

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Combatting New Forms of Extremism, HC 903

Tuesday 20 January 2026

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Dame Karen Bradley (Chair); Mr Paul Kohler; Ben Maguire; Robbie Moore; Margaret Mullane; Peter Prinsley; Joani Reid; Bell Ribeiro-Addy.

Questions 176-250

Witnesses

[I](#): Dame Sara Khan, former Counter Extremism Commissioner 2018-2021; former Independent Adviser for Social Cohesion and Resilience for the UK Government 2021-2024.

[II](#): Dan Jarvis MBE MP, Minister for Security, Home Office; Jonathan Emmett, Director, Counter-Terrorism Directorate, Home Office.

Examination of witness

Witness: Dame Sara Khan.

Chair: I welcome the Committee and our witness to today's first panel of our final session on combating new forms of extremism. Dame Sara, would you like to introduce yourself and then we will go into questions?

Dame Sara Khan: Good afternoon, Committee. Thank you for inviting me to give evidence. As Karen said, my name is Sara Khan. I was the Countering Extremism Commissioner between 2018 and 2021, where I produced a number of official reports for the Government. I was then appointed by the Government to be their independent adviser for social cohesion and resilience, and I published the last official review into threats facing social cohesion and democratic resilience back in March 2024.

Q176 **Joani Reid:** Thank you very much for attending today. As you have just outlined, you have a long history and accomplished career in countering extremism. How, in your experience, has the landscape around extremism changed? What are the new threats and what should the Government's priorities be in tackling them?

Dame Sara Khan: In the absence of an extremism assessment framework, it would be helpful for me to highlight what I think are two really important trends in relation to extremism. The first is that I believe that Britain is in the midst of an evolving and accelerating extremism landscape. We have seen how there have been an unprecedented number of Prevent referrals in the last year—a 27% increase. If we look at the rise of hate crime, again, there have been significant numbers, and, in particular, an unprecedented number of antisemitic and anti-Muslim incidents.

We are seeing worsening youth radicalisation; we know that one in five people who are being investigated for terrorism are under the age of 18. Less talked about but really important is how we are seeing an older generation of men, predominantly aged between 40 or 45 and 65, who are increasingly being influenced by extremist narratives and conspiracy theories, and who are engaged in criminality and violence related to that.

There has been a rise in political violence. We know that in the last general election just under half of candidates experienced abuse, threats, intimidation and violence. But this is not something that is just affecting politicians. When I did my review, it was very clear that this was an issue that was affecting people from across all walks of life: members of the judiciary, civic society groups, people working in academia, teachers, and people working in the arts and culture sector—there is a growing climate of hostility.

We know from MI5 and CT policing about the increase in foreign state interference and hostile threats over the last couple of years, and how a lot of that activity seeks to undermine social cohesion and fuel extremism.



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Unfortunately, during my time at the commission—and incredibly, it has got worse now—we saw the brazen and open activity of domestic extremists, whether it is Islamists or neo-Nazi extremist groups. I am talking about extremist groups that fall just below the terrorism threshold, so they are not proscribed and are in effect allowed to operate freely. We have seen them operate on our streets chanting all kinds of things, whether that is “Globalise the intifada” or the Tommy Robinson rallies actively promoting things like the great replacement theory and so forth.

Online presents another significant challenge. When I was at the commission, I think Twitter was still in existence, and many of the prominent extremist influencers at that time had been banned by Twitter. Under X, many of those people, around 150 or so, have come back, including people like Tommy Robinson. On the scale of online extremism, I know there have been huge discussions about how that is a growing threat, but one clear example is the scale of antisemitic content and posts. I was reading a report recently from the Antisemitism Policy Trust that showed that three years ago around half a million antisemitic posts were being put up in a year; that has now risen to 1 million a day—that is in the last three years alone. That just shows you the scale of that challenge.

What we are seeing now, which we did not see during my time at the commission, is the mainstreaming of extremist narratives. For example, calls for re-migration and for ethnic minority British citizens to be deported used to be a clarion call of the extreme right wing, and it was very much confined to the fringes of the extreme right wing. That has mainstreamed—it has moved from the fringe to the mainstream in a way that I have not seen previously.

Having said all of that, it is important to point out that there is no analysis of extremism without also understanding how resilient we are as a society. What is the state of social cohesion? What is the state of our democratic resilience to help us weather that threat and measure it? That brings me on to my second trend, which is that unfortunately the reality is that we are seeing and witnessing declining social cohesion in this country. We are seeing declining levels of civic participation and increasing levels of polarisation.

There is a level of disillusionment with democracy in our country. If you look at time series data over the last four decades, the level of trust in Parliament, in political parties and in the Government is downward. But I think it is the scale and pace of that trend that I find incredibly concerning. If you look at data from the British social attitudes survey, for example, it highlights how in the last five years alone, the level of distrust around the Government putting the interests of the country before the political party in power has doubled. There is a growing climate of worsening threats from extremism, declining levels of social cohesion and declining levels of democratic resilience, and all of those things are interconnected. When you stand back and look at that picture, it is deeply concerning.

When I go and speak to schools, charities and local authorities, I find that they are all struggling to know how to deal with these issues, because



they do not fall under the remit of Prevent and they do not necessarily fall under the remit of social cohesion—we can talk about that more. Unfortunately, there is a gaping chasm in Whitehall in how we deal with extremism and these threats to social cohesion.

Q177 Joani Reid: Given what you have just said about the lack of that approach, and given that you have also outlined the seriousness of the situation, do you think we should be looking at having a counter-extremism and social cohesion Government strategy that cuts across various Departments, and possibly an assessment framework, which you also mentioned?

Dame Sara Khan: Yes, definitely; that is something that I recommended in my review back in 2024 and in subsequent reports that I have written.

If you look at the example of the summer riots, it really shows how you cannot separate extremism from social cohesion, which is what Whitehall does at the moment. Departments get very funny about—"Well, this is our area of policy. We do not want the Home Office getting involved in MHCLG's work," and vice versa. But the reality is that if you look at the summer riots, here you had prominent far-right extremist groups—the usual suspects: Britain First, Patriotic Alternative, Tommy Robinson and others—who were fuelling the fire, and spreading disinformation and conspiracy theories and extremist narratives.

You also had foreign influencers and foreign actors spreading that disinformation and those conspiracy theories. You can see that the riots took place in areas where social cohesion was often low and the indicators of social cohesion were low. They were areas where you see high levels of deprivation, and concerning levels of disillusionment with democracy and distrust of authorities.

Trying to demarcate, on the one hand, the role of foreign states and the role of foreign interference, and then separating out extremism, and then separating out social cohesion has been, in my view, totally counterproductive, because that has just left us in the dark in understanding how these things are linked. Why is it that in some parts of the country the riots happened and in other parts they did not? What were the factors involved?

I think that in Whitehall we have a very outdated way of looking at cohesion, democratic resilience and extremism, which is just not fit for purpose. I was reading a report today—it was released recently by the Resilience and Reconstruction group—that shows that if you look at how disinformation is operating in the UK, in particular in relation to disinformation about Ukraine that is being spread by Russian-aligned narratives, it is migrating from the margins to the mainstream, and that is being done through familiar domestic figures, such as Tommy Robinson and others, using algorithmic feeds, and they are then blending grievances and stories about local issues, two-tier justice and institutional failure.



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The report shows how, by using those concerns, you have a slow drip-feed that is changing people's perceptions into supporting extremist and anti-state narratives. Again, that just shows you that these things are inextricably linked. It is almost like a triangle, if you think about social cohesion, extremism and democratic resilience—or a square if you also want to include the involvement of foreign states.

Whitehall just does not look at it like that. We have all of the national security infrastructure that deals with foreign state interference. If you look at the defending democracy taskforce, its primary responsibility is how we deal with foreign interference—for example, in our elections. However, the whole of the national security infrastructure and the national security strategy itself does not ask: "Well, okay, you are dealing with the threats, but how are you building resilience? How are you dealing with domestic extremism? How are you strengthening social cohesion to ensure that we are able to withstand that problem?" I am afraid that that will just mean that we will have very limited success, not only in dealing with the role that foreign interference is having but in responding to our own domestic extremism challenges. What I am really calling for is a completely new and radical way of looking at this issue.

You rightly asked about the lack of an extremism framework. I have to say that I just find that really disappointing, because we are so much in the dark about, for example, where the extremism hotspots are across the country, or where social cohesion is fraying. One of the things that I have realised throughout the many years that I have worked in this area is how often extremists have got very fine-tuned to understanding where weaknesses are in local communities, and they target those areas.

Islamist extremists will target vulnerable Muslim communities who may have grievances about anti-Muslim hatred or feel that there is no sense of belonging here. It is the same on the far right where they feel that people have grievances around legitimate concerns about immigration or other issues, and they are very good at targeting those areas.

We are very much behind the curve on all of those issues. Being able to measure extremism and measure those other relevant factors is really important. I do not think it is difficult to do; I just do not understand why Whitehall has not done that in all this time.

That would also help us to understand and develop an early intervention scheme to see where the red lights are flashing and what more we should be doing at an earlier stage, which we perhaps could have done with the summer riots. It was interesting to see HMICFRS also come to that conclusion: they said that, because of the lack of intelligence and risk assessment, we do not have that information. It is important that we build that framework and our analytical capability to help drive a new and much more effective approach to dealing with this problem.

Q178 Joani Reid: My final quick question is, how do you think that is best achieved or delivered? How do we get that co-ordination? Do you have any model in mind?



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Dame Sara Khan: The Home Office could set up a new directorate whose responsibility is dealing with counter-extremism, threats to social cohesion and democratic resilience. That would cut across Government Departments, working with the Department for Education, DCMS, arm's length bodies and others where there is a clear relevance to this type of work.

That has to be distinct from Prevent; I am not of the view that this should be part of the Government's counter-terrorism approach. Part of the problem we have—and we can talk about this more—is the conflation between extremism and terrorism, and what we think and expect Prevent to do and what its remit actually is.

We could have a directorate inside the Home Office or even possibly the Cabinet Office. Alongside that, there should be a new strategic approach or a counter-extremism, social cohesion and democratic resilience strategy that builds a whole-society approach to help us meet this growing challenge in our country.

Joani Reid: Thank you very much. That was very comprehensive.

Q179 **Mr Kohler:** Thank you for coming. You have moved on to a point I was going to ask you about. You are on record bemoaning the fact that extremism is conflated with terrorism and the lack of a legal definition of extremism. How should we define extremism?

Dame Sara Khan: It is a very important question. When I was at the Commission for Countering Extremism, just the definition—never mind a legal definition—was a very complicated and controversial debate. Coming up with a credible definition of extremism is really important for a number of reasons. First, we have to be very clear about the activity that we are concerned about. We know on the one hand there is a growing challenge and threat of extremist actors and groups that are seeking to undermine our democratic way of life and fuel terrorism and violence on our streets. But having a definition is also important because, as a liberal democracy, it is important to make clear what is not extremism. Not matter how horrific, violent or offensive a certain type of activity is, it is important that we do not say, "Well, that's extremism." For that reason, it is really important.

When I was at the commission, we did a whole load of work and, in effect, I spent three years coming up with a definition of extremism, which is in the 2021 "Operating with Impunity" report. In 2024, the Government published an updated definition of extremism using some of that report. I think that is quite a good definition; it is a big improvement from the 2015 definition.

I am not necessarily calling for a legal definition. What is important is having an operational definition of extremism and I do not think the current definition of extremism has been operationalised. When it was published, the election was called around two months later, so it has never been operationalised in the way I would like.



