That is why I was clear that it is more of an indicator than an ideology of itself. It may indicate that the individual is looking for an outlet of some kind, even if we have not yet identified what that ideological outlet may be.

Q22 Simon Fell: If you think that group of individuals are best served outside of the Prevent programme, where should they sit?

Tom Tugendhat: Let me just be quite cautious. I did not say they were necessarily best served outside the Prevent programme. They may or may not be. The Prevent programme is there to assist when people have been referred in. The best people who can judge who should be referred in are the people who are working with others in the community.

It is very difficult to set hard and fast rules from Westminster—from Whitehall—when the human variabilities in our communities are so great. There will be many indicators that may trigger a referral, incel views being one, but the purpose of Prevent is to prevent violent ideology.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

A referral may not be the wrong thing. Channel, the programme that works with people, may be a better way to filter. I am very keen not to deter people from referring, if they feel that that is an appropriate action. Would you agree, Michael?

Michael Stewart: Yes, absolutely. Like you, Mr Fell, I spend quite a lot of time thinking about incels but not from a personal perspective. It is fair to say that, across the counter-terrorism system, inevitably, the edges of Prevent will always be fuzzier than the edges of some of the others, where our understanding and statement of what terrorism is are clearer.

As the Minister says, we would not want to be in a position where we were discouraging people from making referrals even on this more marginal stuff. I absolutely share his view. Our understanding—it is by no means perfect—is that the really large majority of people involved in incel culture are sad and unhappy but not violent. There is a small violent subculture, and that is what we need to look at. As the Minister has touched on, that is also true for school shooting.

Going back to Mr Daly's question, I spend a lot of time talking to my opposite number in the United States, where they have a significant school shooting problem. Much of the methodology we adopt when we are thinking about taking people on to our programmes is remarkably similar to what they do, even though the ideological nature of that is even fuzzier but not necessarily non-existent. We do need to continue to be a broader church than the rest of the counter-terrorism process.

Q23 **Chair:** When you say "people", you mean men, don't you? It is men who are incels. It is not people; it is not women. Women are not incels.

Tom Tugendhat: It is almost entirely men.

Michael Stewart: You are quite right, but this is a reflection of how things can be abused. The incel movement was originally started by a woman in Canada, who had absolutely no violent concepts whatsoever, and it has been exploited in this way. You are right, Chair. More broadly across Prevent casework, about 90% of the casework we look at is men.

Q24 **Tim Loughton:** Welcome, Minister. It is always good to have Ministers for their debut performance in front of the Committee. We are always very gentle.

Is it the case that Prevent drives extremism underground?

Tom Tugendhat: No, I do not think that is true. What Prevent has suffered from, due to some relatively high-profile campaigns, is a perception that that might be the case. The reality is that it has extremely good engagement with many members of pretty much every community. Some loudmouths may say that their community feels like this is victimisation, but the communities themselves choose to engage with it. We certainly see this in mosques and community groups across the United Kingdom.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q25 Tim Loughton: We took evidence some years ago in a different inquiry—I think it was to do with hate crime and racism—from university academics, who were very concerned that Prevent was effectively snuffing out free speech on university campuses because people did not want to express views that could be construed as extremist, which could make them candidates for the Prevent programme. They were very critical of the Prevent programme. Have you seen evidence of that?

Tom Tugendhat: No, we have not seen any serious evidence of that.

Michael Stewart: No, that is right. This is a criticism I have seen repeated on a fairly regular basis. The Department for Education produces statistics on its safeguarding programmes for university speakers. The number of people who are refused an opportunity to speak on Prevent-related grounds is really tiny.

We have not seen any broader indication that a chilling effect does exist. It appears to us that all the issues that are of interest to us are discussed quite vibrantly on university campuses rather than being driven underground.

Q26 Tim Loughton: I am not talking about cancelling speakers. That is why we have the legislation on freedom of speech on university campuses. I am talking about ordinary students who may be harbouring extremist views. They may have previously been engaged in debate or slightly more offensive behaviour, which would have revealed those extremist views, and they are now hesitant to do so and they seek other fora.

Tom Tugendhat: Let us be clear. The purpose of Prevent is to stop people turning to violent ideological movements that would threaten them and others. That is what it is about. It comes under the CONTEST strategy very specifically because it is about preventing terrorism in our country.

Part of the purpose of that is to help people who are being radicalised to be not so radicalised. It is absolutely right to make sure those views are challenged. If, in challenging them, people do not hold them any more and therefore you do not hear them any more, that is a success, not a failure.

