



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Countering extremism, HC 428

Tuesday 17 November 2015

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Victoria Atkins; James Berry; Mr David Burrowes; Nusrat Ghani; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Naz Shah; Mr Chuka Umunna and Mr David Winnick

Questions 120 – 382

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Mark Keary**, Headteacher, Bethnal Green Academy, and **Alison Brannick**, former Deputy Headteacher, Bethnal Green Academy, gave evidence.

Q120 Chair: May I call the Committee to order and welcome our two witnesses? This is part of the Committee's ongoing inquiry into counter-terrorism. I welcome Mark Keary, the headteacher of Bethnal Green Academy, and Alison Brannick, the former deputy head of the academy. For those who follow the Committee's proceedings, our predecessor Committee looked into the issue specifically of Shamima, Kadiza and Amira, three girls at the academy who left the United Kingdom and went to Syria via Istanbul. At that stage, Mr Keary, I had a conversation with you on the telephone, but the general election intervened and we were unable to take evidence from you, so I am glad you are here. We are not here specifically on that case. We are here to use that case as an example regarding the counter-radicalism measures that the Government are proposing, and indeed to consider what your school is doing as well, so thank you for coming.

Could I start with you, Mr Keary? There are criticisms of the school in respect of the three young girls who left the school because of a number of failings in notifying parents, that they had been issued with a formal letter and that they had been interviewed by the police. Do you accept those criticisms that more could have been done to stop Shamima, Kadiza and Amira leaving the country?

Mark Keary: I think the chronology is important to provide context in relation to this, so perhaps you will bear with me for a moment. In December, when the first student went missing, the school was informed that this was a missing persons investigation. Clearly, as the police investigation unfolded and other elements became very clear, the message to the school was again repeated that our role was to continue to ensure that communication to parents and carers related not to any form of extremism, but in relation to a missing person. At that time, Alison Brannick, the deputy principal, contacted all the parents of the

friendship group, including the girls who subsequently left in February. Alison spoke to all the families and informed them that they were going to be contacted by one element or another of the police in relation to this. As far back as December, there was clear engagement with parents and carers, letting them know what was going on and why.

Q121 Chair: This is the first time you are able to put the record straight on these matters. You are telling the Committee that in December last year, there was no question of this being about somebody leaving the country to go and fight in Syria or to move to Syria. This was simply about another pupil, who has not been named yet, who had been a missing person, or did you have notice from the police that this was to do with radicalisation?

Mark Keary: It started as a missing persons. Alison.

Alison Brannick: Yes, I would agree that initially the information that we were given was that the young person was missing, and it was conducted as a missing persons inquiry, so in December that was where we were with the situation.

Q122 Chair: So nobody from the Prevent team came to you and said, “We are very worried. This young girl has left Tower Hamlets. She has gone to Syria. We are worried about the friendship group—that other girls might go as well”? If you saw the evidence of the parents to this Committee, they felt the school had let them down and that had the school intimated that there was a problem with radicalisation, they would have been alerted and maybe they would have taken Shamima, Kadiza and Amira’s passports away from them.

Alison Brannick: In December we were dealing with the missing persons unit, Tower Hamlets police.

Q123 Chair: When did it become a missing person to do with radicalisation?

Alison Brannick: I think it was after the Christmas holiday that we were contacted by the counter-terrorism unit—in February—regarding moving the investigation forward.

Q124 Chair: Had you known in December that this was an issue to do with someone leaving the country, would you have reacted differently?

Alison Brannick: I think we would have looked to the agencies that were supporting us for advice on that, most definitely and, as I said, we were dealing with the missing persons unit of Tower Hamlets police.

Q125 Chair: But you were informed subsequently that this was an issue of radicalisation, and before these three girls—Shamima, Kadiza and Amira—left the country?

Alison Brannick: Yes.

Q126 Chair: So you still had an opportunity then to alert the parents, because the parents’ concern—and, from this case, we want to have a wider look at this issue—is that the school did not do everything that it could in order to alert them. Do you accept now that you should have told the parents that it was a wider issue than a missing person for one of the friends of these three girls?

Alison Brannick: Obviously we worked with Tower Hamlets and we worked with the Metropolitan Police, and we took advice from both of those agencies. Based on our experience, much more clarity is needed from those agencies to support schools in this situation. Learning from the experience that we went through, I think it would be helpful for schools to have real clarity on the roles and responsibilities for every organisation that is involved in this process.

Q127 Chair: Sure. We will come on to the guidance that has been issued so far, but just in this particular case, do you regret not saying to the parents, Mr Keary, that this was more serious than a missing person, and that this was one of the friendship group leaving the country?

Mark Keary: At that time, for me to have done that would have been to go against the clear, consistent and repeated guidance from the police in relation to this matter.

Q128 Chair: Which was not to say anything.

Mark Keary: Which was to ensure that this was communicated, when it was communicated, as a missing persons inquiry. I would suggest in a situation like that, bearing in mind what we know now, that our discussion would have gone significantly wider, but the world for us—as for many people, and certainly all the agencies involved here—was a significantly different place prior to February of this year.

Q129 Chair: Of course. Now, you gave the girls a letter to give to their parents, which never got to their parents.

Mark Keary: We did not give a letter to anyone.

Chair: Who gave the letter to them?

Alison Brannick: The police gave the letter.

Chair: The police?

Alison Brannick: Yes.

Q130 Chair: Was it through you or was it directly to the girls?

Alison Brannick: It was directly to the girls in a meeting that was facilitated at the school.

Q131 Chair: In March this year, five 15 to 16 year-old girls from the academy were barred from travelling abroad without permission by a judge in the Family Division of the High Court after showing an interest in going to Syria. Is that right?

Mark Keary: No. There were four students from Bethnal Green Academy and there was another individual, and we found out on the last day of term from the BBC website that five young people had been made wards of court. We had no prior knowledge of this act. We were not consulted and, in fact, we were not in a position to do anything other than simply to react to it. It was difficult enough to try to correct the erroneous reporting at the time, but clearly by that point, if you are not involved in the conversation, you can neither offer support to those closest affected nor take any action yourself in that respect.

Q132 Chair: But you have the opportunity today to clear the record and to put your views forward, which we appreciate. Why does there appear to be so much radicalisation at Bethnal Green?

Mark Keary: Radicalisation at Bethnal Green is certainly something on which we have found ourselves having to face a great deal of questions from a range of different agencies. I am not at this point clear about the reasons for the young people being made wards of court and on the fact that that was subsequently lifted in August, we were not clear about why that was the case. I am afraid I cannot comment on the evidence. Going back—

Q133 Chair: It must be a concern to you as a headteacher. You have three girls who have gone off—now four girls—to fight in Syria and four girls who have been made wards of court. This is not happening in every single school in the country, as far as we know. Does that not cause you concern, looking at the way in which the school operates? Let me just pose the question: why are so many girls going from this school?

Mark Keary: Of course I am hugely concerned about this. When the news broke in February, we were under huge scrutiny from counter-terrorism and from the police, who went through in great detail the school's processes and mechanisms, including its ICT policy, and records of engagement across the board. Key staff were interviewed in a long-running inquiry that probed, searched and looked closely into every aspect of the school's work. At the end of that process, they concluded that the search for who, what and how in relation to this process of radicalisation would be moving elsewhere. Further down the line, we are still no clearer about what the agents of change were in this respect.

Q134 Chair: Has there been no feedback to you—no additional guidance; no additional clarity from the agencies involved—as to how you should do your job effectively to prevent radicalisation?

Mark Keary: Only in so far as the Prevent strategy, with which we have been fully engaged from the summer of 2014. We have seen that adapt and shift to the evolving strategies of a very different and dynamic situation, which has taken many agencies by surprise. To briefly answer your question, we are hugely concerned. We have looked into every aspect of our work. We have looked closely at what we as a school, and what we would expect to be all the other agencies involved, could or should have done along the way that would have been different.

Q135 Chair: Sure. We had a telephone conversation in which I talked about the availability of literature in your school for these young girls. You said that they did not need to come to school, as outside the school gates, within a short distance from the school, were a number of shops that were able to sell material that perhaps would not be appropriate to a 15 and 16 year-old, and that radicalisation was maybe happening in the community. Is that right? Did I get the right sense of the community over there?

Mark Keary: Our children face many challenges. School is certainly one of the agents of change that hopes to ensure that we enable all our young people to succeed, but within a very short walk of our school there are all sorts of threats and dangers that are very tangible—beyond the house and the home's control, and beyond the school's control.

Q136 Chair: Which dangers in particular?

Mark Keary: We have seen drugs and gangs alongside radicalisation—a range of other threats that maybe are more conventional and long established, but which still take their toll on our young people and their dreams. We live alongside those. The police do what they can as best to manage it but again, to briefly respond, I would suggest that you simply Google the incidents. Issues come up—page after page after page—that perhaps do not constitute criminal offences, but certainly represent a danger to us as we try to work with the young people within a pluralistic setting.

Q137 Tim Loughton: Mr Keary, can I just clarify something? You said that the first you found out that the girls had been made wards of court was from a BBC source.

Alison Brannick: Yes.

Q138 Tim Loughton: You were not notified directly by the court of their status?

Alison Brannick: No.

Q139 Tim Loughton: That is a bit unusual, is it not? Schools are prime players in that and should be notified, I would think.

Alison Brannick: We were not part of the decision-making process with regards to the ward of court application.

Q140 Tim Loughton: No, but you are a party that has a large interface with those girls and need to be aware of their status.

Alison Brannick: Yes.

Q141 Tim Loughton: Can I talk about the Prevent duty now, which has come under quite a lot of criticism? The NAHT says that it is confusing, that it was introduced very quickly and that it has not been properly presented to schools. What guidance have you received from the Government in your school, and how adequate or otherwise do you think it is?

Mark Keary: Perhaps we can take that in two stages—the guidance pre-February and then the way the strategy has evolved, including the revisions in June. I think the big issue to do with the Prevent strategy that we embarked upon in the summer of 2014—again, all this is with hindsight—is that it was designed to counter a process of radicalisation that had evolved over quite a few years, certainly in relation to organisations such as al-Qaeda, and it had certain figures within it: the stereotype of the angry young man, with that gradual disaffection and the route that they follow. Of course it had for us in our training some identifying aspects, some indicators of radicalisation, rather like a tick-list but more complex than that, in fairness.

The difficulty then, of course, was that our staff or, if we are to read further testimony, professional counter-terrorism officers or the families themselves, did not notice that the girls had exhibited any of those symptoms or those characteristics. We were quite focused

through the Prevent strategy on looking for symptoms of radicalisation that on this occasion just simply did not come to light.

Q142 Tim Loughton: The original Prevent strategy soon became not fit for purpose, is what you are saying, because of the evolving threat that was there. But when the Prevent strategy became the Prevent duty in June this year and the Department for Education wrote to schools on 1 July, did that guidance as to what your duty then was reflect the changing circumstances, or was it effectively out of date?

Mark Keary: I think the evolving threat, particularly represented by the current situation and the speed of change, means that any legislative response or any strategy is in danger of becoming outmoded almost instantly, because tactics for recruitment and radicalisation appear to shift and change in response to those. Nevertheless, at its heart there is a clear, coherent and, I think, positive message, which is that we must address the issues and the causes of radicalisation within organisations, including schools, but not exclusively those, because there are many that have a huge duty of care now within the community and have an impact.

Q143 Tim Loughton: But this has become a duty, so you have a responsibility to make sure that you are following Government guidance now, as has been laid out. What you are saying is that guidance effectively has become not fit for purpose, and even the new guidance under the duty from June this year became obsolete very quickly. In that case, what did you do to go back to the Government to say, “You are not dealing with the problem that we are facing now and the guidance needs to be extended, adapted or updated to include this”? What feedback has come from you and perhaps other academies or schools in a similar position?

Mark Keary: We were invited to contribute through the Department for Education to the review of the circumstances, which was just one of the many investigations that we have, quite rightly, participated in since December, moving our way through. We were very clear at that time that no single strategy should follow the same route of the somewhat directive, quite structured process of Prevent as it was when we started working with it.

Q144 Tim Loughton: So have you effectively adapted the Prevent duty into what you see as more appropriate and relevant for your school or are you just paying lip service to it—or are you not following it at all, effectively?

Mark Keary: I do not know where that came from. My apologies if I have led you down that route. We found and issues to do with the original Prevent strategy, which we fed in. We have seen the Prevent duty now updated and I believe it is something that we can work with, but it needs to be very regularly reviewed across the board. We cannot be caught in the same situation where we imagine that the radicalisation process and those who represent a threat to our young people will simply stand still. What we have to learn how to do is to adapt and be, for once, proactive in relation to this. One original flaw of the Prevent strategy, which perhaps lingers at this point, is that it is predominantly reactive, but we need to look at that duty of care, see what we can do to ensure that we have buy-in from our communities and all our staff, and ensure that it is supported by genuine work within the curriculum across the board that educates our young people and helps them to become far more critical thinkers as we move forward. That is every school.

Q145 Tim Loughton: So it should not be called Prevent. Is what you are saying that it should be “Respond”, rather than a Prevent?

Mark Keary: The name will probably change in time, but right now it appears to be what we have and all we have, so I think we need to make it work.

Q146 Chair: Indeed. In fact, our predecessor Committee’s reports talked about “Engage” rather than Prevent as being the best way. Before we go to Mr McDonald, can you just give us some figures? I am not talking about citizenship now; I am talking about ethnicity. What is the ethnic minority percentage in your school in Bethnal Green?

Mark Keary: The first thing to say is that it is very different in every single year group. The area that we are in is an ever-changing, dynamic community.

Q147 Chair: Of course. The 15 to 16 year-olds—GCSE level?

Mark Keary: I would say that over 80% to 85% of our students are ethnic minority.

Q148 Chair: What percentage are from the Muslim faith?

Mark Keary: Around about 50% of that outgoing year 11.

Q149 Stuart C. McDonald: Could you tell us a bit about the training that your staff undergo to equip them with the knowledge and confidence to identify children at risk of radicalisation or extremism?

Mark Keary: Yes, Alison.

Alison Brannick: To be clear, first of all this is an issue in relation to safeguarding and it is very similar to the training that takes place initially regarding any safeguarding issue, whether that is child sexual exploitation, FGM or any other concerns that you may have. It is being very clear with staff about the reporting structure if they have any concerns so that staff are very aware of how to report any concerns relating to any form of change in behaviour, mixing with different groups and so on, that they might see from young people. We have been discussing issues around radicalisation and extremism within our safeguarding training for a very long time.

Q150 Stuart C. McDonald: Who does your training and what form does it take?

Alison Brannick: We do an in-house refresher that goes on throughout the year to ensure that it is always in the forefront of staff’s minds. All our staff have participated in WRAP training—raising awareness of Prevent training—which is delivered by accredited providers from the local authority. A very interesting observation to make about that is the video case studies that are used as part of the training all use the stereotype of the angry young man, whether that is to do with right-wing extremism or Muslim extremism. This is something that we raised with the Department for Education. Again, I think this links into what Mark has said about that shift and change that is constant. Those materials need updating and there needs to be a move away from that stereotype where you are looking at young people who may be radicalised because they have previously been involved in

criminality, and have that vulnerability, to looking at the factors that are impacting on our female population at the moment.