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I have called for—as I wrote in the “Operating with Impunity” report, which was co-authored with Sir Mark Rowley before he was appointed as the Met commissioner—a new legal framework to counter the activity of hateful extremists and extremist organisations. That could be civil, criminal or regulatory. One of the challenges we have had in this country for around two decades now is dealing with extremist groups and actors who fall just below the terrorism threshold—those who promote the same extremist narratives and conspiracy theories as proscribed groups, but because they do not engage in terrorism or violence we have, in effect, had no way of dealing with.

Anjem Choudary was a classic example of that; for years, authorities just did not know what to do with him, even though we all saw for ourselves how he was radicalising people into terrorism, fuelling far-right extremism, further fuelling Islamist extremism, and promoting antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. We did not have the legal means to stop him.

To give credit to David Cameron, when he was Prime Minister he tried to put forward an extremism Bill, which sadly fell flat on its face for a number of different reasons. However, the intent was absolutely right. It cannot be right that we now have proscribed National Action, for example, but not other neo-Nazi groups such as Blood and Honour, White Vanguard, the Homeland Party and others. These are neo-Nazi organisations that are clearly radicalising children and others, promoting the same narratives, and while they may not engage in terrorism, they are clearly anti-democratic and are seeking to use democratic means to undermine our democracy. Why are we not doing something about that?

One of the suggestions we have made is that we need a level of what I would call hateful extremism proscription orders, because you have hateful extremist groups that do not meet the threshold for terrorism but are clearly and persistently engaging in the same activity as terrorist groups, bar the violence and terrorism. We are allowing them to operate freely, in effect, and I don’t think that is acceptable.

Q180 Mr Kohler: So you would need a legal definition of extremism, then.

Dame Sara Khan: You don’t necessarily need a legal definition. We don’t have a legal definition of stalking, for example, but we have powers to deal with stalking. When I spoke to counter-terrorism policing, to the national policing advisers for hate crime, and to regulators such as Ofsted and the Charity Commission, what they said they want is powers.

One of their concerns is that we are expected to deal with extremist actors and groups who fall below terrorism—what I would call hateful extremism, which I have written extensively about, as well as the distinction between hateful extremism and terrorism—and we are limited in what we can do. If we have extremists, possibly as school governors or as trustees of charities, there are no legal powers for us to do anything about that, because there is no legislation around it. When I have spoken to policing, they say, “What do you want us to do about extremism?”—because there are no legal powers to deal with it.



I would encourage the Committee to read “Operating with Impunity”. We show that the two areas of law most relevant to hateful extremism are hate crime legislation—in particular, the stirring up hatred offences—and counter-terrorism legislation. One of the things we show is that, when it comes to hateful extremism and the activities we have defined there, we don’t have legislation that was designed to tackle it. We have deliberately, as a society, created legislation to tackle hate crime and terrorism, but what we have failed to do over the last 20 years or so, while the extremist threat was growing, is outlaw those hateful extremist groups that fall just below the terrorism threshold. That is something I would definitely encourage the Committee to re-look at.

Q181 Mr Kohler: We will. It is not the time now to explore whether you need legal definitions, but could you offer a non-legal definition of extremism? What does it mean to you?

Dame Sara Khan: I can give you the definition that I published back in 2021. We said that it was “Activity or materials directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to an in-group”—and there is a lot of psychology around that, which I am happy to explore—“which is motivated by or intending to advance a political, religious or racial supremacist ideology”, which is similar to the terrorism definition in terms of people being motivated by or intending to advance an ideology, “a. To create a climate conducive to hate crime, terrorism or other violence; or b. Attempt to erode or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of our democratic society as protected under Article 17...of the Human Rights Act”. It talks about the obligation on democratic states to protect the democratic norms and freedoms that extremists and totalitarian groups seek to exploit. That is a very long-winded and slightly confused—

Mr Kohler: No, that is helpful. I will come back to that in another question.

Dame Sara Khan: The Government’s definition right now is also very good.

Q182 Robbie Moore: I want to follow up on the point you were making about community cohesion. Do you think that there is a responsibility on the state, whether national or local government, not to address key issues? To use a quick example from my own constituency, with gang-related grooming and child sexual exploitation, there is an argument for social cohesion not happening. Given a lack of direction by local and national Governments over many years on that particular issue, social cohesion breaks down. The lack of sensible conversation and direction on issues that like that drives lack of social cohesion and more extreme views.

Dame Sara Khan: On the contrary, I think it is important that we talk about those issues, because the failure to have done so has fuelled the breakdown of social cohesion and fuelled far-right extremism in this country, without a doubt. I am from Bradford, so I am very familiar with the challenges around Asian grooming gangs. I have never been fearful to talk about it; it is really important that we do talk about it—that is critical.



In places like Rotherham, because state agencies failed to listen to victims and to the families of victims, they were people who had never ever supported far-right extremist propaganda, but when far-right extremist groups came to Rotherham and organised protests, we saw the fathers of those victims joining them, because they felt so let down by statutory agencies who did not believe their daughters in the name of social cohesion. In effect, they had given a bowl to the extremists. On the contrary, therefore, I feel very strongly that we have to talk about such issues—we cannot shy away from them—because the failure to do so only further fuels extremism and erodes social cohesion.

Q183 Robbie Moore: I am really pleased to hear that, because Nick Griffin stood to be the Member of Parliament in Keighley back in 2005 on that very issue. That just builds into the point you are making about social cohesion breakdown. Turning now to young people, what are the main drivers behind the increase in young people being radicalised?

Dame Sara Khan: Gosh. It is funny, isn't it, because I look back now and think, "Why are we even surprised that we are talking about the radicalisation of young people?" Give it 20 or 30 years and I am sure the next generation will laugh at us and think, "Well, what did you expect was going to happen when young people were exposed to unregulated social media content?" I remember reading one poll in which something like 73% of 16 to 24-year-olds have been exposed to hateful, extremist, terrorist or violent content online. That is almost three quarters of our children and young adults being exposed to such content.

For a long time we failed to remember that, throughout history and time, extremists have always deliberately targeted young people; they have always sought to radicalise young people. Even during the second world war, we saw the deliberate targeting of young people. Whether it is Islamist extremists or far-right extremists, there is always activity on recruiting and targeting young people. There are a number of things and a whole range of different movements—the 764 movement is aimed at young people, which is incredibly worrying—but we cannot just pin this on social media.

This is about, what does education look like? Are we building resilience in our young people? How equipped is our education system to build resilience on extremist narratives, whether that is digital literacy or building citizenship? What does it mean to live in a very plural democracy like Britain, where we celebrate living in a diverse, different and pluralistic society? How resilient are our families to be able to withstand extremism? I have come across cases where there are protective factors and risk factors: for some children, their families and their parents have acted as protective factors against their children being exposed to extremist content; and at the same time, I have come across families where it is the parents who are radicalising their children. Extremism, and young people being exposed to extremism, have to be looked at through a wide variety of issues.

Q184 Robbie Moore: Undoubtedly, one of those is social media. We have seen



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the rise of AI and of algorithms changing, so that content is being fed with the polarisation of views. We all know that. I wonder what your views are on how we address that. Today, the Secretary of State gave a statement in the House on looking at rolling out another consultation on whether we should or should not ban social media for those up to the age of 16. Is that something that the Government should be exploring? I am firm in my views—I think we should ban it up until the age of 16 to try to address these issues—but I am keen to understand your views.

Dame Sara Khan: On the issue of banning, I have not come to a final conclusion, probably because I feel quite conflicted about it. As a parent of three daughters, my instinct, naturally, is ban, ban, ban—just ban it all—but at the same time I don't necessarily think that will answer all the questions. It will be interesting to see what evidence and data come out from Australia. I was reading something by Molly Russell's father, Ian Russell, in *The Times* today—I don't know whether people have seen that piece. He does not support the banning of social media for children under the age of 16, and he looks into the reasons why that may be.

It is really hard. From a counter-extremism perspective, my instinct is that banning probably would be helpful because young people are being exposed to extremist content. We have already touched on the fact that a lot of extremist content is currently classed as legal, so it is not being dealt with sufficiently by the Online Safety Act, and I don't believe Ofcom would be able to deal with it effectively, either.

Do I think it will help the current generation of, say, 15-year-olds? It may not necessarily help them because they have already been exposed to that content, so how do you develop digital literacy and resilience within them? For the next generation of young people, I can see it being an argument. It will not be a debate; it will be very, very helpful for the next generation. My youngest is four, and I think it would be fantastic for her. She will not have grown up with social media, so banning it for under-16s will just not be an issue. I can't give you a clearcut answer because I am still trying to understand what my position is.

Q185 **Robbie Moore:** Finally from me, you mentioned the education point, which is to do with not only digital but media literacy. What are your recommendations on how we should educate parents with young children, teenagers and young people themselves? That is beyond the social media world—in wider education.

Dame Sara Khan: There is obviously digital literacy, and there are broader debates around citizenship. There is a lot of interesting data now about how you combat conspiracy theories. There is a lot of work looking at what pre-bunking conspiracy theories and countering disinformation looks like. It is about making sure the national curriculum is able to deal with those issues. It is about whether it is dealing with the threat itself and equipping them or seeking to build resilience. There is a lot more that I could say about that. I am happy to share that with the Committee later in writing if that would be better.

Robbie Moore: That would be helpful. Thank you.

Q186 **Ben Maguire:** Talking about tackling some of this extremism, we have touched on social media and online harms, and obviously there has been the AI controversy and scandal with the horrendous Grok images that came out a few weeks ago. Where do you think the Government should be prioritising their resources to tackle these new forms of extremism?

Dame Sara Khan: I think there are probably a number of ways, touching on what you asked me earlier, Joani. First, it is important to understand what the Government are doing to counter extremism at present. The reality is not very much. We had a counter-extremism strategy, and it was scrapped in 2021. It worked across Departments, the education sector and a whole range of other things. That, and the resources and funding linked to it, have all gone. That is a real concern. I don't think anything in the Budget has been allocated specifically to counter-extremism. The funding for Prevent is very different from funding to deal with extremism. That is the first thing.

There is no social cohesion plan or strategy at this moment in time. The hate crime strategy from 2016—10 years ago—was due an update in 2020, and that has still not happened. The reality is that extremism seems to have fallen through the Whitehall gap. Nobody is really dealing with it effectively.

The Home Office will say, "We are dealing with part of it. If people have extremist views, they can be referred to Prevent and they will receive Channel support." This is where talking about Prevent is quite important, in trying to understand what is and is not happening around extremism. The reality is that Prevent doesn't deal with extremism that falls below the terrorism threshold.

Prevent is a counter-terrorism strategy. It is often incorrectly labelled as a counter-extremism strategy, but its remit is not to deal with extremism; its remit is to deal with terrorism. If you look at the objectives of Prevent, it is about tackling the ideological causes of terrorism and providing support for those susceptible to radicalisation. If you look at the Home Office's definition of radicalisation, it is not about radicalisation in the broader sense of extremist radicalisation, but about radicalisation into terrorism. The Home Office's definition of radicalisation is, "the process of a person legitimising support for, or use of, terrorist violence." That is really important to understand, because it is about thresholds.

I have had many schools come to me over the years and say, "We have had young pupils who have spouted and support clear extremist propaganda. We referred them to Prevent, and while Prevent was concerned about them, they didn't meet the threshold for referral into Channel." In effect, there was no other safeguarding scheme for them to go to.

Even if you look at the Prevent referral figures—in the last set of figures that were released, around 8,788 referrals were made—we know that



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around 1,472 were adopted by Channel. That leaves around 7,306 referrals that were not adopted by Channel. We know that some of them went into the police-led management scheme, where people who did not meet the Channel threshold received support through other schemes. We don't know how many that is, and I am not aware that that data has ever been published.