That is not the same thing as cancel culture, where you are choosing not to debate in order to have an easier time of your own ideological pursuits. Instead, it is about making sure that violent views—views that genuinely threaten to drive people towards extreme action, not just thought—are challenged and put in their correct place.

Q27 Tim Loughton: That is my point. If people feel they are vulnerable to being pursued by the Prevent programme or being identified for it by speaking their views and having those views challenged in open debate, be it on the university campus, in an education establishment or wherever, they are likely to go underground and seek refuge with the extremist organisations that Prevent is trying to stop them going into the



arms of. Jihadists do not openly recruit at freshers' fair.

Tom Tugendhat: They did.

Tim Loughton: Well, if they did, they can be challenged, but the really dangerous ones do not. Those are exceptional circumstances where pseudo-extremists have presented themselves, but mostly it is done underground, on the internet and through personal contacts.

Tom Tugendhat: Your point about the direct connection between people on the internet as opposed to in open forums is absolutely true. That is due to the nature of the change in the way communities operate and the way we all communicate. I am afraid that is just a fact. There is nothing I can add to that.

It is certainly true that we all communicate more using private—not necessarily secret—communications rather than open forums. That is correct. It is not correct—in fact I have seen no evidence to justify the claim—that Prevent is in any way having a chilling effect on open debate in either universities or any other public forum. It is helping those who are on a path to radicalisation to step off it.

That is a very important thing to do. It is important to protect the individual concerned, but, more importantly, it is important to protect the whole of society. That is exactly what a community like ours should do. We should not accept violent ideology as a norm. It is not a norm; it is not normal in our society. It is an outlier, and it is an outlier in various groups. We have spoken about Islamists; we have spoken about the extreme right wing. In the past, certainly in some instances, we have seen left-wing anarchists and single-issue ideology leading to potential acts of terror as well.

We know ideology can lead to violence. It is absolutely the job of the state to protect individuals and, in doing so, to challenge the ideology that may lead people to violence.

Q28 **Tim Loughton:** Can we touch on the issue about the proportions of Islamist extremism and right-wing extremism? That was one of the major observations by Shawcross. His figures say that, out of the 4,915 referrals to Prevent, 22% related to Islamist radicalisation and slightly more, 25%, related to extreme right-wing ideology. Yet in terms of the people who ended up being in custody on remand for terrorism-related offences, 70% are categorised as Islamist and 22% as extreme right wing. He claims that the Islamist threat is severely under-represented in Prevent referrals. Is he right on that?

Tom Tugendhat: I accept his report. I accept his report because he has demonstrated, through the data, that this is a challenge that we do not have correctly balanced. He is correct on that. We need to find out the reasons for that misallocation and seek to make sure it is better represented.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

As Michael put it earlier, and indeed as the Chair put it earlier, there are potential reasons for that. One is, as the ISC put it, due to the growing understanding that right-wing violence is a serious threat and therefore should be treated with appropriate seriousness. Another is, as I have mentioned, possibly cultural misunderstandings or an unwillingness to challenge on various areas. There may be other reasons I have not covered.

It is important to recognise that the way in which we engage with communities has to be equal, that individuals of whichever community have the same right to protection as anybody else, and that the whole of society has the same right of protection from anybody who challenges it.

Q29 Tim Loughton: I am not going to dispute that, but why is it that there is a higher representation of right-wing extremists than Islamist extremists among those pursued? In the months you have been in this job, certainly since that report, you must have formed a view. Cultural sensitivities led to grooming gangs, predominantly British Pakistani men, going largely undeterred. Are those cultural sensitivities counterbalanced by it being more fashionable to go after right-wing extremists?

Tom Tugendhat: That is one of the theories.

Tim Loughton: Is it right?

Tom Tugendhat: It is a theory that requires quite a lot of further investigation. That is why we are working with groups like Educate Against Hate and many other groups across the country. We are helping to educate teachers and other people in the community, who may be having that level of contact, to look at whether what they are seeing is or is not normal.

As I say, today is the first day of Ramadan. Many people will be practising their faith in ways that will stand out in some communities. To stand out is not to be extremist or to be in any way a danger or threat. To stand out is merely, in some cases, to be practising your religion. On Ash Wednesday, many of us Catholics will have a black mark on our forehead. That is hardly an extremist symbol. There are many other things people do culturally that may simply be a reflection of the cultural practices they follow either religiously or personally.

That does not mean there are not some aspects that are indicators. That is where we need to help teachers and other people in the community understand the difference and, therefore, recognise where there is a challenge or where it must be addressed.