Q151 Stuart C. McDonald: That is very useful to know. Has there been any other feedback from your staff and would you say overall that they feel that the training that they get is sufficient to enable them to undertake the duties that are on them?

Alison Brannick: I think there are two parts to that answer. The feedback from our staff was that those training resources were fixated around stereotypical males. We work very hard with our staff to ensure that they know exactly what to do and what referral processes are in place if they have concerns about any young person.

Q152 Stuart C. McDonald: So they regard the training as fit for purpose, with those caveats?

Alison Brannick: It needs updating with female training materials, I would say. We have to be aware of that, in the light of the current climate, and we cannot just focus on how young men are affected by this. We must have case studies of how young women are affected by this.

Q153 Chair: Thank you. I should have asked you what percentage of your staff are from the ethnic minority communities and what percentage are from the Muslim faith.

Mark Keary: We have approximately 50%, but it is not something that we—

Chair: Sorry, 50% are ethnic minorities on your staff?

Alison Brannick: Yes.

Mark Keary: Across the board, it is a fair reflection of that, including support staff, but it is not something that we keep a regular tally of.

Q154 Chair: No, but you must see them every day, so you would know, would you not?

Mark Keary: Yes.

Chair: What percentage are of the Muslim faith?

Mark Keary: I do not inquire into their faith. Alison?

Alison Brannick: I would say probably around 30% of the staff.

Mark Keary: Yes, I think that is fair.

Q155 Chair: But do you think that you should, Mr Keary? If you are trying to engage with young girls and others in your school, is it not important that they are able to go to people they can trust and rely on who may well be from their own communities? Perhaps one of the problems with schools like Bethnal Green is that there is a disconnect because people do not feel they can be open with you all.

Mark Keary: We have a very comprehensive pastoral care system. I would refer you again back to the Department's inquiries in relation to this and also to Ofsted reports that go into it, and probably in far greater depth and detail. We use community workers to ensure that there is efficient and effective communication with the home. In the absence, sometimes, of the English language, it is absolutely essential to ensure there is appropriate communication. Therefore, there are ample potential role models for our young Muslim students—male and female—to go to, but we are an international school across the board, and there are some considerations and concerns where the issues of gender, race and religious background are entirely irrelevant to the standard of care that is required and the expertise.

Q156 Chair: Sure, but do you have outside organisations that come and talk to your students and tell them about radicalisation and how really terrible it is if they make that decision to go to Syria?

Mark Keary: We have had quite a few through the Prevent strategy.

Alison Brannick: Just to be clear as well, after the events of February half term, when the girls travelled, the school was inundated with agencies offering to help and support us. We had to go through quite a process to ensure that those agencies had the right intentions, so we took the decision to work with Home Office-approved providers only, and approved by Tower Hamlets, within Bethnal Green Academy. We have had the representative from the Prevent team in Tower Hamlets come in and deliver assemblies. We also deliver assemblies ourselves regarding raising the awareness of extremism and the radicalisation of young people.

Chair: Of course. That is very helpful. Thank you.

Q157 Naz Shah: When you talk about your external organisations coming in, have you had any non-Government organisations coming in to deliver the training?

Alison Brannick: No, we have not, and I refer back to the answer I have just given. It was a time when we wanted to be absolutely clear that the people we were inviting into our school were coming with the right intentions. It is also part of the Prevent agenda that you are very clear about the policy on visitors.

Q158 Naz Shah: Are there no non-Government providers on the list of approved providers?

Alison Brannick: I cannot give you an answer to that at the moment without having that list in front of me—apologies.

Q159 Victoria Atkins: I am going to ask you questions about the criteria used to judge children and students at risk. Please do not in any way hinder any investigatory processes that may be going on, but what criteria are used to assess pupils who are at risk of being drawn into extremism and terrorism?

Alison Brannick: You would look for changes in any patterns of behaviour. You would look perhaps at the Channel vulnerability list, which lists potential behaviours that may raise concern, but I have to say it is about knowing your students and being able to

identify when there are those changes in patterns of behaviour, whether that is friendship groups, study habits, dress and so on.

Q160 Victoria Atkins: Again, those are factors that you apply not just to this issue, but getting involved in—

Alison Brannick: No, any safeguarding issue, and I think that is the point that we are trying to make.

Q161 Victoria Atkins: Do staff know how and where to refer children and young people for further help?

Alison Brannick: Yes. I think it is a very clear referral process at Bethnal Green Academy. Any concerns come through to the safeguarding team, and then that team, if it is deemed necessary, would make the referral through to the social inclusion panel, where that would be picked up and a decision is made on the next steps to support that young person, if it goes through to Channel.

Q162 Victoria Atkins: Of course young people do not operate in a vacuum and their families are an essential part of this process.

Alison Brannick: Yes.

Victoria Atkins: How do you work with families if there is a child you think is at risk? How do you work with them to try to help families to help you as well?

Alison Brannick: We have worked with the Tower Hamlets parents advice centre, putting on sessions for parents so that they feel confident in understanding the risks of extremism and radicalisation and in identifying potential signs of radicalisation, and so that they know exactly what agencies to go to to support them, if that was the case. Following on from that, we also do a lot of work around e-safety, which obviously is an issue linked to our discussions today, so that parents feel confident in ensuring that they can help in keeping their young people safe online.

Q163 Mr Winnick: First of all, apologies for having been asked out to deal with various matters. It may that one or two of the questions have been asked by colleagues; if so, the Chair will soon advise me. As far as the internet in school is concerned, how far is there a danger that children will be online and possibly be drawn into terrorist propaganda?

Alison Brannick: Within school?

Mr Winnick: At school.

Alison Brannick: Again, this relates to the Prevent agenda. As a school, it is very important that you have a very strong filtering system on your network, which we do have via London Grid for Learning. We also have software that identifies particular key words so that if a young person was searching for something online, staff would be alerted. The filtering of the school internet system is robust and brings to the attention of staff anything that might be concerning so that they are able to intervene and act on that. Along with that, it is important that young people are equipped with the critical thinking skills to know how

to use the internet safely, to be able to understand the dangers of using the internet and to make the right choices, and to keep themselves safe online.

Q164 Mr Winnick: Do you agree with that, Mr Keary?

Mark Keary: Absolutely. For all sorts of safeguarding reasons that predate this particular challenge, we have regularly updated the software that works right across the academy. The police of course, as you would expect, looked closely into the internet records of the girls across the board and once again were reasonably comfortable that that was not the origin of the issue.

The second part to this is that we have a rather unpopular but very well-implemented policy on mobile phone or smartphone devices, which are the usual route that young people might wish to use if they want to get around the internet protection. We do not allow those within the academy.

Q165 Mr Winnick: To some extent, this is part of the questioning that the Chair put to you at the very beginning. I am not sure about Hindu or Sikhs—perhaps it is the same as Christians and Jews—but Christian and Jewish children often would be told by their parents to be more religious if they had been brought up in a religious setting. It is not the other way round, but what puzzles people and certainly myself—perhaps my generation—is I do not know why there should be a tendency among young Muslims—children of secondary school age, if not before—to be inclined so religiously, and therefore to be vulnerable to the messages of evil and violence that obviously the jihadists are so keen to promote. Is there a particular reason why it should be different than the children of other faiths that I have mentioned?

Mark Keary: I think it would be impossible for us to speculate in relation to that. We have two colleagues as deputy principals who are both Muslim and have very different views on how things have evolved, and the reasons and the causes, but the reality is—you will have to forgive me if I am repeating myself—that we still do not know what caused the radicalisation of the four girls. We do not know what were the principal agents, what made that significant shift and change, and what made them take that terrible decision. Until we have that information, I am afraid the response to your question would be purely speculative and I do not believe I am qualified to respond.

Q166 Mr Winnick: Would it not be correct that just as it is said in other matters totally removed from radicalisation that schools cannot be a substitute for home, that applies to this aspect as well?

Mark Keary: Schools, particularly in our more challenging communities, tend to find that they regularly go the extra mile. We have many different schools within our borough, but that aspect of safeguarding is right at the core of everything that we do. That sometimes involves us being far more actively involved in promoting positive messages with parents and carers, and getting them engaged beyond their most immediate community with the wider community of the school. We are not alone in doing that. Many schools, particularly in areas like ours, do that on a very regular basis. The reality is that we have software control, but we have no control over and no understanding of the threat represented by

other organisations that children may attend, or even from the internet should they go home and not have the protection of that software. So in that respect, yes, I concur.

Mr Winnick: Yes, I well understand. Thank you very much.

Q167 Mr Burrowes: Your vision is that you empower students to become independent learners who are critical in their thinking, informed in their choices and confident in their ability to succeed in the modern world. I presume that that vision has remained for some time now. In that context, you also no doubt would have had e-safety policies and appropriate levels of filtering in relation to IT. Since what happened in December, and particularly February, has anything changed to meet your vision and to also deal with the issues of safety?

Mark Keary: We found ourselves pretty much in the middle of a storm and we had to work with the situation as best we could for the 1,000 young people in the academy. The things that have shifted and changed—again, to avoid repetition, I will not touch on what has already been said—

Mr Burrowes: Particularly in relation to and just following from the questions in relation to the internet.

Mark Keary: Our e-safety policy was updated with the most recent software, as tends to happen. I would suggest that that would probably have happened anyway, and that, again, is based on the best guidance that we can possibly get from all our partners.

Q168 Mr Burrowes: We know that there is software and software, but in terms of trying to change minds and attitudes, not least in relation to the internet, has a difference been made by the briefing notes to headteachers, teachers and safeguarding leads from the Home Office and Department for Education in July, which was particularly identifying main ISIS or propaganda claims on social media sites and the like? Has there been any change of any policy or practice?

Mark Keary: We are assured that those influences are all filtered out and our staff regularly check anyway. You would not find very much independent use of ICT within the school that is not subject to some form of either technical or individual supervision, and usually both. The software itself is Government approved. As far as we are concerned, it is the best on the market.

Q169 Mr Burrowes: Obviously we know that access to the internet goes way beyond the school and school time; there is internet in the bedroom or elsewhere in the privacy of someone's home. What is the relationship with parents, families and carers on the use of internet? It is a wide duty of due regard to preventing people from being drawn into terrorism, and obviously that goes beyond the school gates, but no doubt it has an impact on you when they come back into school.

Alison Brannick: That relates back to what I have already mentioned about the e-safety sessions that we have put on for parents where we are offering practical advice. Safer Internet Day takes place in February. We open the school up and our police community liaison officer did a session for parents.

Q170 Mr Burrowes: What is the attendance rate among parents?

Alison Brannick: We have done four e-safety sessions so far and I believe we had about 18 parents at each session; there was a similar attendance at the safety day where our police officer was present. We also write to parents regularly with advice on how to support their young person staying safe online. If you look on the parents' page of our school website, you will see there is some helpful, concise information on there about how parents can support their sons and daughters in staying safe online. I refer back to the assembly programme that I mentioned earlier. Looking at those e-safety assemblies, we use a lot of CEOP materials, which are powerful and useful in delivering that e-safety message.

Q171 Chair: Thank you. We are coming to the end of your evidence for both of you. Just some very quick final questions. The media caravan, Mr Keary, has moved on from Bethnal Green, but you are still there and you still have your pupils to look after. From anecdotal conversations that your staff have had with the pupils who are there, how are these three girls regarded? I understand that two of them have married Daesh fighters—that has certainly been in the media. Are they regarded by the other pupils as people who got away? Are they regarded as poster girls for what they have done, or are they criticised?

Mark Keary: As you would probably understand, there is not an open conversation about this within the student body. Our community, and our parents and carers of our young people, saw at first hand the devastating consequences when young people take ill-chosen decisions in the way that they did. They have understood a great deal more, perhaps, than we give them credit for—that what they have been sold is not the reality.

Q172 Chair: But are they regarded as heroines? Do people say, “They have done very well, because they are out of Tower Hamlets and are now in Syria”?

Mark Keary: No. I have never heard any student, parent or carer, or anybody in relation to the school community, even faintly touch on that at all. It is immensely sad for everybody. Everyone understands the awful consequences for the families, the community and those who knew the girls, and that cannot be in any way discounted or underestimated.

Q173 Chair: Of course. Mrs Brannick, you have left the school. You are now principal of a school in Derby.

Alison Brannick: Yes, that is right.

Chair: Are these issues also apparent in that area or is it a completely different environment?

Alison Brannick: I think we have to be aware that this is a national and international issue and we should not close our thinking to focusing on just one particular area.

Chair: It is an issue in your school as well.

Alison Brannick: I think it is an issue in every school that all school leaders need to be aware of and working towards how we can work with our young people.

Chair: Naz Shah has a quick last question and then we will close.

Q174 Naz Shah: Do you get any extra funding to implement the new obligations that have been set by the Government?

Mark Keary: No. Some of the engagement from the Prevent team is not costed to the school, which is excellent, but it is fair to say that the most popular area that parents and carers wanted greater understanding of is in relation to e-safety. I would suggest that that aspect, perhaps even as an appendix to the Prevent strategy, is one that can and should grow. Our parents and carers want to be able to help and protect their children better. We need to be able to provide them consistently with the tools, and that involves time and cost and providers, but I think it is a cost that should be borne and it is fully appropriate for schools to be the centre of that work.

Chair: Thank you. Thank you both for coming in. This was a good opportunity. I am sorry we could not have had you in after the parents but, as I have said, things intervened—events intervened—but we are very grateful to you for coming here and sharing this experience with us in such an open and transparent way. Thank you very much to both of you.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Sara Khan**, Director, Inspire, and **Kalsoom Bashir**, Director, Inspire, gave evidence.

Q175 Chair: Sara Khan and Kalsoom Bashir, my apologies for keeping you waiting. We are running a little late and I understand that we have a vote probably around 4 pm, so we will do our best to be able to ask you these questions as best we can, as quickly as we can. Do not feel that both of you have to answer every single question; one of you may feel more inclined to answer than the other. Let me start with you, Sara Khan. You are a great supporter of the Prevent programme. You have been very enthusiastic about it and have said that it is working well, but others have criticised it. You have quite a lot of people lined up against Prevent: Shami Chakrabarti called it “the biggest spying programme in Britain in modern times and an affront to civil liberties”, while Dal Babu, a former police commander, said that it was a “toxic brand”. Why do you think it is such a good thing?

Sara Khan: Chairman, before I begin, can I just thank you for inviting us today to this session? We would also like to take this opportunity to offer our condolences to the families of the victims in Paris, Beirut and Baghdad from last week. I think we all recognise that the threat of terrorism is real, including in this country. As an organisation, we are passionate about doing what we can not only to protect our country but to play a role in safeguarding children.

Q176 Chair: I accept all that, and thank you for that introduction, but I am specifically talking about the Prevent programme. There is a lot of criticism and you are one of its great supporters. Why?

Sara Khan: I would not say we are one of the greatest supporters. We recognise that there are issues, for example with the delivery of Prevent, and we have many conversations with other people on this issue. But overall we believe that you need to have a strategy in place to prevent people from being drawn into committing acts of terrorism.