The reality is that the rest of those people—thousands of people—could be displaying and holding serious extremist views. That has been my concern for a long time. We are not following these people into whether they are engaging in other extremist activity, whether that is engaging in forms of extremism-related hate crime, violence or riots on our streets, or other forms of extremist activity. We are not looking at the link. There is no safeguarding scheme to deal with those people, so it is really important to understand where Prevent starts and stops. We have got to break this assumption and this view that Prevent is dealing with extremism—it is not, and it is not doing so effectively.

The Home Office will say that, "We're disrupting extremist groups that fall below the terrorism threshold." When William Shawcross did his review, he was not made aware of what that looked like in practice or who was being targeted, but the reality is that, in the last couple of years, a lot of the extremist groups like the Homeland Party, Patriotic Alternative and many others have actually grown in influence, rather than decreased. There is a real concern around what we understand to be that challenge—that Prevent is not dealing with it.

Ministers and officials often talk about "the threat". They say, "The greatest threat is the Islamist threat, followed by the far right." I plead with the Committee to perhaps put this in your report: making the distinction between the terrorist threat and the extremist threat is important. It is true that when we are talking about the terrorist threat, the Islamist threat is a far greater threat, but when we are talking about the extremist threat, I would put all my money on saying that I suspect that the far-right extremist threat is the greater hateful extremist threat at the moment. We are not measuring it effectively, and we are not doing enough about it.

Q187 Ben Maguire: Would you say there is space, then, for a middle-tier version of Prevent that looks specifically at extremism cases that do not meet the threshold you mentioned—7,306 cases not adopted by Prevent? Does there need to be that space in the middle that is covered by a similar programme to Prevent that covers not terrorism but extremism?

Dame Sara Khan: For me, it is important to recognise that Prevent is fundamentally a securitised approach. Extremism is a societal problem; I don't think you should deal with extremism through the securitised approach. It should be dealt with as a societal issue rather than a security push. What I would do with Channel is broaden it as a safeguarding scheme where it deals with and takes in people who have terrorist concerns, who are susceptible to terrorism, who have extremist concerns,



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who are fixated on violence or those with other types of safeguarding concerns.

Channel would then triage those individuals to different panels and support for help. At the moment, you are just missing groups of people, whether it is people we missed like Axel Rudakubana, because he didn't show any coherent ideology, or individuals who fall below the terrorism threshold, and who therefore don't meet the current Channel scheme criteria. That is what I would do: I would broaden the approach.

David Anderson made a similar argument in his review last year, where he said that it should be broadened. I very much agree with his recommendation on that.

Chair: We have a few questions on the specifics of that coming up.

Q188 **Ben Maguire:** In terms of monitoring and policing that, would you suggest extra resources for local forces, or would it be an NCA-ringfenced extra pot of money that they get to police that and then, as you suggested, triage to other agencies as might be appropriate? I am aware that my local police force, Devon and Cornwall, are £3 million short at the moment compared with what they were expecting. I cannot imagine that they would be very happy if they had to pick up this almost extra work, if you like, and not have the resources that come with it.

Dame Sara Khan: It is interesting. What I really like about Channel is the current model, which I think is a very good model. It is without a doubt one of the real stories of success for Prevent that we have these multi-agency panel schemes. Many of these panels have to make difficult decisions: "Here we've got somebody who's really spouting extremist views, but are we concerned that they may go on to commit violence or terrorism? We're not too sure." They have to make difficult decisions where they do not necessarily know, and we have seen cases where some of those people who were not referred—or even were referred but were rejected—have then eventually done that.

Broadening the scheme so that Channel becomes more sophisticated, in a way where it can triage and make sure that people are going through the right support schemes, whether at local or national level, and getting the help that they need, is something that we desperately need. It just feels to me like Prevent is struggling to deal with these challenges. It always feels like it is playing catch-up. Every time we hear of a new story of somebody who has committed an extreme act of violence or terrorism, the first question I ask myself is, "Has this individual been referred to Prevent—yes or no?" It can be negative either way, whether they have or they have not.

I just think that broadening Channel would be very helpful. I have not thought of everything about how it would work, but as a starting point, it is probably something that we need to do to help us deal with the kind of evolving threat that we are now seeing.

Q189 **Ben Maguire:** You mentioned cross-Government working, which



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reminded me that when Professor Alexis Jay came before the Committee she made exactly the same point. It does seem to be a bit of a recurring theme across different Governments. Can I dig into that a little more and ask what could be improved, particularly in this area of extremism?

Dame Sara Khan: I guess it is what I have touched on a bit already. We do this with Prevent. Prevent is very good at working with the education sector and working with prisons, for example, on dealing with terrorist offenders. What I would like to see when we talk about counter-extremism—I have mentioned the relevance and how social cohesion and democratic resilience are inextricably linked—is the creation of a whole-of-society approach. If there is a whole-of-society approach, you are going to need to take a cross-departmental approach, and you are going to have to have the DFE play a role.

Very quickly on the point of DFE and youth radicalisation, which I did not mention earlier, we have had 10 years of the Prevent duty, and the Department for Education has played a very important role in working with the education sector, yet despite that we are still seeing a rapid rise in youth radicalisation. Again, we have to ask why that is, despite all the work that Prevent is engaged in. Prevent on its own is just not enough to stop youth radicalisation, despite all the investment and work that is happening. Sorry, I just had to put that in there.

On your wider point, a cross-departmental approach is absolutely needed. The current model of MHCLG saying, “Hands off, Home Office. We’re responsible for social cohesion,” and the Home Office saying to MHCLG, “Hands off. Counter-extremism is our remit,” is just nonsensical now—it is so outdated. By working together in a much more coherent and joined-up way, you are going to be able to draw the links more effectively, for example, between what is happening at local level and what is happening with policing, which MHCLG does not have responsibility for. It is about trying to build a new model that cuts across Departments.

There was a time—I think it was under the old counter-extremism strategy—when it was set out that Ministers from the different relevant Departments would meet every six months to co-ordinate and share insights. I think that model, where Ministers from those Departments come together and share information, could be brought back to the table again, but it requires thinking about this in a new way that is fit for the threat picture we are seeing at the moment.

Q190 **Peter Prinsley:** I am Peter Prinsley, the MP for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket. Thank you for coming this afternoon. I have been listening with growing dismay as you have been speaking—

Dame Sara Khan: Sorry.

Peter Prinsley: Nothing you have said has particularly cheered me up, I have to say. It says in your biography that in 2008, you started a women-led group called Inspire, which tried to deal with some of these problems. That is quite a long time ago. Could you tell us a little bit about that and what has happened to it since?



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Dame Sara Khan: Gosh. After the London bombings in 2005—20 years ago now—I and a couple of other Muslim women felt very aggrieved about the fact that there had been four British Muslims who thought it was acceptable to blow up and kill their fellow British citizens. Having felt really exasperated with existing, predominantly Muslim-led organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain really not doing much about it, as a group of women we decided to roll up our sleeves and do something about it.

We set up this organisation called Inspire, which was, I think, the only women-led counter-extremism organisation. We were predominantly focused on Islamist extremism; we broadened that over a number of years, but our focus at that time was Islamist extremism. We were around for about 10 years, and very much also dealing with the rise of the ISIS threat around 2014 to 2016-17. We did a whole range of different things. We worked with schools, teachers and young people, because there was so much demand about how you stop young Muslims being drawn into supporting Islamist extremism. This was at a time when we saw British Muslim families leave the UK to join and support ISIS.

It was very challenging. There was very little money, I have to say. We had the Home Office support some of our work. We launched a campaign called Making a Stand, where we brought together Muslim women from across the country. We launched a campaign in Whitehall where we led a roadshow across different parts of the UK. We worked predominantly with Muslim women and young people, trying to show them how they could stand up to extremist preachers—whether it was in the mosque or in their local communities—to challenge the narratives, and how to safeguard their children, and how their voices as women were really important.

We saw time and again that some of the most prominent activists in countering Islamist extremism were the women, but the amount of abuse and backlash that they got from Islamists was incredible. I do not think the Government and the Home Office ever realised the extent of the abuse and threats that those women experienced. It was one of the most inspiring times for me, but it was also one of the most challenging moments of my life, because it was incredibly difficult.

One of my frustrations at that time was the failure of not just the Government, but society, who would see us as a problem. They saw us as almost fuelling anti-Muslim hatred if we talked about Islamist extremism, despite the fact that we were concerned about our children being radicalised and we wanted to do something about it. We did not want our children to be locked up for terrorist offences because extremist preachers were using them as fodder. Sometimes we would get a lot of abuse from people who would say that we were fuelling anti-Muslim hatred by talking about Islamist extremism, which I find incredibly distasteful even to this day.

In a very small nutshell—there is a lot I could say about it—that was a lot of the work that we did at that time. What it did give me was a very good understanding of what it is like at the grassroots level, how extremism manifests in our country, how extremists use disinformation and

conspiracy theories—even 10 years ago, how they were doing this work—and what more we need to be doing to build that resilience and counter extremism and extremist narratives.

Q191 **Peter Prinsley:** It seems to me that what you probably thought, and I am sure it is right, is that these young Muslim individuals—I think mainly men—come from families where there are almost always very decent mothers. The idea of trying to get the women in the families to address this seriously was something that you took upon yourself, by the sound of things, all those years ago. It seems to me that that is an initiative that has legs and might be worth reconsidering.

Dame Sara Khan: I never answered your question about what has happened to Inspire now. After I left, because I had taken on the Countering Extremism Commissioner role, we could not find someone to replace us. If I am honest, the reason is that the scale of abuse, threats and intimidation we received was just off the charts. A lot of women were just saying, “Why the hell would I want to do that kind of work?” It is just so hard and difficult, and there is a lack of support and funding. It was really difficult.

It is really important that you police your own backyard, whether it is a faith community or people in your own political circle. If you are a left-wing politician it is very easy to condemn everything that is happening on the right and vice versa, but if you have extremists in your own backyard, the moral duty is to call that out in your own community and say what is unacceptable. I also think it just sets a norm and a standard.

One of the things that I have realised about counter-extremism over the years is that what really matters is leadership. Leadership, whether political, faith or civic society leadership, is really important, because it sets a bar and a norm. Silence is the worst of all actions in the face of extremism, because you are saying what is acceptable and not acceptable in a society.

Q192 **Peter Prinsley:** And leadership in families, probably.

Dame Sara Khan: Of course. It is very difficult for parents, and we do not support them enough. What do you do if your children are supporting and promoting extremist narratives? Do we give parents enough support with how to navigate that? I don’t think we do.

Q193 **Peter Prinsley:** I am going to ask a little about research: what the Government are doing to fund research and what we could do to improve the research that we are doing to try to work out what best we could do. If we had some research funding, how would you spend it?

Dame Sara Khan: I do not know what the Government is currently funding on research—that is probably a question for the Security Minister—but there are probably a number of different things.

The first is ensuring that we have a much better understanding of what works—what can be shown to be effective—in countering extremism. I do not mean countering violent extremism, because in the last decade and a



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half there has been a whole industry—the CVE industry—and a lot of work on how you stop people going down the route towards terrorism. There are broader questions about how we build social cohesion and what things are effective. How do you change people's hearts and minds?