Q30 Tim Loughton: Do you know how many children have been taken into care from parents who have been deemed to be extremist?

Tom Tugendhat: I am going to turn to Michael, I am afraid.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Michael Stewart: I cannot give you a precise answer, but the numbers will be extraordinarily low.

Q31 **Tim Loughton:** How many is extraordinarily low?

Michael Stewart: I do not want to give you a precise answer because my understanding of this would be more based around the children who have returned from Syria than from children who are based in the UK. I am not clear enough on the second one to give you a specific answer.

Q32 **Tim Loughton:** Can I tell you it probably runs into hundreds over several years? It is not dominated by Syria. I would be interested to know how many of those parents were then identified for a Prevent programme.

Michael Stewart: The mechanisms would certainly exist in those circumstances. If a child had been taken into care because of their parents' extremist impact on them, I would have expected that already to be part of the Prevent system, where that was the specific driver behind it.

Q33 **Tim Loughton:** It would be interesting to have those figures. There were high-profile cases some years ago of children taken into care, for example, because their parents were UKIP activists. There were genuine cases, which were challenged. There are many other cases of children who were taken into care because they had parents who identified with genuinely extreme right-wing, Islamist or other extreme religious views. It is more to the latter.

I would be interested to know what the overall figure is. I am slightly out of date on it, but it is more than I think you assume, Mr Stewart. I would also like to know whether an intervention as substantial as taking a child into care is automatically followed by that person being referred to either a Prevent programme or some other restricted activity. Clearly, if they are dangerous to their own children and that danger is based on their extreme views, they must be dangerous to society as well.

Michael Stewart: I am quite confident that no Prevent referrals occur for a person being a member of UKIP, either an individual or their parent. I am absolutely confident that would not fall within even the broadest definition of extremism.

Q34 **Tim Loughton:** That is the case, but there were some cases of kids being taken into care because of that, not being referred to Prevent. I want to know who has been referred to Prevent.

Michael Stewart: Any case of child protection is always challenging in terms of reporting in the public domain and not necessarily covering the sensitivities of it. I will take a look at that for you, but my strong sense is that we are not in a position where the primary driver of significant numbers of children being put in care is the risk their parents pose to them because their parents are extremists.

Q35 **Chair:** Can I just follow on from that point? There has been concern that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

RICU is listing certain works as flags for potential extreme right-wing terrorist interest, including "The Great Escape", the poetry of G. K. Chesterton and even Michael Portillo's "Great British Railway Journeys".

Tim Loughton: A dangerous programme.

Chair: Is that correct?

Tom Tugendhat: Without wishing to comment on Michael Portillo's clothing, I would not describe any other element of that programme as extreme. I should say very clearly that RICU does not either. RICU has listed, possibly without enough warnings as to exactly what it was doing, what an extremist said were products that that person felt were extremist. The idea that G. K. Chesterton, who, as we all know, wrote the fantastic Father Brown books, or Michael Portillo's "Great British Railway Journeys" are in any way extreme is completely absurd. It is absolutely ridiculous.

Q36 **Chair:** Can I ask you about recommendation 25? This is about ensuring that Prevent money does not fund, work with or consult with extremism-linked groups or individuals. How widespread is this?

Tom Tugendhat: This is something we have been looking to address in various ways. As you know, we have been concerned that some groups that claim to represent communities across our country are much more interested in spreading division and hatred in various ways. We are trying to make sure that none of these groups has access to any funding at all. As you know, Chair, that is something the Home Office can work on but cannot prevent every public sector organisation in the country from acting on. This is something we are working on.

Q37 **Chair:** But you don't know the scale of it.

Tom Tugendhat: We have some idea of the scale of it. Would you like to go into the detail, Michael?

Michael Stewart: William looked at this very carefully, and it is important that he did. It is absolutely central that public funds should not be going to organisations that are themselves extremist.

William found a couple of examples from a number of years ago. My teams and I have then looked through this again. I do not see this as a problem that is happening now. However, both the Minister and the Home Secretary have asked for stronger due diligence and a stronger role in making sure we are examining this in detail going forward, and both the Security Minister and the Home Secretary have a clear sign-off. I do not think it is happening now.

Q38 **Chair:** There were a couple of instances a few years ago, but nothing at the moment.

Tom Tugendhat: That is our understanding.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q39 **Chair:** Why is he writing that you need to be looking at this?