You say that Dal Babu has argued that Prevent is a toxic brand. I would argue that what is not often discussed in the media is, “How has it become toxic?” We know through the work that we have done that there are many examples of Muslim groups who have made it their mission to make Prevent toxic. We have lots of examples of groups that have gone into Muslim communities—

Q177 Chair: Why are they doing that? Why are they going out of their way to attack this particular programme?

Sara Khan: I think that is a very interesting question. The people who we have seen attacking it are Islamists, hate preachers—people who fundamentally believe that Islamist extremist ideology is a form of Islam. It is not an Islam that we believe. We feel it violates the teachings of our faith, but it is almost as if they feel that Prevent is about the criminalisation of Islam. As Muslims, we do not subscribe to that view at all. We very much see it as a programme that seeks to prevent people from being drawn into extremism.

Q178 Chair: Sure, but we have spent a huge amount of money on this programme over a number of years and still young people are being radicalised. Is that not an acceptance that we need a new approach?

Sara Khan: I think first and foremost we do not recognise the scale and the threat of the issue. I know with the work that we do—

Chair: You think it is much bigger than even we imagine.

Sara Khan: I just think the scale of it is very, very big.

Q179 Chair: Give us some numbers in terms of scale. What percentage of the community or how many?

Sara Khan: I cannot give you that number. All I can say is that now with the introduction of the—

Chair: If you say the scale is much bigger, we must have some kind of comparison.

Sara Khan: For example, we do a lot of work with Muslim women. We have done so since 2007. We have gone into Muslim communities and delivered counter-radicalisation programmes, well before ISIS were on the scene. What mothers have told us time and again is, “We recognise this to be an issue.” I can give you lots of quotes the women have said to us: this is the first time someone has ever taught a theological counter-narrative to extremist ideology; or when mothers have said, “Our children are saying extreme views to us, but we do not feel we are equipped to answer these questions.” So within the communities and at a ground level, we know that it is a significant issue. Having done this

work for the last seven years, those views are still as prevalent now as they were seven years ago.

Q180 Chair: Indeed. That is why we have invited you in, because we are seeking answers, Kalsoom Bashir, as to what is the tipping point. Something that the Prime Minister feels very passionate about, and we share this passion, is what turns a young British citizen, who has had everything this country has had to offer, into either a jihadi bride who decides to leave to go and live in Syria, or someone who goes to Syria, comes back and then is involved in the kind of atrocities that we have seen in Paris? What is that tipping point? Where are we going wrong?

Kalsoom Bashir: I think that is an issue that we are all grappling with. We do not have the answers, and if we had the answers, I think the world would be a very different place.

Chair: But you have seven years of experience. That is why we have asked you in.

Kalsoom Bashir: We have experience, and what we are looking at is a lot of very complex issues. We have to be proportionate about it: of the 3-point-whatever million Muslims there are now, it is a small but significant number who are being drawn towards that ideology. If we have had 500 young men or more than 50 young women, we have to look at what is going on in their lives. It is complex, but—

Q181 Chair: Sure, but give me the top three. I understand it is complex, but what we want to do in this inquiry is to try to get some solutions. What are the top three issues that are the tipping point for people?

Kalsoom Bashir: I think we are looking at a generation that has been brought up post-9/11, so their identities are hardening, they have been viewed through the media, defined by the media, viewed through the lens of counter-terrorism. You have hardening interpretations of religion and very literal interpretations of religion, and you also have views out there very openly saying, “This is a police state. The Government want to eliminate Islam. Basically, they want to stop us from practising our religion as well,” and that even living here is a temporary measure—that living among non-Muslims or the kafir, which is a very derogatory term for non-Muslims, is not the ideal. So, if you have to choose between being British and being Muslim, as well as all the other vulnerabilities that you have within your home—whether it is domestic violence or all the other issues that teenagers have—and you then have somebody saying, “We can offer you something much, much better,” it is very attractive.

Sara Khan: Can I make a point just on that? I think the issue around non-violent extremism is a very important one. We have come across many people who portray themselves as a religious authority—as a credible religious voice—sitting there in a room full of 16 year-olds and, like Murtaza Khan, for example, saying things to young people like, “We have become Jews in our clothing, Jews in our eating, Jews in everything that we do, and the other half is Christian in everything we do. Muslims are following one of these accursed nations and people are still not waking up to understand the fact that these people are enemies towards us.” What impression does this leave on a 16 year-old boy or a girl? What take-home message are they having? If we had a far right extreme group, for example, and if you reversed or mirrored that quote and said, “Muslims are the enemies to

this country. We hate them and they are dirty,” we would have a problem with that—we would challenge that.

Q182 Chair: Basically you are saying we are not aggressive enough in challenging this ideology and we should be much more aggressive?

Sara Khan: What I would love to see is civil society taking the lead in saying, “Just as we—”

Q183 Chair: Who is that? I mean, civil society is quite a big lot of people. Who in particular are you talking about?

Sara Khan: I believe society as a whole has a responsibility.

Q184 Chair: But that is very big. We want practical stuff here.

Sara Khan: I do believe that Muslim faith institutions have an absolute role in this.

Chair: So the mosques?

Sara Khan: But also wider society. We see non-Muslim organisations that are happy to challenge far right extreme views. Why is it they do not show the same thrust and energy in challenging Islamist extremism, which is deeply offensive to all of us?

Q185 Chair: Indeed. You were quite critical of the counter-extremism strategy that was announced by the Government. You said that it was excessive and that it would give fuel to extremists in their cause. Why were you concerned about that, because so far you have been quite supportive of Government policy? Why do you think that it would give cause to extremism?

Sara Khan: There are sections of the counter-extremism strategy that we welcome. We welcome the fact that the Government highlight far right and Islamist extremism and neo-Nazi extremism. We welcome the fact that there will be separate recordings of Islamophobic attacks and the independent review by Louise Casey—things like that we welcome.

Where we do have concerns are, first, with the identification of negative cultural practices against women as a form of extremism. Personally, we believe that should remain in the Government’s violence against women and girls strategy. We say that as an organisation that works very much around tackling violence against women and girls within Muslim communities, but also extremism. The second concern we have in particular with regard to the strategy is around banning orders, disruption orders and the closing down of premises, because we feel that these practices are illiberal. We feel that in the long term they are not going to challenge extremism. This is very much a battle of ideas.

Q186 Chair: So you would not support the banning of Hizb ut-Tahrir?

Sara Khan: No, we would not support the banning of HT. We feel very much that those ideas have to be challenged, because all you do then is just drive them underground. It is far better to challenge those arguments openly.

Q187 Chair: Kalsoom Bashir, Sara Khan seems to think that we can involve ourselves in a debate with these people. Is that going to be enough? Is it like a meeting of one of these debating societies? Surely we need to be much more aggressive. So many more young women are going than ever before. The French have the biggest contingent of women who have gone from France to Syria. Is that the same in this country? Are lots of young girls and women going?

Kalsoom Bashir: Through my work in schools I have come across a lot of young women who show empathy with and are very sympathetic to girls who have gone. We have to challenge that because they have not heard the counter-narrative. For example, if I have been faced with a woman who says, “I am very envious of women who are going to support our brothers spreading the Deen and I would go if I could, because I do not want to live here,” and I challenge her, saying, “Why do you feel that? What is so difficult about life in this country?” she will say, “The Prophet Muhammad told us to make Hijra; told us to migrate”. Then you say, “Well, why did he tell you to migrate? Why did he tell his followers? Because they were being persecuted.” She has no idea about that and she has no idea that they went to a Christian country, so it is about religious illiteracy as well and that needs to be challenged.

When we do our work, if they have not heard that counter-narrative within a debate within Muslims themselves, they only have the one argument that they are following. What we are saying is that that needs to be rigorously challenged. I work as a chaplain in a university and that is what I would encourage, rather than banning.

Chair: Yes, very helpful

Q188 Nusrat Ghani: Sara, there are a number of organisations that are coming forward in this field of anti-radicalisation or saying that they are in touch with a number of communities or they are in touch with people who could become radicalised. We have had a number of people come forward and give evidence, and it is very hard to have anyone admit they knew of anybody being radicalised, or having any real contact with them or being able to understand why they may have travelled overseas. You have made some comments about CAGE in particular, and especially around its comments on the Government’s anti-radicalisation strategy and the fact that CAGE’s work does not have a positive impact on the Government’s anti-radicalisation efforts and may even erode all the work that you and other organisations are trying to do with communities that are vulnerable or at risk to radicalisation.

Sara Khan: I think this is a very important question and I can give you one or two examples. We know that CAGE has been going around the country delivering information to Muslim communities about the CTS Bill. It was widely reported in the media, for example, that Asim Qureshi from CAGE claimed the Government would consider taking children away as young as seven if those children attended demonstrations by the Stop the War group. It also argued, for example, that if you do not consent as parents to deradicalisation programmes, the state will take your children away. Even Nazir Afzal, the former chief crown prosecutor for the north-west, argued that this is just fearmongering of the very worst kind. Again, this is what brings me back to the idea of when we talk about Prevent being toxic—how has it been made toxic? There are people out there deliberately giving wrong information and scaring Muslim communities about what Prevent is about. For example, there is the idea that if you do not consent to Channel programmes, the state

will take your children away, but Channel works only if you have the consent of parents. If you, as a parent, do not want to engage with Channel, there is nothing anybody can do about it. There is that kind of misinformation: confusing Prevent and Pursue; and the idea that Prevent is about spying. All of these are false arguments about Prevent and we feel that it does hamper our work.

But I think, on a wider issue, as women who do this work, we started off Inspire very much in a voluntary capacity, because women were coming to us post-London bombings and saying to us, “We fear that our children will become radicalised.” Doing this on a daily basis, we would argue that working within Muslim communities, it is a very difficult climate. I would argue there is a climate of intimidation and of abuse if you do this work. People have called us Islamophobes, native informants and Government stooges, and for what? Because we stand up for women’s rights and we are trying to help Muslim mothers who come to us and say, “Can you please give us the counter-narrative? Tell us, how can we stop our children from being radicalised?” It is a very toxic environment.

Q189 Nusrat Ghani: In your work in the field, how many families, communities or organisations have you come across that have said that they have been positively influenced by the work of CAGE, or that CAGE was the place they went to and they were supported by its work?

Sara Khan: We have not really had any of that. We normally have women who come to us and say, as happened in a school last week, “My son has come to me and said, because his cousin went off to join ISIS, ‘I need to die as a martyr and we all need to go to Syria.’” We come across those kind of cases. We come across cases where a father will bring—

Q190 Chair: Just to be clear, because of what they have heard from CAGE.

Sara Khan: No.

Q191 Nusrat Ghani: I just want to focus on CAGE. Have you come across any organisations or families that have said, “We needed some support and we went to CAGE and they supported us, stopping ourselves being radicalised”?

Sara Khan: No.

Q192 Nusrat Ghani: Who do CAGE represent?

Chair: I should say they are witnesses after you, but you can answer that question. Do you know who they represent?

Sara Khan: They are best placed to answer that question.

Q193 Nusrat Ghani: You have no idea who they may represent, apart from themselves?

Sara Khan: We know that they had dealings with cases with people within schools who had a bad experience with Prevent. That is why I say we do have issues around the delivery of Prevent, not so much with the strategy, but about sections of where it is being

delivered, and whether there is enough training for staff to recognise the difference between socially conservative views of Islam and extreme views. That is probably the answer I can give, really.

Q194 Nusrat Ghani: It is refreshing to have two women speaking on this issue. Too often we have men who represent this whole community trying to come forward and say, “We are involved in de-radicalisation”. Are you involved in any women in leadership positions within CAGE?

Kalsoom Bashir: I am not aware of CAGE. The whole reason why Inspire was formed was that this whole discourse was being dominated by men, and women felt that they were quite intimidated in those spaces, but they very much had a voice and they wanted it to be heard. So Inspire was set up around that time when we felt that we wanted to counter extremist attitudes within our community and, particularly, to amplify the voices of women that were not being heard. We have moved on from there, really.

Nusrat Ghani: Thank you. Sara, anything to add?

Sara Khan: No, I totally agree with that. I think also it is testimony to the fact that for a long time, with successive Governments, we have always engaged with the self-appointed unaccountable community leader. When we talk about Muslims in this country, we still often refer to “the Muslim community”. We are not a homogenous block. We are incredibly diverse. We have Muslims on the political left and the political right who hold incredibly diverse views and we still talk about Muslims as if they are represented by organisations. We are a voluntary civil society organisation and there are hundreds of other civil society organisations. To try to put Muslims into representative bodies is an insult, I would argue.

Chair: That is very helpful, thank you.

Q195 James Berry: The Prime Minister recently announced a £5 million fund to support a network of grass-roots organisations to challenge all forms of extremism and ideology, so effectively to create a counter-narrative. He highlighted your work, and having heard you today I can quite understand why, but what I want to know is whether you have applied for funding under that scheme.

Sara Khan: When No. 10 issued that press statement, we were not aware that we were going to be in it. We have not been approached by Government. We do not know what the requirements are to apply for that funding.

James Berry: That covers it. So the answer is probably no, then.

Sara Khan: Yes.

Q196 James Berry: Given your experience in the field—you are, I imagine, one of the kind of organisations the Prime Minister has in mind—what would you suggest the criteria should be for organisations applying for funding under that scheme?

Sara Khan: I am assuming they already have criteria, so they are best placed to answer that. I can only talk about what we stand for as an organisation.

Q197 James Berry: Yes, but I am just wondering what you think the criteria should be, because you can have all sorts of organisations who can apply for it, but obviously we want the right organisations to apply for it, so what would you say the criteria should be?

Sara Khan: I think if I was going to say there should be one criterion it should be that the group should be able to provide tangible evidence that it has been actively challenging extremism and it can demonstrate that. It is easy to issue a press statement condemning terrorism. What are you doing to produce social media videos? We have produced social media videos that have reached thousands of people in this country, particularly for young people. We have gone into Muslim communities and delivered training, and we have delivered training to about 1,000 teachers alone in the last few months. It is to demonstrate actively that you are rolling up your sleeves—you are not just sitting on the side lines—and that you are actively countering extremism and trying to counter radicalisation.

Q198 James Berry: Thank you. Just one more question, if I may. You mentioned the example of 16 year-olds being spoken to by a preacher, talking about Jews and Christians and the insult to Islam and so on. Then the Chairman asked you about banning orders. I accept that it is important to have a counter-narrative, but when people organise these events at which extremist speakers speak to young people, they do not provide a counter-narrative. They do not say, “Oh, we are hearing from this speaker, but we are also hearing from another speaker who will challenge that view,” and I cannot see how the Government could legislate to require every event organiser to produce someone giving a counter-narrative. So, absent banning orders, how do you suggest this counter-narrative is provided in equal measure to the kind of narrative that is promoting extremism?

Kalsoom Bashir: I think we can very much demand that within universities. I am aware that there have been events held at universities. At the university that I chaplain at, it had been brought to my attention when an extremist preacher was coming on to the premises. Rather than ban it, we worked with the Islamic Society and made it aware of the statements that this preacher had made around condoning female genital mutilation, domestic violence, the Jews, and said, “Is this the kind of preacher that you want? You either provide another speaker alongside him, because otherwise he is preaching to a closed group and it has got to be the students themselves scrutinising the speakers and being aware of what they are saying”. The work that we are doing when we are talking to parents is about empowering them to challenge the preachers that they see and hear, so if a group of women came to me and said, “There is an imam who said that 15 year-old girls need to be married and to undergo female genital mutilation, and that secular education is not important for them. We do not like him saying that. What can we do about it?” our answer to them would be, “You need to challenge it yourself.”