If you have, as I said earlier, a cohort of men between the ages of 45 and 65 who are adopting extremist narratives and conspiratorial narratives and engaging in violence and criminality, what do we know to be effective? It is not as easy as just saying, "Well, they're a young person. We can put them through the Prevent scheme. It's easier." It is a much more complicated picture. For example, I do not think we have the research to know how to deal with that cohort of men in a way that does not feel like Big Brother and is going to be effective in changing hearts and minds in a way that is going to make people feel comfortable. I do not think we have any research on that and what would be effective.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done to look at how tech could be utilised to counter extremism. I would love to see a lot more research on that. I have seen a bit of work around how, for example, AI has been used to dissuade people from supporting conspiracy theories. There is some really interesting research showing that, because AI tends to be a lot politer than human beings in saying, "Well, I don't think that's a really good idea," there are ways that technology and AI could be used to dismiss things and support people in countering extremism.

Q194 **Peter Prinsley:** You spoke earlier about the 1 million antisemitic posts a day. Is that 1 million people posting antisemitic posts, or is it some sort of bot that is producing millions of antisemitic posts that are being distributed across the internet?

Dame Sara Khan: It is not people. I do not know the answer to that question, because that was research published by the Antisemitism Policy Trust.

Q195 **Peter Prinsley:** It's bots, isn't it?

Joani Reid: No, it's both.

Dame Sara Khan: It probably is both.

Q196 **Peter Prinsley:** Do you not think that there are technical fixes to that, using AI to turn that stuff off?

Dame Sara Khan: Definitely. This is where AI can be very exciting, and there are signs of this already happening. AI could be used to monitor early detection of extremist narratives, conspiracy theories and disinformation, and intervene early in trying to take some of that content down. This is where we need more and more research around using tech to generate this work. I just think we are still slightly behind the curve on this.

Q197 **Peter Prinsley:** The problem lies with the tech, doesn't it? If we did not have the internet and social media, we would have much less of a problem. If it just relied on newspapers and leaflets, like it used to, it



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would not be a problem. We need to somehow harness the power of the tech, in particular using AI, to counter this. If we had research funds, that is how I would spend them.

Dame Sara Khan: I would personally like to see social media platforms, with all the profit that they make, commit, I don't know, 2% of their profit to furthering research on precisely this issue.

Q198 **Peter Prinsley:** Finally, do you think that the anonymity of the people who post stuff is also part of the problem? Is it reasonable for people to be able to post stuff and not reveal who they are?

Dame Sara Khan: Again, this has been a long-standing debate over the years—and about whistleblowers. I am sympathetic to that, but I just think that in every other walk of life, we have to identify ourselves. We have gone long beyond the time when we think it is okay to have anonymous accounts. We have to outlaw that; it is just ridiculous that we do not do it online, but we do it in every other walk of life.

Q199 **Peter Prinsley:** We could make a law to outlaw anonymous posts like this, couldn't we?

Dame Sara Khan: Yes, I think so. I do not know how we would deal with the whistleblower issue. I am not talking about places like Iran; I am talking specifically about the UK. That is a very different context—people rightly wanting to condemn the authorities and so forth. I just think there is a way of doing this in the UK, and I think it could be done; we just need to get the brains around the table to come up with it.

Peter Prinsley: I agree, and we have some good brains, so we should be able to do it.

Dame Sara Khan: I hope so.

Q200 **Mr Kohler:** You have written, "I don't know what the role of Prevent is any more." What role should it have?

Dame Sara Khan: The reason I said that is that I think the role of Prevent on extremism is very confused. I think that has happened for a number of reasons. When Lord Carlile did his review of Prevent in 2011, he argued that it should deal with non-violent extremism. When William Shawcross did his review, he also argued that Prevent should go back to its original aim of dealing with non-violent extremism and, in particular, Islamist extremism. As I said earlier, if you look at Prevent's objectives, it is very much focused on counter-terrorism, but there is a misunderstanding about how Prevent should be tackling extremism. I would like Prevent to say, "We are not dealing with extremism that falls below the terrorism threshold. The Government has a different strategic approach to deal with that."

I will give you a very practical example. Stoke-on-Trent, which I visited two years ago for my last review, has a long-standing history of dealing with both far-right and Islamist extremism. For a long time, it was on the Prevent priority list, but the then Home Secretary, Priti Patel, removed it



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because it did not meet the criteria as a Prevent priority area. One of the main reasons was that it was not getting enough Prevent referrals. It stopped getting the resources and funding that the Prevent strategy would provide, and it was not receiving funding from the MHCLG's integrated communities action plan, because at that point it was only funding five areas. The counter-extremism strategy, which was giving funding to Stoke-on-Trent, was scrapped, so there was no funding there either.

This will have happened in many other areas, but in a place like Stoke, which was clearly dealing with a significant problem of extremism—again, below the terrorism threshold, but you are talking about Islamist extremist groups active on the ground, far-right and neo-Nazi groups on the ground and coming into the area, the undermining of social cohesion, and threats to local officials and councillors—there was no national strategic approach. They very much felt, "We're on our own here. We've slipped through the net because we don't meet the Prevent threshold." It was like the Government were almost saying, "Right, guys, you just crack on and deal with this problem yourselves."

It is about trying to understand how extremism is not necessarily dealt with by Prevent. Prevent did not have a hand in trying to reduce the summer riots and the active involvement of far-right groups in those riots. It did not contribute, because, again, that is not the remit of Prevent. I would like to see Prevent be very clear about what its role is, and what its remit is and isn't on extremism, and then for something else on extremism to take its place.

Q201 Mr Kohler: Take me through why you don't want to broaden out Prevent. Other witnesses have told us that the problem is linking it to counter-terrorism, and we want to take that out of it. You like the Channel aspect of Prevent and think that is applicable to extremism, so why do you not want to broaden Prevent by taking out the counter-terrorism requirement?

Dame Sara Khan: We have young people who are increasingly becoming radicalised—that is clearly a problem. It is not helpful, and it does not gain the support of parents and communities, if we then put them through a securitised programme. As we have seen over the years, it instinctively draws suspicion. That is why I think only 1% of referrals into Prevent now come from families, and 2% of referrals come from communities—because in their heads, they see this as a securitised, national security programme. It has counter-terrorism policing involved; it is all heavy, from the top. You are losing the support and confidence of people who feel, "What's going to happen to my child if they go through this system?"

You could change Channel so that it becomes a broader system and does not necessarily sit under a security panel. Obviously, if cases are being referred to it and triaged, it can go down that route, but a much more effective way that will build trust among the people you need to have trust from—the people you want to refer—is if they see it as a societal, educational approach, rather than through a securitised Prevent lens of counter-terrorism and national security. That will be a far more effective approach than taking it down a national security, counter-terrorism route.

Q202 Mr Kohler: So the problem with Prevent is the initial triaging by the police—is that what you see as the obstacle in addressing extremism?

Dame Sara Khan: It is more than that. As I said earlier, Prevent does not deal with people who fall just below the terrorism threshold. If Channel feels they are not susceptible to being radicalised into terrorism, they will not meet that threshold, so they will not be dealt with effectively at all anyway. It is a mire of a whole range of different factors behind why Prevent does not deal with extremism.

While I was at the commission, I came up with the phrase “hateful extremism”. The whole point of it was to say, “Hateful extremism as a phenomenon is different to terrorism. This is why it is different. Here are all the harms. Now you can build an assessment framework to measure it and make sure you understand the difference between the extremism threat and the terrorist threat.” All of that has got lost in the last couple of years. That distinction is what we need, because we are still conflating terrorism and extremism and where the thresholds are—“Should X be referred to Channel? Do they meet the threshold? We don’t know.” It all becomes really confusing. That is why I said earlier that I am confused about what the role of Prevent is.

Q203 Mr Kohler: I am trying to get my head around how it would emerge. Are you saying that Prevent should be there for counter-terrorism, with a separate referral process for extremism, borrowing bits of Channel?

Dame Sara Khan: The work of Prevent is absolutely critical in our country. The work of Prevent in stopping individuals from being drawn into terrorism is absolutely critical. We do not often hear about the success stories; we always hear about the stories that have gone wrong, but we need Prevent, and we need an effective Prevent strategy. I am saying that I think Channel could be broader. You can broaden that safeguarding scheme to include other forms of extremism and violence—fixated violence and others—that Prevent did not have to grapple with 20 years ago when the idea of it was put together. The times have changed, and we have to evolve with them.

You do need to continue with Prevent. It needs to continue to be part of the counter-terrorism strategy, but in addition, alongside that, we need a counter-extremism, social cohesion and democratic directorate, strategy and framework that looks at how this is a different problem that we are not dealing with effectively. Having both of them is ideal, because then you are not going to really miss anybody, which we are doing at the moment. We need both of those strategies working alongside each other. We just do not have the extremism part at the moment.

Q204 Mr Kohler: I see what you are saying about Channel being broadened, but at the moment you only get to it when you have gone through the police triaging process first.

Dame Sara Khan: Yes, or through the education sector—

Q205 Mr Kohler: How do people who are not experts say, “Right, I will send



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this person to the counter-terrorism or Prevent stream", or, "I will go to the extremism stream."

Dame Sara Khan: That is what you would have to develop inside Channel. You would have to—

Q206 **Mr Kohler:** But you do not get to Channel until you have gone through the police at the moment. Channel has to stand above rather than below.

Dame Sara Khan: The multi-agency panel will then decide. That panel is made up of local authority officials, people from mental health, the police and people from the education sector. They all sit on that panel, which then decides: "Do we refer this person to the Channel scheme where their case will be adopted?" The panel makes that decision. What I am saying is that Channel could be—

Mr Kohler: The first stage.

Dame Sara Khan: Yes, the first stage, but then what I am saying is that you develop the training, you develop and improve it, so you have experts who will then decide: "This person does not necessarily need CT support. They need much more"—wider societal education may be the better route, or perhaps they need other sources of support, necessarily the wider counter-terrorism support. We do not have that system; that is what I would like to see, but there is leverage in thinking about how we can expand that and develop the training to make sure we have the expertise to ensure that we are triaging in the right place.

Q207 **Mr Kohler:** Given that one of the routes out of that Channel process is the security approach, would that not still therefore cause problems with families, because they see where their child or loved one might end up? Given that that is one of the routes out, would it not still have the same problems of suspicion of the process?

Dame Sara Khan: That is a system we already have in place. There are questions about why that is. To this day, we are still not seeing enough referrals from families and communities, and that has been going on for years. I do not think that we have seen an increase in those referral figures, and we need to go back and look at that. It is still a voluntary scheme—referring people to Prevent and people being adopted for Channel is still voluntary. There has been a lot of discussion about whether it should be made compulsory, but the fact of the matter is that it is still a voluntary scheme, and if we have people in this country who are clearly susceptible to and being radicalised in terrorism, of course we have to have a scheme that they then go through, where some are very successfully de-radicalised—others less so. Clearly, we have to have that. The Government have a duty to make sure that there is a scheme to stop people from being drawn in, so that is a system that is still happening, and it needs to continue.

Chair: I am going to bring this session to a close. Thank you, Dame Sara, for your answers. You have given us an awful lot to think about. We have the Minister coming up next, so we will have questions for him. Thank you

once again for all your help and for answering the questions. If you have any other thoughts after the session that you think we should hear about, please let us know.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dan Jarvis and Jonathan Emmett.

Q208 Chair: I welcome the Minister to the final panel in our inquiry into new forms of extremism. We have just had a very useful session with Dame Sara Khan, and the Committee has lots of questions. Minister, you wanted to make an opening statement, and Mr Emmett might want to introduce himself. Mr Emmett, if you introduce yourself first, we will then let the Minister make his statement.

Jonathan Emmett: My name is Jonathan Emmett. I am the director for counter-terrorism in the Home Office.