Tom Tugendhat: He is right. He is absolutely right. This is definitely not something we should be even—

Chair: Absolutely, but there is no evidence that it is happening.

Tom Tugendhat: There is evidence that it happened in the past.

Michael Stewart: We absolutely have to have zero tolerance of this. We cannot have it under any circumstances.

Q40 **Chair:** No one is disputing that. It is just that statements are being made. When we ask, "Where is the evidence that this is a problem?" it is a bit frustrating that you are saying, "A few years ago there were a couple of instances, but it is not happening at the moment."

Tom Tugendhat: Chair, you will recognise that it is a very long report. It is a very complete report. That is one of the reasons why it is a very good report. Mr Shawcross has looked at many areas where lessons have been drawn and made sure they are reinforced or indeed, more challengingly, looked at areas where lessons need to be drawn and has made those recommendations.

Q41 **Chair:** Can I also ask you about the Prevent staff you have—perhaps this is Mr Stewart's domain, really—and the skills and capabilities you need? Could you just talk a little bit about that? There is a concern that you do not have the right staff in place, given what Mr Shawcross is saying in his report.

Michael Stewart: About 150 staff work directly in Prevent, and then about another 100 I fund who are employed by local authorities. It is a reasonably small effort by overall Government standards.

My sense of Prevent staff is that I have a strongly motivated and in many cases highly specialist workforce. I have seen people, particularly in the local authority area, move from one local authority to another because they are passionate about Prevent. Seeing that is one of the most elevating and energising parts of my job.

In skills, the challenge we have, as we touched on earlier, is that the risk picture is changing all the time. Our ability to keep up with that is always a challenge, but we do well on that. As the Minister has touched on, the proliferation of online skills is really important here. I have a group of specialists who are working specifically on how that plays out. That is also a challenge because the online position changes so quickly.

William is definitely of the view that, in particular, the understanding of Islamist extremism within Prevent needs to improve, and we are very much committed to that. William also, in a further recommendation, says he wants to see more of the work being done in-house rather than delivered by consultants. That is what we are already doing, which for me is a reflection of the confidence I have in Prevent staff.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q42 **Paula Barker:** Mr Stewart, on the 100 employees you fund to work in local authorities, I am assuming that is because those specific areas have high levels of risk. Is that the case?

Michael Stewart: Yes, that is right. Our philosophy—again, William touches on this—is that we have a series of Prevent priority areas. Across England and Wales, every local authority has a duty to deliver on Prevent, but over years we have developed a methodology in which we look at the highest-risk areas.

William notes correctly that that is now probably a little out of kilter with where the threat is. The threat feels, sadly for us, more balanced across a range of regions. Today I have just over 40 Prevent priority areas. Based on William's recommendations, we will be regionalising more strongly. That number will fall to about 20 over the next couple of years.

Q43 **Chair:** Will that help make sure the right referrals are made and the right people go into the Channel programme? It seems to me, if the 40 local authorities are the high-profile ones, there are lots of other local authorities that may not have access to the expertise you have just been talking about from staff being able to assist in making decisions. Are you expecting that regionalisation process to result in better decision making?

Michael Stewart: Yes, I do. That is not the only reason. There will be a series of regional advisers employed directly by the Home Office who will help particularly for those areas that are unfamiliar with this, but that is not the only thing to improve in the referral process.

The Minister has touched already, as does William, on the quality of our training products to frontline practitioners, to teachers or health workers. We already have a range of training products, but we need to make them sharper, particularly on the ideological points. That will be another key in improving the quality of referrals.

Q44 **Chair:** Minister, is there anything you need to say to us or tell us about? Is there anything you are concerned about?

Tom Tugendhat: No, I don't think so. I would just like to thank Mr Shawcross formally on the record and thank you for your interest in this area of work. This is enormously important and it does not stand alone. As you know, there are four areas in the CONTEST strategy. This is one, but it is an important element, and it is rightly challenged frequently.

Having this ability to explain what its purpose is—I look forward to reading your report, when it comes out, and hearing how you feel it should be engaged and how it should engage with others—is an essential part of democratic debate. We should compete in the ideas space just as we compete in others, and this is important.

Q45 **Chair:** We have asked to speak to Mr Shawcross. We were hoping he might be able to join you today, but that was not possible. We would like to see him. If you do come across him, perhaps you could say that we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are very keen to speak to him, if he would like to come.

Tom Tugendhat: I know he is keen to do it. I am not, I am afraid, able to organise his diary for him, but I realise he is very keen to do it.

Chair: Good. That is very helpful. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.