Q199 James Berry: But that is just dealing with university. People at universities going to hear talks do not normally report back to their parents what they might or might not hear. In the exact scenario you gave, what happened there? Did the Islamic Society proceed with the talk? Did it—

Kalsoom Bashir: It actually withdrew its invitation, but the message out in the community was, “Kalsoom has banned the talk,” and nobody came to me to ask me. It was, “She has banned the talk. She is working for Government. She is working for Prevent,” but it was the Islamic Society itself that withdrew its invitation to the speaker.

Q200 James Berry: So how could the Government, in legislation or guidance, ensure that there is a balancing speaker, so to speak, when someone with extremist views comes to give a talk?

Kalsoom Bashir: I think in public buildings, in universities, and general awareness. It is about groups like us throughout the country providing that support to groups to enable them to think more critically about who they are inviting. Just as we find speakers who promote racism to be toxic, we need encourage exactly the same climate where these speakers themselves are not invited.

James Berry: But we have a very long way to go.

Kalsoom Bashir: We have.

Q201 Naz Shah: I reiterate what Nusrat has just said: I admire women who put their heads above the parapet, certainly around these sensitive issues. In line with what you have just said about tangible evidence, Sara, can you explain to me what it was you did before 2011 in terms of tangible evidence, and what you did in delivery on this agenda before you received any funding?

Sara Khan: Thank you for that very nice comment. We set up Inspire in 2009. In that time, we went into cities like Portsmouth and Leeds, in Beeston in particular, of course, where three of the 7/7 bombers came from, and places like Redbridge, west London and delivered counter-radicalisation and gender empowerment programmes directly to Muslim women.

Q202 Naz Shah: Which organisation did you do that with?

Sara Khan: That is in partnership with the local authority. We are a voluntary organisation. The only way we would be able to deliver those projects is by doing it in partnership with the local authority, so they asked us to come in and deliver training to Muslim women. That is something that has consistently been ongoing for us—going into Muslim communities.

The second was that in 2010, as you may remember, Anjem Choudary threatened to take empty coffins into Wootton Bassett. We were quite frustrated with the response from many of the male-led Muslim organisations, so we organised a memorial service at the National Memorial Arboretum to pay our respects to our armed forces in partnership with the Armed Forces Muslim Association. It was also supported by the Support Our Soldiers charity. It was the most widely read news item on the BBC that day.

In 2011, we launched a campaign called Jihad Against Violence, looking at how, as Muslims, we need to tackle gender discrimination and violence against women and girls, and also terrorism that is conducted in the name of Islam. This was a declaration that we put up online. It was signed and endorsed by people from over 32 countries and was widely reported in the press. After our #MakingAStand campaign that we launched last year, *The Sun* backed our campaign. This is our campaign image and they used it, and it was very much, again countering narrative, where we were saying, “As British Muslims, we are British and we are Muslim. We are challenging the narrative of far right Islamist extremists.”

Chair: Very helpful, thank you.

Q203 Naz Shah: What I am trying to ask is that when you talk about tangible evidence, what kind of evidence base do you have? You are running lots of campaigns, but what actual tangible evidence do you bring to this Committee that you have impacted on the agenda of radicalisation? Where is your evidence base and how is that measured?

Sara Khan: In the last year, we have delivered—

Naz Shah: Sorry, prior to 2011, not in the last year. I am talking about prior to you receiving Government funding.

Sara Khan: I am happy to provide all the evaluation reports for our programmes that we have delivered, and information on how that has impacted on women and how women's understanding of this issue has travelled in terms of their knowledge. We have all that information available to share with you. Empowering women, in particular, is something that we have been consistently doing, because I think there was some research that was released recently that showed that two thirds of 11 to 25 year-olds will go to their mothers if they have any concerns around radicalisation.

Q204 Chair: Was that was your research?

Sara Khan: No, it was not. It was some research done by, I think, the police.

Kalsoom Bashir: The police.

Naz Shah: We would interested in having those statistics and the reports of the evidence—

Chair: It would be very helpful if you could write to us with that information.

Q205 Naz Shah: Your website states you as independent. Would you agree it is fair to say that you are more than well supported by the Government? I will evidence that: you have had a comment piece by Theresa May herself in *The Sun*; you have had David Cameron, the Prime Minister, making speeches and mentioning the work of Inspire; you have preferential provider status; you have a sister who is in a senior position who advises the Home Secretary on all the things around radicalisation and Muslim issues which would raise some concerns; and, Kalsoom, you have been head of Prevent in Bristol, where you have done lots. Would you agree that it is fair to say that you have been more than well supported by Government and would you rephrase your independent status?

Sara Khan: No, I would disagree with that. We are a voluntary organisation that depends on the goodwill of donors. When we set up Inspire, we had no funding, no salaries and no office—we continue to have no office. The only two full-time salaries you have are for the people sitting in front of you. If we were so well funded and supported by the Government, we would have far more than we have. At the moment, we are inundated with requests from wider society.

Q206 Naz Shah: Can I refer to *The Guardian* article? You have been mentioned no less than I think it is three or four times in just one recent article, where you referred to as the face of David Cameron. Let me just quote it: “The Conservative government’s anti-radicalisation strategy, of which Khan is an important public face”.

Sara Khan: Those are the words of the journalist, they are not my words.

Naz Shah: But you had that yourself. Even if we look at the opinions of the journalists, the fact is that you had been mentioned by Theresa May herself, you have the Prime Minister mentioning you in his speeches and we have a senior adviser to the Home Secretary who happens to be your sister. Would you not agree that that would raise concerns about your conflict of interest when delivering on this agenda?

Sara Khan: Not at all.

Naz Shah: Let me explain. We have the Government who are making the legislation and then we have the schools and the statutory bodies that have to deliver that legislation. At the moment, all I can see in the third corner in this triangle is Inspire as the preferred provider. It is our Government’s job to prepare our statutory bodies like the schools to deliver on that agenda.

Sara Khan: This is the first time that I am hearing that we are a preferred provider. I was not aware of that. I cannot be blamed for the good work that we have done. We have done this work in a voluntary capacity when often we have had no funding. We believe in the things that we stand for as an organisation. Should I be attacked because of the great campaigning that we have done—

Chair: Please do not take this personally; this is just what we do to all witnesses.

Sara Khan: No, that is fine, but I am just saying it is almost as if there is an attitude that if, as a Muslim woman, you do good work, you have gone out of your way and you care about this country, it is wrong. If the Government like what we do, we take that as a compliment.

Chair: Ms Khan, I do not think that Naz Shah is doing this personally. She is raising issues that we will raise with all witnesses and we always do this.

Sara Khan: No, that is fine.

Q207 Naz Shah: Can I just reiterate my understanding? My understanding is it is very simple: the Government, we, make legislation—we are the legislators. We then support our statutory organisations to deliver on that. Now, as it is, we are not equipping our statutory bodies like the schools, and from that article, from your own evidence and from what we are seeing, Inspire is delivering to our schools, and it has to be a preferred provider to be getting Prevent money. Am I right that you have to have preferred provider status to access Prevent funding?

Sara Khan: I am honestly not aware, but all I know is that schools contact us.

Naz Shah: Okay, that is fine. Thank you.

Q208 Chair: Could we just put that point to Kalsoom Bashir? This is the point I think Naz Shah is also making: should it be a voluntary organisation doing this, no matter how independent? Should it not be the schools and the universities—a statutory body? Why are you having to fill this gap? Is it not an admission that the statutory bodies have failed? A brief answer, Kalsoom Bashir.

Kalsoom Bashir: I think the challenge that we are facing is unprecedented. I think the response, to be credible against the recruiting narrative of ISIS, has to be for Muslim organisations themselves. That is why we feel so strongly about the work that we are doing.

Q209 Naz Shah: We heard from Alison earlier on about WRAP training, and her quote was, “We have to be clear about intentions”, which is why she does not engage with a third organisation—an NGO. Her explanation was that she engages with statutory service providers. There is a concern from somebody who runs a school. As you can appreciate, I share that concern, which is why I asked again: is it appropriate and do you understand the concern around Inspire’s conflict of interest that I have highlighted? Do you understand that concern?

Chair: Sara Khan, a quick answer, because we have explored this in detail.

Sara Khan: If that was the case, I do not understand why we are being inundated by schools asking us to come in to talk about these issues, to highlight why Islam is different to ISIS, and to understand the difference between extremism and socially conservative views. I do not see it as a conflict of interest. You have talked about my sister. My sister is a Home Office official. I cannot comment on her.

Chair: Indeed. I am afraid we are going to have to leave it there because there is a vote, but we will return with Mr Loughton’s questioning. I am sorry; we have to vote, but we will come back.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Q210 Tim Loughton: Can I come on to schools and the Prevent duty? I might just preface it by saying I think if it all—such is my experience of dealing with young people—were left to Government Departments and Government officials, we would be in a very parlous state, hence the need for third-party organisations who speak the language of the people we need to do something with. In terms of schools, you heard the evidence from Bethnal Green Academy and the criticism there was of the way the Prevent strategy has been passed on to schools. I think you have a role, employed by the Association of Schools and College Leaders, to help train teachers in this. Can you explain that role and tell us whether you think the Government could have done a better job with the materials and the strategy, and the way this has presented it to schools?

Kalsoom Bashir: Yes, absolutely. Going back to what we have been discussing, as an organisation we feel very strongly about tackling radicalisation and vulnerabilities within Muslim communities, and have rolled up our sleeves and got on and started doing the job that we are doing, because we feel very, very strongly about it. People make the criticism that the Government do not engage with community groups, but when they do, we get criticism for it as well, so I have to just point that out.

In relation to schools, the statutory duty came in on 1 July and I have to say that schools have had to grapple with it, which is the reason why we had been inundated with requests. We have become very well known within this field because we have been operating a long time. The overwhelming response I have had from delivering training to staff has been very positive in response to the strategy. Teachers themselves have been impacted and misled by the misconceptions and myths that are out there in the media according to how this strategy impacts on them, and they are reassured by the fact that it is part of their safeguarding policies.

Q211 Tim Loughton: That suggests to me that the Government have not communicated very well to the schools what their duty—it is now a duty now, not a strategy—is, if they do not understand what the duty is, let alone what that duty involves in how they have to look out and be vigilant.

Sara Khan: The response to the training that they are now delivering—the WRAP training, which I had a role in delivering—has been very positive. The concerns that I have heard is that it is very short and that there is no provision in it for further questions and answers. Where schools are confused is about what is a socially conservative practice and what is extreme practice. We recognise that we have a duty, if we are concerned about behaviour, to have conversations with our colleagues to share those concerns and to go to designated leads, but what teachers are struggling with is the lack of resources that they have to be able to communicate that to people as well.

Q212 Tim Loughton: There was a suggestion from the head earlier, though, that the Prevent strategy and then the duty was not fit for purpose, in that it had been overtaken by events—it was almost redundant as soon as it came in—and the specific examples of the girls from Bethnal were not catered for within that strategy. Is that a fair comment? Are you having, effectively, to supplement the Government strategy in order to produce something that is workable, practical and appropriate?

Kalsoom Bashir: Yes. Within the case studies that WRAP has, there is just one case of a young Muslim girl that shows vulnerability to radicalisation, I have to say. So there is a case study. The facilitators behind WRAP have said that we will continually refresh those case studies as more and more cases emerge. There is a huge menu within those case studies and we have examples of vulnerabilities to far right extremism. Some schools we go to say, “We are not concerned about Islamist-inspired extremism; we are concerned about far right.” So the case studies reflect all that, but they do need to be constantly refreshed.

Q213 Tim Loughton: Are you having an influence on the Department for Education in terms of the refreshed guidance and constant updating it is putting out, or is it not putting anything out?

Kalsoom Bashir: I understand that there is a working group. Sara, did you attend that working group?

Sara Khan: I attended one meeting.

Kalsoom Bashir: There has been one meeting so far, but other than that we have not.

Q214 Tim Loughton: But you are the main players in communicating how schools should be putting this into practice. If you are only just aware there may have been a working group to refresh, it does not suggest that you are at the centre of helping to shape this.

Kalsoom Bashir: We are a voluntary organisation, with just the two of us, that feels very strongly about tackling radicalisation in our communities. Schools come to us directly. We do not tout for work. We have never written to schools asking them to come to us. We have become known—

Q215 Tim Loughton: I understand. I am absolutely not questioning your sincerity or the effectiveness of what you do. What I am questioning is whether you are being taken seriously enough and used appropriately by the DfE/Home Office in terms of the clear resource that you can bring to supplement what appears to be a gap in understanding and resources that feed into schools directly.

Kalsoom Bashir: We would be more than happy to contribute and share our experiences.

Sara Khan: In that one meeting that I attended, I said what teachers have told us and what kind of resources they need. I have made it very clear that teachers have come to us and said what they need more of.

Q216 Chair: Sara Khan, you wrote an open letter to girls that was read out in schools all over the country. You got 40,000 people viewing this letter online. I just want a brief answer here. Was there much contact after this letter was published?

Sara Khan: Contact with who?

Chair: You. Did a lot of people write in or send you emails?

Sara Khan: Yes. We had a very positive response.

Q217 Chair: How many people contacted you?

Sara Khan: I can't remember off the top of my head. We had a lot of teachers contacting us and people on social media saying, "Thank you. This is the first time someone has explained to us the difference between Islamist extremism and Islam." People said they were going to read it out in their assemblies and so forth. I can't recall how many.

Q218 Chair: But you had a lot of contact following the publication?

Sara Khan: Yes. We had contact from abroad as well, with people saying, “This is a great letter”.

Q219 Victoria Atkins: I want to pick up the allegation that there is somehow a conflict of interest. If I have the chronology right, you were founded in 2009, so before the coalition Government.

Sara Khan: Yes.

Victoria Atkins: Who decides how you campaign and on what you campaign?

Sara Khan: We do.

Q220 Victoria Atkins: Who decides which schools you go into, who you talk to, and so on?

Sara Khan: We do. We react very much to need. What we find quite frustrating, as a very small organisation that is under-resourced, is the number of requests we have coming from schools. We have to say no to a lot of them. Kalsoom was up in Dewsbury recently, and we travel a lot to get to schools. People are coming to us and ringing us and saying, “Look, we have had a 13 year-old girl who has tried to leave for ISIS. The media hasn’t got hold of the story. Please can you come in and deliver training?” and we have done. We were in a school last week where, despite the fact that people say the Prevent duty is about closing down the debate, we were encouraging children, saying, “We want you to talk; let’s talk about these issues,” and we got positive feedback from the school saying the discussion can continue until the end of the day.

Q221 Victoria Atkins: So when it is being said that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have praised you, is it not the case that they are praising what they see as good work on your part, just as they would cite campaigners against FGM who do a good job?