Dan Jarvis: Thank you, Chair. Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your important work and your inquiry. It is a statement of truth that counter-extremism is a deeply challenging and complex area. The predominant extremist threat in this country comes from Islamist and extreme right-wing ideologies. Tragically, we have seen recently a sharp increase in both antisemitic and Islamophobic discourse and incidents. As a Government, we are clear that no one should be made fearful for their safety on the basis of prejudice. Our fundamental values, such as freedom of speech, freedom of worship and democracy, define us as a society. As such, everyone has both a right and a responsibility to challenge extremist narratives.

Extremists often deliberately operate below legal thresholds. However, where their activities fall foul of the law, they will be investigated and prosecuted. When ideological hatred leads to serious violence, designed to influence the Government or intimidate society, that is terrorism. Our response to the threat from terrorism is clear and is set out in the UK's counter-terrorism strategy, Contest. As part of Contest, our Prevent programme has since 2015 delivered interventions to support nearly 6,000 people at risk of being drawn into terrorism. Recently, a significant focus has been on the risk from individuals who are not motivated by a particular ideology, but who instead display a fascination with extreme violence and mass-casualty attacks. We have already taken steps to look at how Prevent works alongside wider safeguarding mechanisms to ensure that it offers support to the right people.

Home Office efforts to counter extremism focus on the highest-harm threats, in direct support of our core counter-terrorism and wider national security missions. However, it is clear that there are areas where we must, as a society, consider going further. Of particular concern to me is the role of the online environment. The speed with which hateful and violent content can spread online is of course unprecedented. What is unacceptable offline should not be acceptable online, and platforms that

enable the dissemination of illegal material must be properly held to account.

Government must play its part, through not only the Home Office's work on counter extremism, but MHCLG's efforts to strengthen community cohesion. However, the challenge cannot be met by Government alone; society also has a vital role to ensure that extremist narratives are confronted wherever they arise, and that our shared values remain the foundation of a safe and inclusive society. I welcome the Committee's scrutiny of these important matters, and I very much look forward to your recommendations.

Q209 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: To start, what are the potential consequences for wider society if extremism is not tackled?

Dan Jarvis: As the Committee will know from its work and from your work as individual Members of Parliament, there are potentially considerable implications should Government not be able to check such issues. One of the things that we are ensuring we are able to do is to make sure that our response is as joined up as it possibly can be across Government. In the relatively recent reshuffle, the Prime Minister took the decision to have the Security Minister sit in both the Home Office and the Cabinet Office. In part, that is an acknowledgment that the complicated challenges that we face to our national security, and in the areas that you reference, require the most effective, joined-up response. That is the approach that the Government seek to take, but the Committee will be very well aware of the risks that come alongside narratives that are not properly challenged and where we do not have the correct procedures to respond in the most appropriate way. I do not know whether you want to add anything to that, Jonathan.

Jonathan Emmett: I would only add that we see extremism at the upper end as a clear driver of national security risks. Certainly in our counter-terrorism work, there are moments when we have to consider things that fall below the legal threshold for terrorism but that present conditions that are permissive towards radicalisation, so that is absolutely something that we deal with and see as a consequence.

Q210 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Are there particular demographics that are causing you concern, or particularly concerning trends that you are seeing in extremism from radicalisation?

Dan Jarvis: That is a very good question. Lots of things keep me awake at night now. I caught a little of what Dame Sara Khan was saying, which was very interesting. In terms of your question, the predominant extremist threat in this country still comes from Islamist and extreme right-wing ideologies. There is a specific and warranted concern about young people, who are particularly vulnerable to extremist narratives and radicalisation. This is in part because of their age and cognitive development, but other factors are at play as well. We see this reflected in the rise in the number of young people being referred to Prevent and involved in CT investigations. Both the director general of MI5 and

counter-terrorism police have spoken extensively and publicly about their concerns with regard to the increasing number of young people engaged in these activities.

I think the latest data is significant. It shows a record number of young people arrested for terrorism-related activity; it was 53 in the year to September 2025. Clearly, the online information environment is a key area in this regard. Often, young people use social media and gaming platforms to socialise; and there is obviously concerning evidence, which Members will be well aware of, that these platforms can be exploited by radicalisers to share terrorist content and narratives. It is something that we are spending a lot of time thinking about. We are determined to make sure that we have an appropriate policy response, difficult though that is. Do you want to add to that, Jonathan?

Jonathan Emmett: I might add a few points if that is all right, Minister. The question also touched on broader trends. I think there are three chunks to this. We see a range of concerning activities across public safety and national security. Some of those are enduring but evolving, such as the terrorist threat, which is my area of expertise. Some are increasing: there are the well documented increases in hate crime against both the Muslim and the Jewish communities. And some are emergent, such as the prevalence of individuals fascinated by mass violence or the toxic and dangerous online communities known as com groups. I know that the Committee is interested in a range of those.

From our perspective, there are no neat dividing lines between those phenomena. That particularly plays on me in my role as counter-terrorism director, where I might, for example, find that an individual fascinated by violence also represents a terrorist threat. But there are some common factors, and the Minister has already touched on most of those. There is a common factor about the wide range of extremist ideologies that we are confronting these days across that range of threats. There is a common factor about the prevalence of young people. There is a common factor about the significant incidence of mental ill health and neurodiversity in the caseload associated with many of those challenges. And the Minister has already talked about the online information environment.

Q211 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** In 2021, the “Operating with Impunity” report was published. It found that the scale of extremist activity that was lawful in Britain was shocking and dangerous and that laws had failed to keep pace with that. Would you say, five years later, that the report’s findings are still true?

Jonathan Emmett: I was just listening to Dame Sara Khan’s evidence on that. I think the second part of the question, about the adequacy of our legal response, is interesting. From my perspective in counter-terrorism, I see a range of legal avenues available to us, under the Terrorism Act and associated legislation, to tackle extremism where it is a component of terrorism. A range of other legal frameworks in use in the Home Office and beyond can deal with some of the consequences of extremism. We have



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strong public order legislation, strong online legislation and strong legislation on hate crime.

So it strikes me that when we talk about legal gaps, we are really coming to the point at which we are talking about what is and is not lawful when it comes to how an individual thinks. From my perspective as counter-terrorism director, I have a very clear set of legislation. To hold a set of ideas is not illegal, but once you advocate for serious violence in support of those ideas, that is the point at which we will engage.

Dan Jarvis: All that is absolutely right. I just want to convey the fact that we keep these things under very careful review. I am mindful that Lord Macdonald's independent review of public order and hate crime legislation provided an important opportunity to look at the legislative framework. There are other important contributors to that process, but if the Government think that there is absolutely a need to legislate, we will not hesitate to do so.

Q212 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: I am trying to get a sense of whether you feel that the current legislation is adequate, and whether the Department is going to consider any changes to policy, to resourcing or to targets for tackling new forms of extremism. Is everything working now?

Dan Jarvis: It is a good challenge. It would be unrealistic to say that everything is working in the way that we want. There are constant pressures on the system. The world in which we operate is rapidly evolving, and it is the job of Government to make sure that there is an appropriate level of resource in the right place, at the right time, underpinned by the right legislative framework. Everybody would acknowledge that if we were designing it from scratch, we would not get to where we are, but we have to make sure that we have the appropriate legislative response.

We looked very carefully at this Committee's recommendations and listened to expert opinion, whether from Lord Anderson, Lord Macdonald or Jonathan Hall, all of whom have important contributions to make. I am broadly content that the arrangements we have in place are fit for purpose, but that is not to say that I do not want us to do more and go further. As the Security Minister, I will always want more resource to manage these particularly gnarly public policy challenges, but that is a wider conversation that has to be had across Government.

Q213 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: But there are currently no plans for any new legislation or wider resources?

Jonathan Emmett: I will cover a bit more of the detail. I have a very long list here of all the relevant legislation, which I will not bother reading out, but one example that was highlighted by the independent review of terrorism legislation is the gap of the offence of planning a mass-casualty attack. There is legislation in the Terrorism Act that catches the offence of planning an act of terrorism, but there is no equivalent piece of legislation that covers a non-terrorist mass-casualty attack. That is something that

the Government have committed to bringing forward when an appropriate legislative vehicle can be found.

Q214 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: What does the Home Office count as counter-extremism measures, and what is the spend for counter-extremism including non-Prevent programmes?

Dan Jarvis: Can you pick up the point about resource, Jonathan?

Jonathan Emmett: On the broader point of how we are tackling the threat of extremism, the Home Office does a number of things. On specifics, we have a programme that stops foreign individuals of extremist concern, including hate preachers and influencers, from travelling to the UK, through our visa watchlisting programme. We advise and support public authorities and local partners to reduce permissive environments by disrupting extremist events such as speaking tours featuring hate preachers. Both those things come under the broad ambit of our Prevent work. We also invest in capabilities to stop charities being exploited by extremists. The independent Charity Commission now has an investigative function that it can deploy in this way.

Crucially, to your point about resourcing, we support communities that are targeted by extremists to ensure protective security at their places of worship. In this financial year, around £70.9 million has been made available to protect faith communities. That includes uplifts of £10 million each—so a total of £20 million—of emergency funding for both Jewish and Muslim communities in the wake of the rise in hate crime and the tragic attack we saw in Heaton Park.

In the recent past, we have also commenced key provisions of the Online Safety Act in relation to illegal material and the protection of children online. We have taken tangible steps to protect vulnerable children who are at risk of a terrorism conviction through the introduction of our new youth diversion orders, which are currently moving through the House.

Q215 Chair: We have questions on that coming up.

Jonathan Emmett: Great. You asked about Prevent budgets overall. The Home Office Prevent funding for this financial year was just shy of £39 million, which includes around £6 million of funding to 28 priority local authorities, £1.6 million of funding for regional Prevent and Channel advisers and £2 million of funding for civil society organisations that do vital work to counter extremism at the local level.

Dan Jarvis: Just to emphasise the importance we attach to protecting places of worship, we have now dedicated record levels of funding to enable people to worship free from the fear of attack. We have seen terrible attacks, on the synagogue and on mosques, in recent times, and we are absolutely committed to making sure that those places of worship have the protective security and resources they need to enable that important activity.

Q216 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Do you see a need for a distinct counter-extremism

strategy, and how are you measuring impact in your approach to tackling new forms of extremism?

Dan Jarvis: I have thought a lot about that question, but I will go to the expert first. Can you give a view on the strategy, Jonathan?

Jonathan Emmett: That is, in a sense, a slightly challenging question to be asked. As counter-terrorism director, I operate against an extremely clear strategy: Contest, the United Kingdom's counter-terrorism strategy. I engage with colleagues who operate in other strategic framings. For me as counter-terrorism director, the role of Prevent as part of a broader safeguarding system is crucial.

I do not feel the lack of a strategy in my role, because I have a clear counter-terrorism framework. I do not need a strategy to encourage me to work—very effectively, I would suggest—with my colleagues in different Departments who have adjacent or overlapping responsibilities. That is an inevitable feature of Government—this work is complex. That is not to say that there could not be some space that could be filled, but I do not feel the lack of it.

Q217 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** How are you measuring impact?

Jonathan Emmett: In terms of impact, we have a very significant programme of evaluation on how we are delivering our Prevent objectives, many of which touch on counter-extremism. We think that Prevent is a vital part of our overall counter-terrorism strategy and, as Dame Sara Khan said, since records began in 2015 we have delivered interventions and support to nearly 6,000 people at risk of being drawn into terrorism.

The first component of measuring success is to ensure independent oversight. Committee members will be familiar with William Shawcross's independent review of Prevent, with Lord Anderson's review, "Lessons for Prevent", and with our ongoing efforts to appoint a permanent Prevent commissioner, which is currently subject to the public appointments process. That independent oversight is crucial, and it has been deeply valuable to Prevent to have that expert criticism and recommendations.

We also have a substantial programme of evaluation inside Prevent. We are currently undertaking an evaluation of the Channel multi-agency support programme to really understand where best practice sits across the country, and we are consulting practitioners nationally on that. We have strengthened our approach to assurance and performance monitoring across the whole Prevent system over the last few years. We have an annual Prevent assurance exercise with all local authority leads, and that provides us and local partners, which are so crucial, with assurances that the Prevent duty is being met in proportion to the threat and risk in each area.

I could add other examples, but my point is that when it comes to evaluating our work to prevent people being drawn into terrorism, and the associated work to reduce permissive environments, we think we have a very strong picture to paint on our assessment.

Dan Jarvis: I would add the importance we attach to the appointment of the independent Prevent commissioner, which is a relatively new appointment. Lord Anderson—and anyone who knows him will testify to this—is truly independent of Government, and we think he has the right experience, skillset and judgment to provide genuine, independent advice to Government.

We think that is a good appointment, which we have made because we think it will be helpful, not only in informing the work of Prevent, but in making sure that Ministers are accountable. We think that was the right thing to do and are keen to invest in that role.

Q218 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: We have rightly touched on the spread of extremist narratives online. What progress have you had with tech companies on that? Do you think they respect and understand their obligations under the Online Safety Act, particularly regarding their duty to prevent children from viewing this?

Jonathan Emmett: On the first part, we know that Ofcom is now at the stage of implementation and has made a number of public commitments, including one to look in detail at enforcement on at least one major platform over the next 12 months. I think that is a positive step, given the quite strong powers that the Online Safety Act provides to Ofcom, and the importance of protecting children's experience online. Again, as the counter-terrorism director, that is profoundly important to me, for reasons that we will no doubt get into later.

In the Home Office we do have a direct relationship with technology companies, as part of which we provide some of our expertise in assessing the extent of the terrorist and—to a degree—extremist threat online, helping those companies to understand it, in the hope that they will take significant action to counter it. The amount of action taken is variable; it is largely dependent on the letter of the law, rather than the spirit of that conversation, but it is an avenue that we will constantly keep open. I am sure that somebody will ask about the Australian experience. I have a very close relationship with my Australian counterparts; we talk regularly and are involved in the evaluation of their current set of measures.

Dan Jarvis: The only thing I would add to that is the importance of the role for other Government Departments in that relationship. You will have heard the statement that was made today by the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Liz Kendall. You will also have heard the Prime Minister's comments specifically with regard to Grok in recent days. We need to make sure that the online environment is a more permissive environment for younger people than is currently the case. There is a lot of thinking about how best to do that, both internally within Government and in conversations with our international allies, to try to get to a better place than we are now. The Government take these matters incredibly seriously.

Q219 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Given Elon Musk's response to the recent Grok AI images, do we think that we are actually making progress with these



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companies? If not, what are the Government's plans to change that?

Dan Jarvis: Again, I think that is an entirely fair challenge. I think we made a bit of progress, which is obviously welcome, but clearly these are incredibly influential entities in their own right with massive resource. The more that we can join up our work with our international allies, the better. It is good to see a bit of progress, but let's see where we get to with the consultation that DSIT has initiated today. I think there is still quite a bit of work to do, to be honest.

Q220 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: What are the unique challenges that your Department is facing in tackling com networks?

Jonathan Emmett: The com networks are a really concerning phenomenon. They first came to my attention some time ago in the context of my current role. I am really grateful to the work that the National Crime Agency has done on this; it has really been a driving force behind getting a proper assessment of that risk. That assessment has been published, and I think the Committee will be aware of it in its national strategic risk assessment. For us, that really highlighted this emergence of com networks—sadistic, violent online communities dedicated to inflicting harm and committing serious violent acts. There has also been a lot of media coverage, so none of that will be a surprise.

The striking feature of these online communities is that they are engaged in a seemingly limitless variety of criminality—fraud, cyber-crime, child sexual abuse, sextortion, incitement to self-harm, animal abuse, livestream violence and even, at the upper end, extremism and terrorism. The lack of a unifying ideology really distinguishes them from traditional extremism and counter-terrorism work, but in some ways it can really amplify the threat. Com offending is so diverse because it is not driven by those traditional ideologies, and it crosses a great many threat and harm teams, both in law enforcement and in policy terms. It is also transnational; offenders may be targeting victims in other jurisdictions—indeed, offenders may be victims, and victims may be offenders in both those cycles.

Effective disruption and identification rely on really good data sharing between law enforcement, and really good international co-operation. There has been some success in tackling com networks. As I think you may be aware, UK law enforcement has established a multi-agency taskforce, collaborating with policing, Ofcom and the Home Office to enhance intelligence sharing. That has also worked internationally. Between October and December 2025 we had over 250 referrals, including 52 from international partners, and at that stage they had led to at least 10 arrests in the UK and the safeguarding of 16 vulnerable individuals. It is complex and difficult multi-agency work, and because it is online, it creates challenges of access to the communities themselves.

Dan Jarvis: I want to put something very briefly on the record, because I feel very strongly about this. I am the Minister with responsibility for the National Crime Agency, and that is a very comprehensive description of



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what we are doing. I would stress the importance of the transnational element of all this, and working with key allies internationally.

This is still a relatively new phenomenon, but the National Crime Agency and other partners are deploying a range of very innovative measures to try to disrupt this activity. We are absolutely committed to breaking this particular model, and to sowing the seeds of doubt with the people who are engaged with it. We will do that through targeted disruption, and prosecutions.

Q221 Joani Reid: We have heard quite a lot of evidence thus far to suggest that Prevent is effective in tackling and identifying counter-terrorism targets, but not so much with counter-extremism. Would you agree with that? If not, which of your key counter-extremism programmes do you think are most successful?

Dan Jarvis: Can you come in on that first, Jonathan?

Jonathan Emmett: I can definitely come in on that one. At its heart, Prevent is a counter-terrorism programme—I of all people need to be absolutely clear on that. There is a slight subtlety, in that the Prevent duty requires specified authorities, such as education, health and local authorities, to help prevent the risk of people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

Inevitably, when we look at our delivery model, which is in three chunks, the first of those—in some ways, the one with the broadest base—is to tackle the ideological causes of terrorism by focusing on reducing the influence of radicalisers on susceptible audiences. As I think your previous witness said, some of those radicalisers have historically been very adept at flying just below the threshold of terrorism—indeed, Anjem Choudary was mentioned, and I note with no small degree of satisfaction that he is currently serving a significant sentence at His Majesty's pleasure.

That part of the Prevent programme is about reducing the influence of radicalisers on susceptible audiences and actually building resilience in susceptible audiences, which is one of the ways in which we work with civil society, as well as reducing the availability of access to terrorist content online, and I think that it is really important. It touches on the very upper end of counter-extremism, where it is a direct link into terrorism.

Beyond that, the focus of Prevent is absolutely on terrorism risk. Our early intervention programme is of course trying to get to individuals who are not at that stage of their journey, and who are not an actual committed terrorist—frankly, if they were, they would be investigated, rather than supported in this way. None the less, it is very clearly trying to identify people who are on that pathway and intervene with them. Obviously, our rehabilitation programme, which has largely worked with the prison population, is directed at those who have been convicted of terrorism offences.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: Thank you all for coming back so promptly. We will make a start because I am conscious that the Minister has had a long day, and we do not want to make it any longer than we absolutely have to. We will continue with the questions. We will move on to how Prevent might be adapted or enhanced, and other systems that could be used to help deal with people who have a propensity to violence and extremism but do not meet the criteria to go into the full Prevent programme and Channel.

Q222 **Margaret Mullane:** Minister, the Committee had a visit to the National Crime Agency. As you were saying, they are doing outstanding work. What really struck us that day was the sheer scale and complexity of what they are dealing with online that would not meet the Prevent criteria. We spoke a lot about Prevent earlier, but, as the Chair alluded to, the nature and the scale of online crime is what we are all really concerned about. Aside from what Jonathan Emmett has said, what action are you taking to identify the blind spots that Prevent does not cover and—I cannot emphasise this enough—the very concerning behaviour that currently takes place online?

Dan Jarvis: I will bring in Jonathan because he knows a lot about it, but I will just make a couple of points. First, thank you for commending the work of the National Crime Agency. They do incredibly important work and I am not convinced that they always get the recognition they deserve.

I was just about to respond to a point earlier with regard to Prevent, and I have heard Lord Anderson make this point previously. When Prevent goes wrong—when it falls short—there are potentially very significant consequences that will lead the news, but what it does not get is attention for all the occasions where it does succeed. The Prevent programme is not perfect, and we do want to make it as effective as it possibly can be, but it is worth acknowledging the extraordinary contribution made by those who work within it. Thinking about the footprint right around the country, I have visited lots of different parts of the UK where we have people engaged in difficult, complicated work, who often feel like they do not necessarily get the recognition they deserve. Let me bring in Jonathan to come to the specific point on the online environment, which I think we have touched on.

Jonathan Emmett: Thank you, Minister. On the blind spot question, I am mindful of the Chair's instruction to look beyond Prevent; I emphasise that my expertise is there, but I will seek to do so. We agree with Lord Anderson's assessment of the important role of the online information environment when it comes to radicalisation to terrorism, as well as its relevance to other risks and the fact that responses to it are really hard. Taking the example of Prevent, but thinking about applying it more broadly, we are asking a range of public sector professionals who come into contact with individuals who may be at risk to assess that risk. Our research is telling us that a major risk factor—not the only one, but a major one—is the nature of those people's online lives, which, by definition, is very unlikely to be visible to those professionals. That is a wicked problem if ever there was one.



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Obviously, the Home Office works with technology companies in the counter-terrorism space and in a range of other spaces, with an interest in thinking about how, in a way that is proportionate with the values of democratic society, you can identify people who, based on their online activity, may pose a risk to others—terrorism is the most serious, but there are other very serious risks. We are looking at whether you can take approaches to divert those people in their natural environment—online—by providing different off-ramps that can almost warn them when they are engaged in behaviour that might be risky or indeed deeply antisocial. That is really difficult work. I do not think the details of it are for this discussion, but it is something that we are clearly engaged with.

The final thing is that none of that should detract from the fact that platforms have legal duties. They have a legal duty under the Online Safety Act. It is really important, as the Government have said, that we back Ofcom to do the difficult role it has been asked to do in enforcing the provisions of that important and well-meaning legislation.

Q223 Margaret Mullane: It is acknowledged that this is something that Prevent cannot do because it is doing enough, so we do not want to go back over Prevent. I won't share with you what we spoke about, but very loosely, a lot of the behaviour and what was happening was absolutely terrifying—there were safeguarding issues, safety issues and many others. On what you have just said, are you waiting for something or are you moving it forward, or is there a different action outside of what you have already stated today?

Jonathan Emmett: Obviously, we are watching very closely the implementation of our own Online Safety Act and the Australian experience. Both of those are examples of relying on broad-based regulation to try to buy down risk. As I have said separately, both in the CT space and more broadly, we are looking at other measures that we can take, proactively, to either identify at-risk individuals or divert them, no matter what their offending path. My expertise is in counter-terrorism; we are certainly in that business. I know that, for example, my colleagues who deal with child sexual exploitation and abuse would absolutely say that they are in a similar business. We talk very frequently about what is technically possible and the partnership that we need to have with the technology companies, upon whose infrastructure any such capability would need to sit. Those are challenging conversations.

Dan Jarvis: The only point I would add to that is that we do not own a number of the policy levers that sit with other Government Departments. There is an obvious importance to making sure that we are joining up our response across Government, working very closely with DSIT but with other Government Departments as well.