Sara Khan: Of course, and we feel that the Government should be engaging with groups like ours. We say on the one hand that the Government need to engage more with Muslim groups, so when Muslim groups like us roll up our sleeves and do something, should not Government engage with groups like ours? Should not the Government support campaigns that we run?

Q222 Victoria Atkins: Another question. You have mentioned in your evidence some of the very oppressive things that have been said to young girls and women about expectations placed on them by people who run counter to the ideas that you espouse. How are you treated as women in this world that you are describing?

Sara Khan: I would say that we have had people and Muslim groups who have actively tried to sabotage our work. We have had groups that have maliciously contacted schools and tried to prevent us from delivering sessions with pupils, when all we are doing is coming in and talking to pupils about standing for human rights and speaking against extremism.

We have had Muslim organisations and groups try to sabotage our events. For example, we were going into Cardiff to deliver training to women and they put out a five-page smear document against us accusing us of everything, and sending it out to all the mosques actively to try to discourage women from attending. One of their key issues was that we were going to exert influence and encourage women to exert influence in mosques and communities because that was one of the aims of our campaign. They said, “We can’t possibly have this happening”.

As women you face not just that, but it is very misogynistic. There is that kind of sabotage-type of work that is going on, but on a wider scale we have taken a lot of personal abuse, in the sense of threats from ISIS sympathisers. I have had to have police patrol cars driving round my house three times a day. I have had to install a fireproof and bombproof letterbox. That is the kind of thing that you are working in, and on top of that you get accused of being an Islamophobe and native informant when all you are trying to do is to counter radicalisation—as mothers we feel very passionate about this—and to protect our country from acts of terror.

Q223 Mr Winnick: Even one young person lost to religious fascism is a setback—that goes without saying—but to take the position in the round, would I not be right in saying that the large majority of Muslim females of school age and in their first years at university are more likely, as a result of being born here or brought here at a very early age, to be inclined to what could be described as British values of democracy, and the things that young females tend to incline to in countries where they are allowed the freedom to do so? Would that be right?

Kalsoom Bashir: I didn’t quite understand the question.

Mr Winnick: Is it not the case that although there are some who are won over for a while at least to jihadism and religious fascism, the large majority of young Muslim females are more inclined, as I was trying to put it, to Western or British values? Would that be the position?

Kalsoom Bashir: Absolutely. It is a minority of young women who are travelling, but there are others who are showing sympathy and empathy towards going over. A lot of our work is around gender equality. Last week, when we were in a school in London, it was about showcasing positive role models to challenge the notion that women should be in the private sphere and really exposing ISIS ideology for what it is. We were showcasing the counter-narrative to that: what religious texts actually say about the role of women, how we interpret it, and how that conflicts with ISIS ideology.

Q224 Mr Winnick: So what I am saying—you will agree or disagree, but I think you will agree—is that it is a very limited number, however unfortunate it is, who are prone to this sort of poisonous propaganda—that women are basically inferior, that they only should be the helpmeets of their menfolk, and that violence and mass murder is justified against alleged crusaders and against Judaism.

Kalsoom Bashir: It is. Absolutely. It is, but it is very real, nevertheless, and we have to challenge it.

Q225 Mr Winnick: Would you say that for those who are prone to such poison, it is because of indoctrination at home or in the mosque, or various other reasons arising from their own personalities?

Kalsoom Bashir: I think there are specific circumstances within the home that could make somebody vulnerable. There is a narrative out there that says that we are living in a country that we should not be living in. There is religious illiteracy as well. It is a combination of factors.

Q226 Mr Winnick: Religious illiteracy being a total distortion?

Kalsoom Bashir: It is religious illiteracy about not having a sound understanding of your own religion. What we are saying is that although mosques are not radicalising young people, they could do a whole lot more. If young women, particularly, are made to feel unwelcome in mosques and that there is nothing there for them, they are even more vulnerable to going online and looking for those answers around identity and belonging, and there are more than enough people out there who will offer them those options.

Mr Winnick: And you agree with that presumably?

Sara Khan: Yes.

Q227 Chair: As far as social media is concerned, you have been very forceful in saying we need to be more aggressive. Who should be more aggressive? Very quickly, who should it be? Should it be the police? It clearly cannot be the Government. Should it be yourselves? Who should be going along there to put out the counter-narrative?

Kalsoom Bashir: It has to be community-led on social media. ISIS has a cause and it is using social media.

Chair: You yourself have said that the Muslim community is very big. Who should lead it?

Kalsoom Bashir: It has to be the communities themselves. In a very limited way, we have started that work online. We have young people who are developing resources that they can share on social media. We have a resource like “A Community Response”, which is Muslim communities saying it for themselves.

Q228 Chair: So it should be community-led, not from Government agencies?

Kalsoom Bashir: It has to be community-led to be credible.

Chair: Very good. Thank you.

Q229 Stuart C. McDonald: Is this your #MakingAStand campaign we are talking about here? Could you tell us what you think the impact of that has been?

Sara Khan: We went into nine or 10 cities across the UK. We launched the campaign after ISIS declared their so-called caliphate and Muslim women were coming to us and saying, “We have to do something.” We had the launch event last year; 100 women came from across the country. Then they said to us, “This is not enough. We need you to come in and teach counter-narratives. Show us what can make people vulnerable to radicalisation.” So

we went in there. If you go on to our website, you will see something called MAS—the #MakingAStand wall—which has about 25 video testimonials of how #MakingAStand impacted on them.

Two women in Birmingham went off and set up their own local organisation because they were so inspired by what they had heard at the #MakingAStand campaign. Their own local organisation wanted to provide services to women and to do more to counter extremism. We have had women who have gone off and set up talks and events and encouraged them to say, “Our voices matter in Muslim communities. We feel it is very male-dominated. We want to do more.” So we have had a very positive response of women saying they want to do more.

We have also had women who have contacted us and said, “Thank you for coming and speaking to us.” I recall one woman ringing me and saying, “My son had come back from university. He had been spouting Salafi jihadist narratives. If I had not gone on to your course and on to your programme, I would never have had the confidence to challenge him, but I did challenge him and he listened to what I was saying.” Again, it is that one person that you have mentioned. If we stop even one person, we feel we have achieved something. So there is a lot of testimony. Women themselves have said how #MakingAStand impacted on them.

Q230 Stuart C. McDonald: In terms of social media, do you think folk are confident enough and feel equipped to take their battle online?

Sara Khan: The propaganda that ISIS has put out is incomparable to any other Islamist extremist organisation. We know for example that the Brookings Institution has said that there are around 90,000 people on Twitter tweeting around seven times a day. ISIS have the Al-Hayat Foundation. They have one specifically for women called Al-Zora. I think we are losing that battle online. If you Google Islam, unfortunately Sheikh Google comes up with a lot of extremist websites, pretending they are mainstream religious websites. So the challenges are very huge and we are only playing catch-up.

Kalsoom Bashir: Our work has to go two steps back from that because the parents we are working with do not even know what social media sites their children are going on. Our work is about resilience to those social media sites, just as if a young person were approached by a stranger in the street they would walk away and tell somebody. We have to instil that safety awareness in the home among the parents so that they are aware of what their children are looking at on social media and can start having those conversations even before we need a response in school. The work we are doing very much has to support what the Government are doing, but at a much earlier stage. It is about resilience.

Q231 Mr Umunna: A couple of quick questions, first to get clarification on what you, Sara, said earlier about those who attack Prevent and to check what you said. I have written down that you said that those who attack Prevent generally see Islamist ideology as a form of Islam. Did I hear that correctly?

Sara Khan: They see it as normative Islam.

Q232 Mr Umunna: Would you extend that to include CAGE, from which we are going to be taking evidence shortly?

Sara Khan: Yes. I would. Can I just make another point about CAGE? It is similar to what you asked before. We had the Bethnal Green Academy here. On the day—I think it was Friday 20 February—when that story broke, the parents came on to the media pleading, “Please, we know that you have not crossed the border yet. Please come back.” The police were saying, “Do not cross over. Come back to your families.” CAGE released this tweet on that day, saying “Incredible. Police telling three girls to come back when they know full well they’ll be locked up”. At best, this is just very irresponsible; at worst, it is downright dangerous. While the parents are pleading, “Please come back,” if the girls had read that tweet, they might think, “Actually, we’re not going to come back.” So when people are asking us what we are doing, we are trying to prevent people from becoming radicalised. I would argue CAGE is not doing its part in terms of engaging in trying to deradicalise people.

Q233 Mr Umunna: For the benefit of the Committee, what is the date and time of that tweet?

Sara Khan: It was Friday 20 February and it was in the evening—around 7.30 pm. I think it has been deleted now. Luckily I captured a screenshot of it.

Q234 Mr Umunna: You talked of other groups seeking to smear your work. Can you mention any of these groups? Are they well known? Could you cite the names of some of these groups, not least so that if we are going to be taking evidence from them, we know who they are?

Sara Khan: One organisation is MEND. I am writing about this and I will put it on our website at the end of this week. It actively tried to contact a school to say that we were Islamophobes and should not be delivering training there, although the school had contacted us because it wanted us to deliver training. It wrote an article with 5Pillars. 5Pillars has often accused us of being Islamophobes, native informants and so forth.

Q235 Mr Umunna: Which groups would you say are among your most prominent supporters that have been favourable about your work in the community? That will be my last question on the community.

Sara Khan: When we went into the nine cities, we engaged and partnered with local Muslim women’s organisations. There are lots of Muslim organisations, but particularly women’s ones, that have engaged with us, and also schools and bodies like the Association of School and College Leaders. We have had fantastic support from schools and from private individuals who have contacted us.

One of the greatest things that we received was when we had a member of the British public who emailed to say, “Please, you can’t stop what you are doing. Your voices are so important. I am donating £50”. We are very grateful for those kinds of letters and the donations that we receive from members of the British public. It comes from a wide cross-section of society.

Q236 Mr Umunna: I was very taken with one comment that you made, which I completely agree with, about the sea of self-appointed community leaders we have from many of our different communities in every single constituency—I have them in my own in Streatham—who, frankly, are not like the members of this Committee: they don't have an electoral mandate, so it is quite hard often to determine who they speak for. How do you think we judge this and how do we know—to play devil's advocate and I am not saying I believe this—that you are not just another self-appointed community leader?

Kalsoom Bashir: I think the one positive thing I have to say about Prevent when it was initiated was that the Government then said, “We need to engage much more widely. We need to bring more people to the table, and women and young people are groups that we have not engaged with.” I think that has been a really positive thing so that you have many more people at the table.

Q237 Mr Umunna: But that was not an answer to my question. My question was, for the benefit of the members of this Committee and the evidence we are taking from people who see themselves as community leaders: how on earth are we to distinguish who genuinely represents and speaks on behalf of their community?

Kalsoom Bashir: I don't think anyone can speak on behalf—

Mr Umunna: How do we measure that?

Kalsoom Bashir: When we go to women's organisations, we don't speak to the chair of that organisation who says, “I will relay your message.” They will fill a room with 40 women and we speak to those women. How often, when you speak to a chair of the mosque, have you spoken to the full congregation of that mosque and reached people on the ground? So we measure our work by the number of people.

Sara Khan: I think we have to move beyond this idea of representation. It is what we do with ethnic minorities and we do not seem to do that with white British society. I have an MP who I will go to if I have a problem. I think we have to move beyond this idea of the Muslim community—that these Muslims need to be represented. I find that a very toxic narrative. There are lots of civil societies—

Chair: Thank you. Just a final two questions and then we will release you. You have been here a long time.

Q238 Naz Shah: In relation to what you have just said, Kalsoom, I absolutely agree with you about the Prevent agenda. I delivered a Prevent project many years ago and it was about engaging widely. However, my understanding is that the only NGO that is on the preferred providers list on a national scale is yours. Would you suggest—would you agree with me—that the Government are using the wrong approach and are not reaching into the communities, because you are national, and they are not empowering the communities to deal with it? Why is it just yourselves? Do you think that the Government are getting this right?

Chair: We don't want a long answer because we have had some of this before.

Kalsoom Bashir: Locally, I can speak about where I live. There is a Prevent board. The chair of the Prevent board, who is the democratically elected chair of the Prevent board in

Bristol, issued invitations to OSCT, and we had the deputy head of OSCT come and speak to local communities. It was an open meeting.

Q239 Naz Shah: Elected by who?

Kalsoom Bashir: Members of the Muslim communities in Bristol. There was an open election. All communities were invited to vote for the chair—that position. There have also been open meetings by national police that Prevent leads as well. Assistant Police Commissioner Helen Ball has been to Bristol to talk to an open meeting of members.

Naz Shah: That is Bristol. What about—

Sara Khan: I am aware that that happens elsewhere, but communities themselves need to issue those invitations.

Chair: Indeed. Thank you. Finally a very quick question from Mr Berry.

Q240 James Berry: It is right, isn't it, that despite attracting praise from Government, Inspire remains free to agree or disagree with Government policy, as indeed you have today?

Sara Khan: Absolutely. We have gone to the Government and told them about the concerns that we have and the concerns that Muslim parents have come to us with about Prevent. We have gone to the Government and shared those concerns.

Q241 James Berry: Will you continue to speak out against extremism despite the abuse and criticisms that you have faced for doing so?

Sara Khan: A lot of that really depends on whether we have funding. At the moment we have no regular streams of funding. Our funding runs out at the end of the financial year. We may not exist this time next year. It really depends on whether we can secure funding to do this work. We would very much like to continue to do so. Hopefully you can tell that we are very passionate about doing this work.

Q242 Chair: Following the events in Paris, the Government have announced a shoot-to-kill policy in respect of hostages being taken. Does this help or hinder the work that you do? A very quick answer.

Sara Khan: Our work is in a very specific area. It is about preventing people from being drawn into terrorism. That is not something that is in our remit.

Q243 Chair: So you don't think it will further radicalise people?

Sara Khan: It is not an area that we can really comment on.

Chair: Okay. I am happy to accept that answer.

Sara Khan and Kalsoom Bashir, thank you very much for coming in here today. This Committee will be going out to visit various communities. We will be talking to women and young people. We are going to Bradford in January, and we are going to Leicester, Birmingham and Manchester, to do the very thing that you have suggested that we do—

not necessarily just to deal with community leaders but to talk to young people and to women directly. Thank you for coming in.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Dr Adnan Siddiqui**, Director, CAGE Advocacy Ltd, **Ibrahim Mohamoud**, Communications Officer, CAGE Advocacy Ltd, and **Mohammed Umar Farooq**, gave evidence.

Q244 Chair: Dr Siddiqui, Mr Farooq, and Mr Mohamoud, thank you very much for coming. My apologies for keeping you waiting—I am afraid that we had the vote and we overran—but we are most grateful to you for coming in. Dr Siddiqui, thank you for sending the documents concerning the legal proceedings and other matters with the Charity Commission. They have been most helpful to this Committee.

I want to start with an opportunity for you to clarify your stance on a number of areas, in particular the comments that you made about Mohammed Emwazi, in which you stated that he was an extremely kind and gentle man—indeed a beautiful young man—but of course we know him to be someone called Jihadi John, in popular phraseology, who has brutally and theatrically murdered a number of British and other citizens. Do you stand by your statement that this person was an extremely kind and gentle person and a beautiful young man?