Q224 Chair: When somebody accesses a certain website or puts certain terminology into a search engine, are you using any tools that will flash up a warning sign such as, "Do you really want to look at this content? Do you really want to see this?"? Is the Government looking at anything around that?

Jonathan Emmett: That is not currently a capability that we are deploying.

Q225 **Chair:** But we do that on child sexual exploitation. There is the capability there, so is it possible to replicate that capability so that people going down these rabbit holes can be identified and stopped from using AI? Peter Prinsley talked about that in the last panel.

Jonathan Emmett: That is exactly the sort of thing that I am talking about when I describe the need to look at how we divert people from paths in different ways. That is one thing we could consider.

Q226 **Mr Kohler:** Dame Sara criticised the Home Office and Ministers for using the words “terrorism” and “extremism” interchangeably. Do you recognise that charge?

Dan Jarvis: I am very sorry, but I did not hear what she said because I was otherwise occupied. I think you were here for it, Jonathan.

Jonathan Emmett: I did catch Dame Sara’s evidence, although that may have come at the very end, which I missed—I did not catch that particular point.

Mr Kohler: You don’t need to have heard that; it is what she said.

Jonathan Emmett: I hope that from the perspective of a counter-terrorism director I have been very clear on the distinction between the two, which is a legal and a practical distinction for us. Do we have to deal with both? Yes, at the upper end of extremism and once we cross the threshold into terrorism, but I would hope that we do not use the terms interchangeably and that our use of language is very deliberate.

Dan Jarvis: I have a huge amount of respect for Dame Sara. She has a huge amount of experience in this area, so I will look very carefully at what she said. We want to work with Dame Sara. She brings a weight of experience, credibility and authority. We are keen to listen to and act on her advice.

Q227 **Mr Kohler:** Okay, we will let that pass. I think that you have done it a couple of times in this conversation, but we will see. Prevent is an early intervention tool for identifying those at risk of committing terrorism. What about those who are simply at risk of falling prey to extremism? What should we be doing for them?

Jonathan Emmett: We may get on to this later, but one of the current features of our Prevent system is a relatively large number of referrals—although in public policy terms, it is a very modest number—and a relatively smaller number of those referrals that identify a risk of being drawn into terrorism. One of the perfectly reasonable questions that a lot of people ask is, “Well, what happens to the rest?”. They are signposted to other areas of support. To partially answer your question on how we would deal in Prevent with somebody who was at risk of exposure to extremist ideology but not on a pathway to terrorism, that is a finely balanced operational decision, but we would, if appropriate, refer them onward to



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another service for support, be that education, social work, or health if any sort of mental ill health or neurodiversity was an issue.

Q228 Mr Kohler: Those are the ones who have wrongly been pushed to Prevent, but what about those who clearly are being pushed to Prevent not because there is a risk of terrorism, but because their family members, particularly, are concerned about a child or loved one going down that rabbit hole—not worried about terrorism and not wanting to go down the security route. What are the routes for that person?

Dan Jarvis: I think it would be helpful if you talked about the safeguarding route.

Jonathan Emmett: That's fine. Please do respect the fact that this is beyond my purview, but, essentially, that is broader safeguarding. From my experience, Prevent sits as part of a broader safeguarding network. It is certainly not necessary to refer somebody to Prevent in order to access that wider safeguarding network. That is done very regularly—I think it was David Anderson who quoted a shockingly high number of 600,000-odd referrals for children who might be at risk every year. I have no doubt that some of those concerns would be appropriately picked up in that broader safeguarding system.

Q229 Mr Kohler: We have heard evidence from other witnesses that the Prevent system is being used because there is no other route. It is being used for those with mental health problems and those where there is a fear of extremism, or who are subject to extremism. Your answer would be, what—"Oh, it doesn't matter, because at the Channel point, they'll get pushed to something else"? Is that what you are saying?

Dan Jarvis: I think it is worth making a point about the quality of referrals.

Jonathan Emmett: Yes, absolutely. I would first slightly disagree with the premise; there are many other routes for individuals who may be at risk to receive an appropriate level of support. It is absolutely not the case that Prevent, as it is conceived today, or as it operates today, is that sole gateway. It is simply not.

Q230 Mr Kohler: What are these other routes?

Jonathan Emmett: This will be broader safeguarding, so the normal work of child and adult mental health services, school safeguarding officers and many others involved in that important safeguarding world.

Mr Kohler: The evidence we have heard is that those possibilities do not exist in reality. People use Prevent to try to get some sort of help, but you are telling me that they are just not using the safeguarding processes that are out there.

Jonathan Emmett: I think I can say with confidence that other safeguarding processes are available and appropriate for risks that fall below a terrorism threshold. The process that is undergone in Prevent is once we triage for that terrorism risk, if that terrorism risk is not, in our



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view, present, we refer back into a pre-existing safeguarding route, so it is not the case that there is a sort of gateway that exists on that. Does that clarify things?

Mr Kohler: Perhaps you could send us details of that, because we have not heard much evidence that those other routes are really in existence.

Dan Jarvis: We would be very happy to do that. I just want to emphasise, again, the importance of joining it up across Government. While the Home Office is the departmental lead, my strong view is that, actually, it will only ever be made to work if we have the buy-in of other Departments. Health is a key contributor to that process, and that is why I engage closely with ministerial colleagues in the Health Department—and in the Department for Education as well.

Q231 **Mr Kohler:** Yes, that co-ordination going beyond particular Departments is clearly important, and your role in both now makes sense. According to the 2014 counter-extremism strategy, the Prime Minister of the day chaired regular Cabinet-level taskforce meetings on counter-extremism work. Does that still happen today? We have seen no recent evidence of that, so is that still happening?

Dan Jarvis: I am casting my mind back to that time. To be fair to David Cameron, he invested a huge amount of time in the processes of the National Security Council. I can say that the Prime Minister is personally invested in these issues; I know that he takes a very keen interest, and I know that there is a regular conversation between him and senior Cabinet Ministers, including the Home Office.

Mr Kohler: But there is no taskforce chaired by the current Prime Minister in the way that there was under David Cameron—is that what you are telling me?

Dan Jarvis: There are still the structures of the National Security Council, which provide the most appropriate forum to discuss these matters with Cabinet members and with—

Mr Kohler: I am not criticising; I am just asking a question. There is no taskforce chaired by the Prime Minister, is there?

Dan Jarvis: It is a fair challenge. There isn't a kind of formal taskforce, as such, but I can genuinely reassure you of the Prime Minister's personal interest in this, and the Home Secretary's.

Q232 **Mr Kohler:** Okay. How is central Government working with local authorities and communities?

Jonathan Emmett: I have described the role of Prevent in supporting local communities to counter extremism in their areas where that is creating a permissive environment for terrorism. It is absolutely crucial to us that Prevent is, at its heart, delivered locally, because it is local authorities and other public service providers in the area who have the best understanding about risk in their area. They come together to form



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the multi-agency Channel panels, which make the very difficult decisions about where individuals might need further support, and indeed where they might not and might need to be referred back into other local services—which goes back to your earlier question.

We support local authorities in a number of ways. First, we have a national network of Prevent advisers. Those are regionally based and support all of the local authorities in their regions to deliver their Prevent duty.

We also have a network of quality assurers who, I would argue, support local authorities by quality-assuring the work done, particularly in Channel panels, to give assurance to those local authorities that it is being done well. We provide financial support to the 28 local authorities that we assess to be at greatest risk in the context of Prevent and counter-terrorism, and so on and so forth—quite a significant amount.

Q233 Mr Kohler: What was the role of community co-ordinators in all this?

Jonathan Emmett: Is that your phrase or my phrase? I said Prevent regional advisers—

Mr Kohler: It was a Home Office phrase, but you stopped funding them in 2021. I wondered what they did and why you stopped funding them.

Jonathan Emmett: That would be the point at which we started to shift our Prevent delivery model. That delivery model is now, we would argue, more efficient and effective, and it is based on a regional adviser model. We have 20 regional advisers based up and down the country. Between them, they provide support to all—

Q234 Mr Kohler: Are those 20 doing what the 35 community co-ordinators used to do, or is it a different role, or do you not know exactly?

Jonathan Emmett: I could not give you blow by blow on the job description, but we have sharpened considerably the way in which we deliver Prevent, to put in place some of the points of assurance that I talked about earlier. We believe that we are achieving more effective outcomes with fewer resources deployed in that way.

Dan Jarvis: This is where the rubber hits the road, so that is an entirely fair challenge. I met in London the chief exec who co-ordinates activity across London, and was with a chief constable and a deputy mayor for policing in Greater Manchester, specifically to talk about such issues. The Home Office Prevent advisers do incredibly important work with local authorities to make sure that they have the technical expertise and support to do a very difficult job, but that link to the local authorities is an important part of all this.

Q235 Mr Kohler: You are aware of the LGA criticism.

Both witnesses indicated assent.

Mr Kohler: And your answer to the charge is that you are doing better with less resources—is that it?

Dan Jarvis: Yes.

Q236 **Ben Maguire:** I want to follow up on Paul Kohler's point. One of the pieces of evidence that Dame Sara mentioned earlier was about a bit of a black hole, in essence—again going back to what Paul was talking about—in the stage before Prevent. That is, not at the terrorism stage. Jonathan, you have already mentioned the safeguarding system, which is fair enough. One of the things that Dame Sara was talking about was that there does not seem to be monitoring, if at all—please correct me if I have got this wrong—on the pathway between the safeguarding piece and Prevent. Dame Sara was alluding to the need for, almost, a prevent Prevent body, which tackles the extremism before it gets to the stage of terrorism. I am interested to hear your thoughts on that.

Dan Jarvis: I am then conscious of the world in which we would then have a pre-prevent prevent Prevent, but I will hand over to Jonathan.

Ben Maguire: Or is there any monitoring to see whether we need that or not?

Dan Jarvis: Good point.

Jonathan Emmett: Gosh. There is an awful lot in this, which sort of plays to my earlier point about safeguarding, and it touches on some of the recommendations made by Lord David Anderson in his report, "Lessons for Prevent", where in effect he talked about the challenge for Prevent being that it conducts a triage based on looking for one thing; it is not in the business of—and is not skilled or funded to conduct—a triage based on looking for a range of risk factors.

Q237 **Ben Maguire:** I do not think anyone is suggesting that. It is more the point before that: is the data being recorded to see whether the safeguarding you were talking about, which presumably goes off to the local government agencies, is being tracked and monitored to go on later to form part of Prevent? That is separate and outside Prevent really; I do not think that anyone is suggesting that Prevent should pick up that slack.

Jonathan Emmett: I am afraid I would suggest that that is definitely beyond my purview. We have a very good sense of where referrals to Prevent come from, but I do not have that data, and it is beyond my responsibilities.

Q238 **Ben Maguire:** Do you know whether that data exists, or is it just not out there?

Jonathan Emmett: I am afraid I don't know.

Chair: Perhaps you will write to us.

Dan Jarvis: That is entirely fair—technical, but fair—so let us come back to you with something.

Q239 **Margaret Mullane:** You fund the 28 areas at greatest risk. Is that monitored? Touching on what Dame Sara said in her evidence earlier



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about social cohesion, are you monitoring that in those 28 greatest at-risk areas?

Jonathan Emmett: The short answer to that is yes. I will not go into the entire process of how we determine which areas are most at risk, although I would be very happy to spell that out at a later date if necessary. We take into account a range of factors, some of which relate to absolute high-end terrorism risk, but the extent to which a local area has or is at risk of having a permissive environment is part of that package and would inform where we put our funding. I should add that that is additional funding. Every local authority area has a legal duty to comply with the Prevent duty, and that includes reducing that permissive environment.