Dr Siddiqui: It wasn't my statement, but I would say that for those who had meetings with him when he made contact with us, that was what how they saw him. I am sorry that I will be referring very often to medical metaphors, but the same thing is that I see patients every day. What their end result is and where they end up I can't say, but the thing is you will always get a surprise. You don't know what the trajectory is. But I think one of the things that came through from that conference was it was something where we made our own review with regard to an external review and we said—

Q245 Chair: I am coming to that, but do you still stand by that statement? You have never met him.

Dr Siddiqui: I have never met him.

Chair: And none of our witnesses have met this individual?

Dr Siddiqui: No.

Q246 Chair: But the statement was made by CAGE and I am giving you the opportunity, if you wish to take it today, to withdraw that statement or to stand by it, given that it was given by your organisation. It is just an opportunity to put it on record. Mr Mohamoud?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: I think it important to quote what the research director of CAGE said at the time: “was extremely kind, extremely gentle, extremely soft-spoken, was the most humble young person that I knew”. Those comments are comments that were made

by a number of people at the time, and I think we made our points very clear in the review as to what we as an organisation collectively thought about those comments.

Q247 Chair: What did you think of those comments?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: What I will refer you to very quickly is what his teacher called him—he called him hard working, a lovely boy. Another member of staff, a former headteacher, said he was a very hard working, aspirational young man. Even as recently as Sunday, you had a piece in *The Independent* where Robert Verkaik was surprised—shocked—at what this person he knew in 2012 had evolved into last year.

Q248 Chair: For the benefit of accuracy, are you saying to this Committee now that those may have been statements made in the past but that, bearing in mind the brutality of what he has done, he can no longer be described in those terms?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: The statements were made at the time—

Chair: Sorry. You were nodding.

Ibrahim Mohamoud: —in reference to how the person—essentially when Asim Qureshi met Mohammed Emwazi at the time. It is in no way in reference to the person he became and the acts that he committed. I think we made that very clear in the press conference. I do refer you to that again.

Q249 Chair: Thank you very much. We do not need to be referred to the press conference. We have got you here today so that we can hear it from you. These were comments made in the past and they were not made by any of you. However, are you telling this Committee that, given what he has done—the brutal murder of people like David Haines and Alan Henning—your organisation dissociates itself from any of these comments, or do you still accept that these comments are a description of this man?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: The comments were made in reference to the person that our research director met at the time in 2012. They are in no way in reference to the person that he became or what he did. In fact, if you look at the work of the organisation, we have done a lot to undertake assurances or attempts to try to facilitate all sorts of conflict resolution with people who are held captive, mainly Alan Henning. So for us it is quite frustrating—we have made this clear on a number of occasions on television, on radio, in the press, in print and even in writing—that those are not the thoughts of the organisation or a reference to the person he became in 2014.

Q250 Chair: Right. Dr Siddiqui, your communications officer, Mr Mohamoud, is very clear. You do not support these statements anymore, even though you did not make them in the past; they were made by others. Given the brutality of what Mr Emwazi has done, this is not something that your organisation, CAGE, supports as a description of him. Is that right?

Dr Siddiqui: As I said, it was a past description. It looks like Emwazi has been drone-killed. We are saying that he was a war criminal and that was the latest statement we made with respect to him.

Q251 Chair: So you regard him as being a war criminal.
Dr Siddiqui: Absolutely.

Q252 Chair: You condemn the action that he has taken in respect of the brutal murder of these individuals.
Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Chair: Is that right?

Dr Siddiqui: Without exception.

Q253 Chair: So presumably you support the action that was taken to make sure that he was killed.

Dr Siddiqui: That goes back to your question about shoot-to-kill. We feel, as some of the victims' families have said, that we will never know his story now and that he should have been tried. People have said how you are going to drag him out and this type of thing. Given the effort that was made to kill him, I think a lot of other things could have been done. I think it was just vengeance. I understand the public sentiment as to why do that. However, that does not mean that was the right thing to do.

Q254 Chair: In respect of your call made only last Friday, at a conference, for a caliphate to be established, do you and your organisation support the creation of a caliphate?

Dr Siddiqui: I am not sure what statement you are—

Chair: Was your organisation not present at an event on Friday?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: Which event are you referring to?

Chair: An event that took place in Bedford on Friday. Were you represented there?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: That was Moazzam Begg.

Dr Siddiqui: This is something that— What we are saying—

Chair: Sorry, just clarify this. Was your organisation present, or were members of your organisation present?

Dr Siddiqui: Moazzam Begg, our outreach director, was there.

Q255 Chair: You looked puzzled when I referred to it. Do you associate or dissociate yourself with what your outreach officer has said—that you support a caliphate?

Dr Siddiqui: No, no. We do not dissociate at all from that. We think that is a model that is being discussed in the Muslim world. The problem is that you are seeing many people associating the term “caliphate” with ISIS. We could go into discussions. We know of a case of a child who talked about the Ottoman caliphate and actually was then referred to Prevent.

Q256 Chair: Dr Siddiqui, where would this caliphate be created? Would it be created in the United Kingdom or abroad, or does it not matter?

Dr Siddiqui: What you are talking about there is hypothetical. If we talk about every single one of us at CAGE, and if you are talking about those who we talk to, there are lots of models that people are talking about, even from a perspective of some kind of united states of Islam, an EU—these types of things. I think the problem is that there is a certain model that is being projected and this is the only model that is being accepted.

Q257 Chair: And you support it?

Dr Siddiqui: I say it is one of many. You should let that be open.

Q258 Chair: In respect of the matters raised by Sara Khan and Kalsoom Bashir earlier on about the tweet that you made, or your organisation made, when the three young girls from Bethnal Green left their families to go to Syria, do you support what was said or do you dissociate yourself from it?

Dr Siddiqui: What I would say with regard to that is we are in contact with their lawyers. One of the problems that we see, and this is hopefully something that comes across in this Committee, is that we need to have the community having faith and trust in institutions. The problem is that the message that is getting across very clearly is that people who are coming back, who have made mistakes and clearly have said they have made errors in returning, have been criminalised and then put into jail for 14 years. I don't think our tweet would make any difference and I don't think any social media would have made any difference. I think the key thing is that we had channels that we were talking through via the lawyers but the problem is, as you can see with the Bethnal Green questioning that was happening earlier, there were lots of inconsistencies between who was talking to who. The actual girls themselves then decided, "Okay we have no faith in what is happening," and just left.

Q259 Chair: But the tweet was deleted, so you are glad that it was deleted?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, I would say so because I think social media—

Q260 Chair: In the end it was not true because the Commissioner told this Committee they would not be "locked up", in your words, had they come back.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Chair: He actually asked them to come back and he was very clear with this Committee that they would not face charges. It was completely the opposite of what you said in the tweet.

Dr Siddiqui: Then we agree to what you say.

Q261 Chair: Other Members will want to question you on this but could I ask you something, Mr Farooq—thank you for coming in. You were doing a masters course at Staffordshire University when you were accused under the Prevent duty. You were not

involved, you have been completely exonerated and Staffordshire University has apologised. How do you think that you got caught up in the whole Prevent strategy? I don't know if you are a member of CAGE or you are here just because they have suggested that you come. Do you think there is a lot wrong with the system at the moment when someone like you, conducting yourself properly as a student, should end up being accused of what is a very serious issue?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: Thank you very much for inviting me. I didn't know of CAGE—I had never heard of them—and neither was I very aware of Prevent. I had heard the name bounced across the walls a few times. I am somebody who purely wanted to pursue a path in academia. My degree is English literature and Shakespearian studies, so that is something completely contrary to where I have gone.

Q262 Chair: Sure. What was your experience going through this?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: The reason I went down this is that I agree—I am sure that everybody here would—that there is an issue. We need to agree that there is an issue in order to prosper and move forward. My personal understanding is that the understanding of the issue is one that is not based the majority of the time on some academic foundation. I applied for a course and thought that I would study a masters in terrorism and international security just purely for the reason that I could understand it more, not to change society or to make a difference at this stage, at which stage I decided that straight after this, without rest, I would go straight through a PhD and maybe one day get a professorship. What happened is somewhere along the line I was reading a book—I was writing a paper on ISIS—and the effects that—

Q263 Chair: You were literally only reading a book?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: I was reading a book because I was preparing for a paper. The question was ISIS, and the effects that the Arab Spring and al-Qaeda have had on ISIS. I was trying to gauge an overall view through the prism of how it all ties together. I was reading a book called *A Terrorism Reader* by Dr John Horgan, who is a leading scholar in this field from Georgia State University. That was what I was reading at the time, yes.

Q264 Chair: And as a result of that you went through this whole Prevent process.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: How it happened to me at the time—it was humorous for a little while, but I was absolutely mortified by the repercussions that this could hold. I was reading a book and a lady came and sat next to me—well, not next to me, I would say probably the distance that the lady to my left is sitting—and the first question was, “What are you reading?” and the answer was quite simply, “Oh, a terrorism studies book to try to understand what the word means,” and from there the discussion quickly turned to, “What do you think of ISIS? What do you think of three girls leaving to go and join ISIS? What do you think of homosexuality?” I had no issue answering these questions.

Q265 Chair: Indeed. But at the end of the process, of course, you had an apology, and you are now doing another course—is that right, or is it the same one?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: At the end of this process what happened was that security almost pounced on me because they were told that there is an al-Qaeda operative. During

the whole transaction, to cut a story short, I found things that quite offended me more so. I am third generation in this country and “his kind” or “a problem” is what was said, and, “He’s an issue for our society,” and, “We will never know what he’s capable of.” Security, who have known me for five years, vouched for me, but that was to no avail. So, yes, I was accused like that. That was what happened.

Q266 Chair: Thank you. Dr Siddiqui, you presumably condemn what has happened in Paris.

Dr Siddiqui: Absolutely.

Chair: Has your organisation put out a statement to that effect?

Dr Siddiqui: No, I don’t think we have.

Q267 Chair: Why is that?

Dr Siddiqui: I think that what Muslims have said after the initial emotion related to it—no one can say that they were not disgusted by what happened—clearly with cool minds after thinking about it, is, “Were we responsible? Did we have a role to play?” Our communications officer has had a lot of discussion in terms of these issues that we have—

Q268 Chair: Do you think that we were responsible?

Dr Siddiqui: I don’t think we have anything to say with respect to it. Our condemnation means little. With those people who expect us to condemn and are actually waiting for us to condemn, we actually don’t value their opinion, because they will have another thing that they will want us to condemn.

Q269 Chair: But if you do not condemn, there is an assumption that you condone.

Dr Siddiqui: No, not at all.

Chair: So today you are saying very clearly you condemn what has happened.

Dr Siddiqui: Absolutely.

Chair: And there is no excuse for it.

Dr Siddiqui: There is no excuse for it. Absolutely.

Q270 Naz Shah: We were talking about Prevent earlier. In your opinion, what broader impact has the Prevent strategy had on relations between Muslim communities and the police?

Dr Siddiqui: I think it has really wrecked trust because whatever people might say—let’s look at the evidence; look and see what Prevent has done—has it made us any safer? Cases like Mohammed Umar Farooq’s are not the only cases you see. The problem I feel, particularly as a public sector worker, is that you are securitising rather than looking at the duties that we have. Teachers are now being called informants and doctors are being called cops. I think that that is a very unhealthy relationship for us to be in. We have a

relationship that is based upon trust and I think—not everybody, as I said to you, but many people; Mohammed is saying very clearly that not every single person is impacted by Prevent—when it does happen and the miscarriages are there, they are too numerous to mention. We can just list straight away a hundred of them.

Q271 Naz Shah: You talked earlier about this notion of the caliphate and you said there are different models. If, for example, there was somebody who was listening to that language—my common-sense understanding is that it is not necessarily a positive language in the climate that we are living in—how would Prevent engage ideally in that situation where there are conversations going on, as there were in Bedfordshire last week, as the Chair referred to?

Dr Siddiqui: This is precisely the issue because what Prevent has done is to close down debate about things that all of us need to discuss. One of the members of the Committee has mentioned religious fascism. I think a lot of people don't even understand what fascism is, or socialism, because we need to have a much wider discussion. If we are going to talk about these kinds of emotive terms, whether it is "caliphate", "extremist" or "moderate"—even the Leader of the Opposition is being called an extremist—we need more discussion and more debate, and less kind of policing of the language, so that people can explore ideas. If you don't do that, our worry is that the conversations are going to go into dark corners, which is where they can neither be challenged nor corrected.

Q272 Mr Winnick: A home-grown fascist on the far right also resents being described as fascist or a Hitler-lover. That does not stop anti-fascists and anti-racists so describing them, and rightly so. I am not putting you in any category on the other side, but you took exception to my term, because I was the member of the Committee who used the term "religious fascism" not so long ago during this session. How would you otherwise describe mass murderers who consider their victims to be inferior and sub-human—including Shi'a Muslims, by the way—and who, as far as Paris is concerned, are so determined to have the maximum number of victims and look upon their victims first and foremost as sub-human, without the right to life? Doesn't that liken one to what Hitler said about Jews and Serbs?

Dr Siddiqui: I agree with you 100%. The thing, though, is that the terminology that is used, and has been mentioned many times here, is that people are accused of being Islamists. Many of you may say, "You three are Islamists." Are we religious fascists? I don't know. But I agree with what you are saying there—just using that terminology of looking at people as sub-human and that resulting in mass murder is, for me, a symptom of fascism.

Q273 Mr Winnick: Dr Siddiqui, if I can continue. You have not denounced it, but you say you are totally opposed to the massacre in Paris—obviously we are pleased that is so—and presumably also to those elsewhere where 90% and over happen to be Muslims, although unfortunately they do not get as much prominence. In many instances, those Muslims happen to be Shi'a Muslims as well as Sunni. Do you accept that those who carry out such acts of atrocity are acting not in the true interest of Islam, but the most poisoned and

distorted version of that honourable religion—no less honourable, of course, than any other religion?

Dr Siddiqui: I would agree with that. I don't have any compunction at all about what you are saying there.

Mr Winnick: If you could just speak up?

Dr Siddiqui: Sorry. I don't have any qualms or any concerns about what you are saying. I agree with what you are saying there.

Q274 Mr Winnick: You agree it is a total distortion?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, I think it is a distortion.

Q275 Mr Winnick: Coming back to what the Chair asked you when you said that there did not seem to be any need to make a public condemnation of what occurred last week in Paris, do you not feel that as a result of remarks associated with your organisation and the way in which Jihadi John was described, although I am not going back into that because you have given an explanation, in the sense of making your view clear regardless of the differences you may have with the Western way of life or the present Government—I have many differences with the present Government—you should condemn publicly? There should be no ambiguity about where you stand as an organisation on what I repeat is religious fascism and mass murder.

Dr Siddiqui: I still stand by what I say. From our perspective, we are a very young organisation. We have been around for 12 years. The points that you are saying we will certainly take on board but, from our perspective, we do not feel that there is a need to. Are you conflating our importance? I am very glad that you have invited us here but, in reality, does what we say make a difference? Like I said, on a personal level, I can say it very clearly, as can every single one of us at CAGE, but our remit is very clear. We deal with abuses in the war on terror.

Q276 James Berry: You ask whether what you say makes any difference, but you seek publicity. You seek to shape public opinion, don't you?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Q277 James Berry: Jihadi John's father described him as a dog, an animal and a terrorist, and said he can go to hell. Would you agree that every civilised person must utterly condemn his barbaric behaviour?

Dr Siddiqui: How many times do you want me to say that?

James Berry: I would just like you to answer the question.

Dr Siddiqui: I have answered the question.

James Berry: Would you agree that every civilised person must utterly—

Dr Siddiqui: I have answered the question.

Q278 James Berry: Fine. Well, I will take that as your answer then. You have described the killing of Jihadi John in your evidence to this Committee as an “act of vengeance”. Do you understand the difference between stopping a continuing threat and seeking vengeance?

Dr Siddiqui: That is for the Prime Minister to describe.

Q279 James Berry: It is a question I just asked you. Do you understand the difference between stopping a continuing threat and seeking vengeance?

Dr Siddiqui: What was the continuing threat?

James Berry: Do you agree that Jihadi John posed a continuing threat?

Dr Siddiqui: If you speak to security analysts, taking out Jihadi John made very little difference in the war on terror. He was not a command and control man; it was an act of vengeance.

Q280 James Berry: Do you agree that he posed a continuing threat?

Dr Siddiqui: To whom?

James Berry: To people in Syria; to people he was beheading.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

James Berry: You do.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes. That I agree with.

Q281 James Berry: Right. Do you not agree that there is a difference between stopping a continuing threat and seeking vengeance?

Dr Siddiqui: Why did they need to take him out, rather than command and control?

Q282 James Berry: Dr Siddiqui, I am asking the questions.

Dr Siddiqui: I am answering your question.

James Berry: No, you are not. You are asking me another question. Do you agree that there is a difference between stopping a continuing threat and seeking vengeance?

Dr Siddiqui: I am stating my personal opinion. I believe it was an act of vengeance because it did not make any difference in the war on terror and the war on ISIS.

Q283 James Berry: Do you not think it might have made a difference to the people that Jihadi John intended to continue beheading?

Dr Siddiqui: Ask their families. Did they say that they revel in his death? No, they did not.

Q284 James Berry: In April 2014, Boko Haram, a terrorist organisation in Nigeria, abducted 270 schoolgirls, you will recall. In December 2014, CAGE commented that a social media campaign against Boko Haram had taken place that was media manipulation and was produced in a deep-seated fear of Islam. Do you agree that Boko Haram does not represent the views of Islam or Islam in this country?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, I agree with you.

Q285 James Berry: CAGE, as we have heard today and from what you have sent in, is very quick to criticise the police and the Government's efforts at counter-radicalisation. That is fine; there is a variety of views. Do you agree that in order to counter radicalisation, groups like yours that seek publicity for your views have an absolute duty to condemn the terrorist atrocities utterly?

Dr Siddiqui: I will take that on board. I will not be able to answer that straight away because you have put that to us. We need to have a position where we can say whether we can agree or not.

Q286 James Berry: You have a public profile, do you not?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, we do have a public profile.

James Berry: Which you have sought. You have a public profile and with that public profile comes a responsibility to condemn terrorism so that people who are interested in what you have to say know that that is your view and are influenced by it. That is surely right, is it not?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, I do agree with you, but in terms of the condemnations, you are picking and choosing the various things we should condemn. As the Chairman has already said, it was not just Paris. There were massacres in Beirut and Baghdad. What do we condemn? Are you wanting us to condemn a list of things that are approved by the Government, or a list of things that are globally condemned?

Q287 James Berry: No, just things that most civilised people consider to be absolutely barbarous and which the Muslim Council of Great Britain, which we have heard evidence from at this Committee, had no problem condemning almost as soon as they happened on behalf of British Muslims.

Ibrahim Mohamoud: May I make a comment?

Chair: Very quickly.

Ibrahim Mohamoud: My apologies. It is important to ask ourselves where we were on that day. Myself and my director were at a restaurant.

Chair: Which day?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: On the Friday of the attacks we saw in Paris. We were at a restaurant, like many of the people who were so brutally killed. At that moment, it was implicit that it could have been us. That could have been us at any city in the world.

The point I would like to put across, very quickly, is that in terms of condemnation, on the day itself, prior to the news emerging in Paris, on the issue of Emwazi we made it very clear that we condemn any act of extrajudicial killing, whether it be the state or non-state actors. We have repeatedly mentioned that. That is publicly available. It is on our website and it is on most of our press releases. You are right; we have not put something out recently in reference to the Paris attacks and this is an opportunity to clarify that, but the idea that we—

Q288 Chair: To clarify it and say what?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: To clarify the implied assumption that we do not have some sort of sympathy or concern, and that we do not feel when people are murdered so mercilessly on—

Q289 Chair: That is what Mr Berry is seeking from you. You have this opportunity today to condemn the atrocities that occurred in Paris. I think that is what he is seeking. He was surprised you had not done so, given the media profile you seek.

Ibrahim Mohamoud: No, I reject that. What you have to bear in mind is on the day—

Chair: No, you can't reject what Mr Berry has said. He is putting it to you.

Ibrahim Mohamoud: On the Friday of the attacks, we were very busy. We were replying to a number of media inquiries relating to the Emwazi revelation that came out from him being droned. We made it very clear on a number of occasions to a number of outlets that we condemn any type of extrajudicial killings, whether by the state or non-state actors. We agree we have not put anything up specifically in regards to Paris. That is no secret and it is a matter we will take on board.

Q290 Chair: Mr Berry has said that in view of the fact that you are sitting before the Committee today and these atrocities occurred on Friday, this is your opportunity to do so. I understand that Dr Siddiqui has just said that he condemned the tragedy that occurred.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, absolutely.

Ibrahim Mohamoud: That is why I hope it is clear.

Q291 Nusrat Ghani: CAGE seems to have been very busy last Friday when those dreadful, cowardly attacks happened in France. Moazzam Begg was at the Quiz a Muslim event, which we have heard about earlier on, and said that he believed that people should be struggling for an Islamic state. How does that differ to the Islamic state that Daesh are struggling for? Are you struggling for the same Islamic state as Daesh?

Dr Siddiqui: No, absolutely not.

Q292 Nusrat Ghani: You are struggling for a different Islamic state from Daesh?

Dr Siddiqui: We are saying that the Muslim world needs to make its own decisions, politically and economically, without interference from outside.

Q293 Nusrat Ghani: So the Islamic state that you are calling for is not the same Islamic state that Daesh are calling for.

Dr Siddiqui: I do not call for an Islamic state.

Q294 Nusrat Ghani: Moazzam Begg was a panellist and he said there is an Islamic duty to struggle for an Islamic state. All I want to know is whether it is the same Islamic state that Daesh are struggling for.

Dr Siddiqui: No, absolutely not.

Q295 Nusrat Ghani: So you are not struggling for the same Islamic state; is that correct?

Dr Siddiqui: Moazzam Begg has very clearly said on record that Islamic State, Daesh, is counter to everything that we stand for. When he went to Syria, it was to document all the abuses that were happening and that included Daesh abuses.

Q296 Nusrat Ghani: Daesh is not struggling for the same Islamic state as CAGE is requesting Muslims to struggle for?

Dr Siddiqui: CAGE is not talking about an Islamic state.

Nusrat Ghani: Moazzam Begg said that on Friday.

Q297 Chair: Order. In evidence to us today, you said to me, in answer to my question—to clarify for Nusrat Ghani—that you support a caliphate, a different model.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Chair: So you are not saying no; you are saying, yes, you do support a model.

Dr Siddiqui: We do support a model, but a different one—

Chair: In answer to Ms Ghani, a different one from Daesh?

Dr Siddiqui: —and, more importantly, it is one that requires the Muslim people to come together.

Q298 Chair: You do support a caliphate and you do support a Muslim state?

Dr Siddiqui: It could be any form. That is what I am saying.

Q299 Chair: I am just asking you to clarify. I do not want to have a debate with you. Just for the record, you do. In answer to Nusrat Ghani, you do support it.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, I—

Nusrat Ghani: Thank you.

Dr Siddiqui: I do. Yes, I—

Q300 Nusrat Ghani: There can only be one Islamic state.

Dr Siddiqui: Can there?

Nusrat Ghani: Can there or can there not? I just want to know, if you are struggling for a different Islamic state from Daesh, are they apostates and are you the real holders of the Islamic faith?

Dr Siddiqui: No, you are putting us in that position. I would never make that kind of statement.

Nusrat Ghani: About Daesh?

Dr Siddiqui: To say anyone is an apostate, whoever it might be.

Q301 Nusrat Ghani: The Islamic state that Daesh are calling for is the same Islamic state that you are calling for?

Dr Siddiqui: No, it is not; absolutely not.

Q302 Nusrat Ghani: But nor are they apostates?

Dr Siddiqui: You are getting into realms that I would have to say are well past our remit.

Q303 Nusrat Ghani: It is well past your remit, but on that Friday evening, when you were too busy to comment on the atrocities in France, Moazzam Begg was calling for an Islamic state.

Dr Siddiqui: Do you understand how many people we have in our organisation?

Nusrat Ghani: Obviously not enough, but enough, I must add, to make a statement when Emwazi was killed. You were not busy at that particular time.

Ibrahim Mohamoud: I think it is a chronology issue here.

Q304 Nusrat Ghani: That is okay, Mr Mohamoud. Let me go on to the next question. You released a statement when Emwazi was killed and you said, “His journey to becoming Jihadi John lay in Britain”. You have not had any personal experience with Emwazi yourself but CAGE has. Given the extensive contact that he had with CAGE, do you think in any way that his contact with you was important to his journey to being radicalised?

Dr Siddiqui: No, not at all. Hopefully you have read the Emwazi emails that we released. You could just as easily then say that the people who were involved in that journey were the IPCC, his MP and the media. We asked him to take all measures to deal with what he said happened, because remember these were his claims about what happened to him. That trajectory has lots of actors and to single us out is being unfair.

Q305 Nusrat Ghani: You singled yourselves out by saying that his journey to becoming Jihadi John lay in Britain. You have also singled yourselves out as an organisation that had some contact with him.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, absolutely, but—

Nusrat Ghani: Not many organisations can say, “We had contact with someone who went on to be radicalised”. He has contacted you. I am just asking whether there was any influence on him becoming radicalised due to his contact with you.

Dr Siddiqui: It is a fair question.

Nusrat Ghani: It requires a straightforward, fair answer.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, but one of the things I would say is that I do not understand the whole terminology of “radicalisation” and, having sat here this afternoon, I do not think many people understand it.

Chair: You can give us a definition of that in a moment, but I want to bring in Mr Umunna and then Tim Loughton.

Q306 Mr Umunna: Just to clarify, Dr Siddiqui, you have been involved with the organisation from the start.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Q307 Mr Umunna: When did you become the director?

Dr Siddiqui: I was director when we changed to CAGE in terminology. I cannot remember but I think that was in 2009.

Q308 Mr Umunna: Mr Mohamoud, when did you become the communications officer?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: Around April 2015.

Q309 Mr Umunna: Can I ask you something then, Dr Siddiqui, in particular? The press conference in February that your research director, Asim Qureshi, held in response to what had happened to Mohammed Emwazi was described in the report that you commissioned as, “Not planned, not structured, not scripted and too long”. It also said that your team, “Lacked experience in key areas such as handling the media and risk management and the board needed to provide much more support and direction to staff than they did”. What were the consequences of those findings and who was held to account?

Dr Siddiqui: We had the consequences of those findings straight away with Emwazi’s drone killing because we were being contacted very quickly.

Q310 Mr Umunna: Let me clarify, because we do not have much time. That was a very critical report. Who was held to account for what happened and for that press conference being held in the way that it was, for an hour and a half, carried live on Sky and BBC? Who was held to account for the disaster that that became?

Dr Siddiqui: There were a number of people and, like I said to you, that is an internal issue. If you look at whoever is there and what has happened since then, there have been changes.

Q311 Mr Umunna: Are you not ultimately responsible?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, I am, and they can sack me.

Q312 Mr Umunna: It seems to me at the moment that you hold yourselves up as promoters of human rights, ensuring that in a climate such as we are in at the moment that we have due regard for the rule of law, which is after all why it is so important that we deal with ISIL, because they have no regard for that whatsoever. However, you are completely undermining and compromising your ability to be effective advocates when you make big mistakes like that press conference and you allow silly tweets like this to be tweeted on Twitter.

Dr Siddiqui: I take that wholly on board. The issue, from our perspective, is that I do not think it something where you just say, “Okay, what’s happened?” The actual review was not that long ago and they are totally at liberty to say, “You should leave as a director.”

Q313 Mr Umunna: It does not seem to me, Dr Siddiqui, that there have been any consequences.

Dr Siddiqui: You do not know.

Mr Umunna: You have said several times, if you allow me, in evidence that you have given that you are a young organisation. You are not that young as an organisation and surely you should know better if you are to do a better job for people who genuinely find they may have been wrongly accused of something. Surely you should be doing a better job and frankly, if I may say so—and this is coming from a bunch of politicians!—be giving straight answers to straight questions.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, I agree with you. I absolutely agree with you.

Q314 Tim Loughton: Mr Siddiqui, you introduced the term “caliphate”, so let us be absolutely clear. You would reject a worldwide caliphate?

Dr Siddiqui: I do not agree with that.

Q315 Tim Loughton: What, you do reject it?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, I—

Chair: You disagree? You support it.

Dr Siddiqui: No, I support a caliphate but—

Q316 Tim Loughton: I specifically asked you about a worldwide caliphate. The definition of a worldwide caliphate is a concept of a single, theocratic, one-world government, which many people would interpret as being about believers or subject communities living under one Muslim rule. Do you support that or reject that?

Dr Siddiqui: I reject it.

Q317 Tim Loughton: You do reject that? Absolutely clear?
Dr Siddiqui: Absolutely clear.

Q318 Tim Loughton: Right. Can you see why this Committee is concerned with some of the answers to your questions, and slightly complacent answers to some of the acts that we are concerned about that have had a public profile? Purely saying you will take that on board leaves space for some concern as to whether you are serious about condemning some of these acts of terrorism, as I very much hope that you are. Do you see that with an organisation as high profile as yours, whether or not you have absolutely no connections with it—clearly you have no connections with what happened in Paris—it is incumbent on you and all sorts of other high-profile Muslim organisations proactively to come out and say that, “We utterly condemn this. This is an affront. This is terrorism or violence”, whatever, in those terms? Purely to say you were a bit busy on Friday gives the impression that there may be a different agenda there.

Dr Siddiqui: I understand what you are saying and I would reiterate exactly what I said: we are a young organisation. I do want that to be on record. If you say that—

Q319 Mr Umunna: Twelve years.

Dr Siddiqui: Twelve years is a very small time. More importantly—this is not a sob story we are going to talk about here—the reality is this that we have operated on skeleton staff. Accounts have been closed for 20 months. Prevent actually closes our events down.

Q320 Tim Loughton: Dr Siddiqui, you are compounding the excuses here. After 12 years, with all the experience that you and people working with you have, and given you are an organisation that has gone to the extent of employing a public relations officer, who is with you here today, when one of the worst terrorist atrocities in Europe takes place, you do not instantly put out a condemnation. You say you were too busy and then you try to excuse it by saying, “What is the relevance of it?” Even though you have no connection with it, can you not see, even after only 12 years, that people may be looking to you to say, “We stand together against these sorts of atrocities”? In the interests of the Muslim community, more than the rest of the community, perhaps, you are being wrongly put in the spotlight because of what these people have done.