Dan Jarvis: It is another reason why we have the Home Office Prevent advisers. In addition to the resource available, there is technical expertise that can be deployed to provide support in a given area if there is a request from a local authority.

Q240 **Chair:** You talked about other safeguarding pathways. Is anybody in Government or anywhere else monitoring those individuals who have been referred to Prevent and gone into some other safeguarding pathway? Does anyone know what happens to them?

Jonathan Emmett: That is a really good question. It has come up, of course, in the context of the aftermath of the dreadful attack in Southport. We expect Sir Adrian Fulford's inquiry to make some recommendations in this regard in his first phase; I would anticipate more recommendations in his second phase. We have not waited for either of those things. In Prevent, we have undertaken a pilot programme, which is coming to its conclusion; some of those are outward referrals from Prevent, which, to be clear, do not represent a counter-terrorism risk, but none the less, we have undertaken a pilot programme to track those and determine whether there is a way in which we can gain assurance about what is subsequently done with them. That is ongoing work.

Chair: I will say, just to make the point, that we have heard evidence throughout that Prevent really is doing good work, and we pay tribute to Prevent. What we are interested in is the people who are not qualifying for Prevent. We do not want to dilute Prevent and we do not want Prevent to suddenly become an all-singing, all-dancing safeguarding mechanism. Prevent has a very specific purpose. The question is how we get to the people who are not right for Prevent and should not be in Prevent, but who have a propensity to violence.

Q241 **Robbie Moore:** I want to focus on the Prevent duty. We know that local authorities and education and health providers are mandated, under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, to deliver and be aware of how to make referrals to the Prevent programme, but that does not cover extremism; it is just those where there is a duty associated with terrorism. For reasons that we have explored in this Committee so far, do you think it is right that extremism is not included in the Prevent duty?



Jonathan Emmett: As I explained earlier, there are three layers of the Prevent duty. The first layer, tackling the ideological causes and focusing on reducing the influence of radicalisers on susceptible audiences, will absolutely capture those at the upper end of the extremism risk, where, as I think I also said earlier, there are individuals or groups that operate deliberately below a threshold but that are part and parcel of the risk picture that I look at as a counter-terrorism director and want to address. To that extent, we are absolutely interested in that.

Secondly, when we get to the early intervention programme that most people think of as Prevent, we in a sense are not sifting for people who have committed to a path of terrorism. We are looking for something rather more subtle, and this is a really challenging job for counter-terrorism police, upon whom we rely to assess this. We are looking for people who are at risk of being drawn on to that path. Of course their experience of and engagement with extremist narrative and ideology is a really important component, but it is not sufficient in and of itself to necessarily hit that bar.

That is the really difficult job that we ask Channel panels up and down the country to do—it is counter-terrorism police in the initial triage, and then Channel panels in the discussion of those cases. That is challenging. I slightly push back on the idea that “Prevent doesn’t do”, but you are right to the extent that of course, if an individual holds views that are extreme and that many might consider to be reprehensible, that is not a matter for Prevent.

Q242 **Robbie Moore:** In the earlier panel, Dame Sara made the point that those who fall into the terrorism category are more likely to be ideologically driven Islamists, and those in the extremism category are more likely to fall under far-right extremism. Therefore, as a supplementary to the question I have already asked, do you think the scope of the Prevent duty is wide enough? Do you recognise that categorisation in Dame Sara’s comments?

Jonathan Emmett: I am not sure that I could point to evidence that recognises Dame Sara’s comments, but neither could I point to any evidence that would disagree. She is certainly correct to say that the most significant terrorist threat is absolutely an Islamist extremist terrorist threat. It is also true that there is a very significant and serious extreme right-wing terrorist threat in the United Kingdom today, and the director general of MI5 is on record on that.

One of the things that is often said to me as the counter-terrorism director is, “How do you square that with the relatively low, but still significant”—on a population basis; it is certainly significant—“number of Islamist extremist referrals into Prevent, versus a relatively high number of referrals for extreme right-wing terrorism-related risk?” It is a complex issue, and my simple answer to that is in two parts.

First, we are taking very strenuous steps to ensure that we have calibrated our system to be appropriately sensitive to Islamist extremist



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risk. That will always be an ongoing process, and I can talk about it if the Committee is interested. Secondly, Prevent is looking for a different thing from MI5. MI5 is looking for hardened and committed terrorists who are intending to conduct attacks; we are looking for people who are on a pathway, and we want to intervene before they get there. We would expect there to be a differential in demographic.

Q243 Robbie Moore: So that you can establish confidence for Committee members, what action are you taking to ensure that everyone who undertakes the Prevent duty is confident and competent in identifying and referring individuals who are of concern?

Jonathan Emmett: Sorry, I missed the last part of the question. Did you ask about training for competence more generally?

Chair: And confidence.

Jonathan Emmett: Apologies, I will be there in one moment.

Q244 Robbie Moore: While you are finding that, can you expand on the nature of the organisations that deliver the programmes, and whether you have confidence that they are delivering them appropriately?

Jonathan Emmett: On the nature of the organisations that deliver programmes, they are civil society organisations with whom we work—we have a network of 68 civil society organisations. Of course, prior to working with them, and during our relationship, we make sure that we conduct appropriate due diligence checks on those organisations, so that we can have high confidence in the quality of their work.

Further, when we are talking about training for Prevent, we rely very heavily on a network of around 900 trainers who come from all sorts of organisations and put themselves forward to be accredited by the Prevent programme. They undergo training, and they then have a stringent knowledge check before they are allowed to deliver training on aspects of the Prevent duty, including Islamist extremist ideology. In November last year, we rolled out specific additional, ideologically focused training on Islamist extremism. I think that has now been delivered to at least 50 groups, and it will continue to be delivered and refined.

Taken together, all those things, as well as the Channel assurance team that I talked about earlier, are designed as checks and balances inside that system to try to make sure that everyone inside it is equipped with the knowledge they need to make the very difficult decisions that we ask them to.

Dan Jarvis: I should acknowledge one particular point of challenge. Essentially, there is a reliance on frontline professionals who are able to identify concerns and make a referral. That is harder to do online. There are some specific challenges about how we can more effectively detect concerning online behaviour to inform high-quality referrals.

Q245 Robbie Moore: Finally, what assessment, if any, has been done on the



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quality of referrals that have made under the Prevent duty?

Jonathan Emmett: We work really closely with the counter-terrorism police. They receive the referrals, and my team and I work very closely with them to understand any issue with the referral quality. We have implemented quarterly regional meetings with local partners to identify specific issues in their region, and to ensure consistent application of national policy and examine local delivery. There is always a balance; local delivery partners know their region, and they know the risks.

There are national standards, including knowledge that we have about, for example, Islamist extremism, and how that works in the modern world and online. As well as tracking the quality of referrals, what is crucial is our work to disseminate knowledge from Government about those risks to the local partners, which we do regularly, including products from the research, information and communications unit, which is part of the Prevent team.

Chair: In the interests of time, I suggest that you write to us on some such matters—I did not want to interrupt.

Dan Jarvis: To provide an additional point of reassurance, I have instigated a monthly meeting with CT police, which I chair along with senior Home Office officials, to look at precisely that issue and to make sure that we are getting it right.

Q246 **Mr Kohler:** I have a quick question, picking up on what Robbie was asking. I totally understand why the duty to refer should apply only to those who are thought to meet the Prevent threshold. If there are—I am still sceptical—other safeguarding routes for those subject to extremism, is there a duty to refer them to those routes, or should there be a duty?

Dan Jarvis: Anyone can make a referral.

Mr Kohler: Should there be a duty, though, in the same way as there is a duty to refer to Prevent?

Jonathan Emmett: That is a two-part question. The Minister is absolutely right, anyone can refer to Prevent—and should do, if they think that there is a risk. Very good guidance is available online, including for members of the public. That is the first point. The second point is more broadly on safeguarding, but I am afraid I am not an expert in safeguarding duties. I know that a number of legal duties apply to individuals in particular roles. If necessary, we can write to the Committee.

Mr Kohler: If you could come back to us on those routes and the duty, that would be good.

Chair: That would be helpful. We will spend the last few minutes on youth diversion orders with Ben Maguire.

Q247 **Ben Maguire:** We talked briefly about the fact that lots of these cases do not quite meet the terrorism threshold. I am interested to hear what you are considering in the way of further measures to increase police powers



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to be able to intervene in cases of violence-fixated individuals, who do not quite meet the terrorism threshold, but clearly pose a form of risk. I am interested how you might tackle that, in particular through policing powers, while mindful of additional budget. As I mentioned to Dame Sara, my local force is struggling with funding at the moment, so how will any such burden not just be put on the police? What are your thoughts?

Dan Jarvis: The youth diversion order is designed for terrorism-related cases, but will you pick up on the good point about pressures on the police, Jonathan?

Jonathan Emmett: That was a two-part question. I will be brief, Chair. I will come to the details of YDOs in a minute, but on violence-fascinated individuals, I will say a couple of things. First, a violence-fascinated individual could well also pose a terrorism-associated risk, so we will deal with them in Prevent, and rightly so, and in other parts of the terrorism system if we need to. You are right, however, that there are gaps. The IRTL identified a particular legislative gap—the planning of a mass-casualty attack—which the Government have committed to fill, and will forward legislation when an appropriate vehicle is found. Beyond that, we await Sir Adrian Fulford's report into phase 1 and, following on from that, into phase 2. We anticipate some significant recommendations, to which the Government will respond in full.

Q248 **Ben Maguire:** What timetable is there for that, approximately?

Jonathan Emmett: I think Sir Adrian's report is due at the end of April, so just over a year after the inquiry began.

Q249 **Ben Maguire:** Moving on to the youth diversion orders, which you mentioned, how do you see them being used to counter extremism? How will you measure their success?

Jonathan Emmett: Youth diversion orders are a counter-terrorism measure. I should be abundantly clear about that. Our most recent set of Terrorism Act statistics saw 53 young people—a record high—arrested for counter-terrorism offences in the course of the preceding 12 months. We have long been concerned about the increase in minors in our CT casework across the whole range from Prevent and into the very hard end of Pursue. As a result, we were very pleased by Jonathan Hall's recommendation—another one from him—for some sort of youth diversion order to provide us with a non-judicial pathway for individuals who are none the less engaged in quite serious activity, including potentially terrorism-related offending.

The measure is going through the House now, so I cannot give you a sense of the final shape of it, but we envisage that youth diversion orders will be used by policing to mandate conditions for an individual—not only restrictive, but, crucially, also supportive, as a way of mandating engagement with, for example, some of the techniques that we have long used in our Prevent programme, with an intervention provider tailored to a particular individual's risk profile, who can divert them from a pathway that would otherwise lead to terrorism offending.



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Q250 **Ben Maguire:** Could that model not be used elsewhere? You said earlier that you had almost identified the gap for violence-fixated individuals who do not quite meet the terrorism threshold. Is there a particular reason why those youth diversion orders cannot be used in that gap, as it were?

Dan Jarvis: It is early days, so we want to keep that under close review, but in terms of the basic principle, I do not see why that would not be the case. We are not quite there yet.

Chair: I think we have reached our time—we said we would get you out by 5 pm, Minister. Thank you; I know you have had a long and arduous day, so I appreciate you coming before the Committee. It does mean that we can complete our work in this area and get a report out. We will be making significant recommendations on how Government could work on this, based not only on the evidence that we have received, but on Lord Anderson's review and other issues. Again, we appreciate you coming before us and staying that little bit longer.