Dr Siddiqui: I do understand what you are saying. I would not deny that. We do need to have a coherent view in terms of what we need to do. Condemnation for everything? Certain things? This is what I am saying to you.

Q321 Tim Loughton: This was quite a big thing, was it not?

Dr Siddiqui: No, I agree with you. To give you the reality of what actually happens, we talked a lot about women’s involvement. Instead of trading stereotypes, we wanted to have our female staff here. The reality is that after Paris, the people who are now worried about coming on public transport are visibly Muslim women who we wanted to come here. It is very easy for you to say, “You should condemn for the wider public.” I also want condemnation of people who are making aspersions about us being a fifth column.

Chair: Of course.

Tim Loughton: So don't give them any possible chance or excuse to do that.

Dr Siddiqui: I will not name them. Those who call me a fifth columnist do not know what I do in my day job. I deal with every member of the public and that is what the reality is. I do not have to have a condemn-athon on me. I am somebody who does it for my work. I agree with what you said to me about, "These may seem like excuses: you are 12 years old, you are this, that and the other". I accept all of these things. Let us try to develop. That is what we are trying to do.

Q322 Chair: Thank you, Mr Loughton. Thank you, Dr Siddiqui. Just to be clear, Mr Mohamoud is not part of Communica, the public affairs company. He is a member of your organisation and your communications officer, obviously. He is not a paid consultant.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, that is right. He is not, no.

Chair: Just to be clear that that is his position.

Q323 Victoria Atkins: Dr Siddiqui, you are a GP, yes?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Victoria Atkins: The motto for doctors, the unofficial motto, is "First, do no harm".

Dr Siddiqui: That is right.

Q324 Victoria Atkins: How is that consistent with your organisation's views on, for example, Jihadi John?

Dr Siddiqui: I do not even know where that is coming from.

Q325 Victoria Atkins: All right. We have heard that one of your colleagues described Mr Emwazi as "a beautiful young man". You said today you condemn that?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Q326 Victoria Atkins: "A most humble young man." You have said today you condemn that?

Dr Siddiqui: I have said that was past tense.

Q327 Victoria Atkins: A simple yes or no, Dr Siddiqui.

Dr Siddiqui: I said it was past tense.

Q328 Victoria Atkins: Do you condemn it, yes or no?

Dr Siddiqui: I have to say to you that if it has come across that I am condemning the views of Asim, our research director, about Emwazi at the time he met him, I do not, because that was his value judgment of him at that time.

Q329 Victoria Atkins: Do you condemn it—yes or no?

Dr Siddiqui: I condemn what he is now, or was now.

Q330 Victoria Atkins: All right. Let us move on. In February last year, CAGE praised a suicide bombing attack against the Aleppo prison in which dozens were killed by saying that it resulted in the liberty of over 300 people, “a price worth paying”. Do you stand by that statement—yes or no?

Dr Siddiqui: I do, actually.

Q331 Victoria Atkins: So killing dozens of people in a prison was a price worth paying to free those people.

Dr Siddiqui: To release prisoners in an act of war, yes.

Q332 Victoria Atkins: Your colleague, Asim Qureshi, told a rally in 2006 here in London that it is incumbent upon all of us to support the jihad of our brothers and sisters in places such as Chechnya, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan. Do you agree with him—yes or no?

Dr Siddiqui: I do not know the context of what he was saying.

Q333 Victoria Atkins: Yes, you do, Dr Siddiqui, because this has been quoted back at you many times.

Dr Siddiqui: No, it has not been quoted back to me.

Q334 Victoria Atkins: Yes or no, do you agree with him?

Dr Siddiqui: I accept that the concept of jihad is an important concept.

Q335 Victoria Atkins: You cannot say yes or no again.

Dr Siddiqui: No, I say that if he is talking about—

Q336 Victoria Atkins: Just an observation. As someone who is used to questioning defendants in criminal trials, I have to say that your answers are not terribly clear or directed. You seem to be very good at finding ways of not answering a simple yes or no.

Dr Siddiqui: I apologise if that is the case.

Q337 Victoria Atkins: Remembering your promise as a doctor to first do no harm, do you support the security services in combating terrorism here and abroad?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes, absolutely.

Q338 Victoria Atkins: Do you support the efforts of counter-terrorism police to combat terrorism here and abroad?

Dr Siddiqui: I have no problems with that.

Q339 Victoria Atkins: Will you personally ensure that you and your organisation do everything to help the security services and the police to combat terrorism?

Dr Siddiqui: We do.

Q340 Victoria Atkins: Forgive me, but the answers you are giving give room for doubt on that.

Dr Siddiqui: That is in your mind.

Victoria Atkins: So it is my fault.

Dr Siddiqui: If you are making an accusation.

Q341 Victoria Atkins: Will CAGE stop apologising for terrorist activities—yes or no?

Dr Siddiqui: Which ones are you talking about?

Victoria Atkins: For a start, the bombing of Aleppo prison.

Dr Siddiqui: You would classify that as terrorism?

Victoria Atkins: That is an attack that happened on a prison.

Dr Siddiqui: We have somebody who has studied terrorism and even he is saying that we do not know the definitions.

Q342 Chair: You have said to this Committee in answer to questions earlier on that we did not understand the nature of radicalism, or perhaps that we did not know precisely what that was. We are very keen to understand this. What do you think causes young people to be radicalised? Obviously we are concerned about the 700 British citizens born in this country who have decided to go and fight in Syria and other parts of the world. What is the cause of radicalism? How can you help this Committee?

Dr Siddiqui: Everyone is very clear that you need to find those people who have gone, or those people who have those views. There are multiple things. I do not want to bore the Committee by saying that there are issues of identity and disempowerment—there are many, many things.

Q343 Chair: You are not boring the Committee if you are giving us examples of what you think cause radicalisation.

Dr Siddiqui: That is why I do not like the term “radicalisation”, because—

Q344 Chair: What is a better term, then?

Dr Siddiqui: Politicisation or disenfranchisement. Baroness Warsi has said very clearly that she was radicalised by racism in the 1970s. The terminology is very fluid.

Q345 Chair: Radicalisation, to this Committee, in the inquiry that we are conducting, is young people or others, who are law-abiding citizens, who decide to go abroad

from this country to fight in Syria or, in the case of two of the three Bethnal Green girls, to marry Daesh fighters. That is what we regard as radicalisation. You say that is just politicisation.

Dr Siddiqui: It could be any number of things. It is important to try to analyse what is happening for them to be motivated to go. I am sorry to go off on a tangent, but I work in an area where the riots happened in 2011 and a lot of the discussions and the things that young people talk about are not that different from what you as a Committee are trying to deal with.

Q346 Chair: You do not see a problem with young people in this country who decide to go abroad?

Dr Siddiqui: No, I see a big problem with that.

Q347 Chair: How do we keep them here? How do we stop them going? If you are able to give us the benefit of your experience of dealing with all these cases, how do we stop this process?

Dr Siddiqui: The first is to make sure they do not feel disenfranchised, but that they have a stake in society. The problem here partly is that when you are saying, “You need to be responsible, you are a public figure and you need to say these types of things”—and I agree with all of that—

Q348 Chair: Forget about what you should say. I want to know what we should do to stop them going.

Dr Siddiqui: They need to feel that their voices are heard.

Q349 Chair: It is a matter of enfranchisement.

Dr Siddiqui: Absolutely.

Q350 Chair: Is it a failure of democracy? We now have Members of Parliament of the Muslim faith, two of whom are sitting on this Committee.

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Chair: Is it the failure of politics? Who has failed to give them that voice?

Dr Siddiqui: We all have, collectively. As I said to you, we hold up our hands and we say that we have said things that maybe have made the situation worse. Also, as politicians, there is a disconnect. If you look at how many young people vote and how many feel that they are represented by Members of Parliament—

Q351 Chair: Not many, Dr Siddiqui, decide to make that journey and to go and kill people.

Dr Siddiqui: I agree with you, yes.

Chair: What makes those people different?

Dr Siddiqui: The thing is, again, if you are in south London, people can join a gang and do exactly the same thing. They can kill people on the streets of south London.

Q352 Chair: So what happened in Paris, which was something that happened because people had been radicalised in Syria and had come back, is the same as someone who is involved in gang activity in some part of London, or is it different?

Dr Siddiqui: There are crossovers. If you look at the areas where people often are recruited from and people are looking at, there certainly seems to be that kind of urban wasteland that you often see where people do not see any kind of future for themselves. As I said to you, I do not want to make glib statements that cover everything. It is something that needs to be addressed.

Q353 Chair: Do you think it also is to do with values? Do you think that members of the Muslim community in particular feel that they have to accept British values and that some reject that?

Dr Siddiqui: On the term “British values”, if you are British, you live it. I feel very British. I do not feel anything different. The fact that we are having this discussion—it is a robust discussion—is, for me, Britishness, and there is nothing wrong with that. The issue is if people do not feel equipped to do that and if they feel that that is being imposed upon them. I do not have to put on a Union Jack shirt to say I am British. I am British.

Q354 Chair: Indeed. Mr Farooq, you have studied this subject. What is the tipping point at which a young British citizen, born in this country, who has everything this country has to offer, suddenly decides to go to Syria and join Daesh? What is that tipping point? What causes that? You have studied this so carefully.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: To be honest, like I said, I am no doctor in this field at the moment.

Chair: No, but you have studied it more than we have.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: What they do say is that there are many factors that contribute to a person who will turn against everything that they have ever known in order to adopt a specific ideology.

Q355 Chair: What are those key factors?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: I will use myself as an example, if that is okay. I am of the Muslim faith, born into a Muslim family, third generation here, and perfectly in tandem with British society, Britishness and British values. In order for me, as a person, to take that sort of step, it would need to be something very drastic. I would need to be alienated in a way. My personal belief is that everybody in society longs to belong and to be part of something or another. It is how society works. Society, subcultures—it is all formed by people coming together.

Q356 Chair: Have you met people who have decided to go over that tipping point in your research? You are now doing a doctorate.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: I am a masters student. As of yet, I have not met people who have said, “Let us go to Syria” but I have met people who will say, initially, “We believe what ISIS is doing is a great job.” Time itself—

Chair: You do not believe that, of course.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: Of course not.

Q357 Chair: How do we deal with the counter-narrative?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: This is what I am getting to. Time itself, in a very particular way, with the atrocities—initially, when they first came into existence, everybody dreamt of a utopian society where everything is so great and the grass is so green. In time, people came to know. When people’s heads are being removed and put on stakes, when people are being thrown off buildings and dragged around the streets, set on fire in cages and put into water and drowned, slowly for the people that I have come across who have this idea, the counter-narrative, in a very peculiar way, presented itself through the action of the group.

Q358 Chair: They have provided the counter-narrative because of their atrocities?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: The group itself has, if you look at this, by what they are doing. As a Muslim person, we are raised a particular way, like everybody of any faith or culture is. When you start to see people chopping people’s ears off and speaking to you in blatant English, eloquent discourse, using the accent of London, saying, “This is what we will do to everybody who we get hold of,” it is enough to scare anybody in any scope. This is a horror movie that is taking place in the world arena. My point is this: as an example, I am somebody who was willing to dedicate my research and my time, and to finance myself in this field, to obtain the answers to the sorts of questions you are asking. I feel academia holds these answers. That is my personal view.

With regards to this issue, with what I went through, I assure you I have never in my life felt un-British or rejected by society. I am a family man. I have two children. It affected me in a way that I am sure you can tell visibly by my face. My hair has fallen out and I have developed all sorts of stress symptoms. I would lie awake at night thinking, “How have I, the one person who dedicated so much time and effort to reading literature in different languages in order to obtain answers that I feel are not being answered, ended up in the basket with the very people I am trying to eradicate?”

Q359 Chair: If it was somebody else, do you think they might have been radicalised by that process—someone not as strong as you?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: Forgive me for my ignorance. I do not know how to address you. The Right Honourable?

Chair: “Chairman” is fine.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: Chairman, sorry. I do apologise. Yes, I would say that if it was somebody who was not as focused and was not able to deduce from my experience that what has happened to me is an issue involving an institution or caused by a particular

policy. I can keep going back further if I need to, but my point is this: although what has happened to me has ruined me in a way, it is also quite nice to know that we live in a society where people will look at me and there are lessons learned from what happened to me.

Chair: Yes, and there certainly are.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: That is what I hold on to. Otherwise, there is a potential that what you are referring to could happen. That is what scares me. It did happen to me. I am sure it would not affect my masculinity to say that I shed tears over this. Of course I would do.

Chair: Of course.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: It is something that really—

Chair: Everyone has subsequently apologised to you.

Q360 Stuart C. McDonald: Dr Siddiqui, you are absolutely right, of course, that the reasons why some people might turn to violence or extrajudicial killings are very complicated, but one immediate trigger is obviously that there are people who encourage that to happen and encourage people to take part in these activities. How do we support Muslim communities in particular to resist such calls and to take on such arguments?

Dr Siddiqui: I do not like to keep using narratives, but by giving them a stake, making sure that they feel that their voices are being heard and that essentially, for any struggles they have, there is a way and a means to do it. What we hoped for when we saw the Arab Spring was that people would see a non-violent way of challenging things. It is difficult, but the main thing to say in this country is that there needs to be more fora. Our worry, when we go back to the Prevent agenda, is that we are closing those things down.

Q361 Stuart C. McDonald: You referred a couple of times to the Prevent strategy closing down debate. In fact, that is slightly similar to one or two other criticisms we have heard. However, given what you have just accepted about the fact that one reason why some people turn to violence is people calling and encouraging that behaviour, is it not right that the Prevent strategy seeks to close down those voices? Are you saying that what we need to do is to take on those voices?

Dr Siddiqui: Remember that those voices, if they are not given a platform, cannot be challenged. They will be somewhere else. That is why what is important in these things is complete openness and complete transparency so that if someone is doing that, the full force of the law can get on with that. That is what I am saying to you. If people are saying that, it is not difficult for that to be viewed as glorifying and going down that route.

Q362 Stuart C. McDonald: To an extent the Prevent strategy seeks to do that, for example by empowering young people. You cannot exclude these voices everywhere. As you say, they will be somewhere else. For a start, they will be on the internet. The Prevent strategy seeks to equip people to take on these arguments and to resist these arguments. Why are you so critical of every aspect of it?

Dr Siddiqui: Again, it is about buy-in in terms of whether these are authentic arguments—things that people feel are relevant to them. Whenever we talk to people who have had Prevent training, it seems to be more of a top-down, “This is what you are meant to be doing.” That is it. It does not seem to be something of which the community would say, “These are our voices being represented”.

Q363 Stuart C. McDonald: How do you change that, then? Do we ensure that it—
Dr Siddiqui: Our whole thing with regard to Prevent has been that you need to go right back to the drawing board, talk about the issue and analyse it, say, “What is radicalisation? What are all of these?” and then propose solutions.

Q364 Stuart C. McDonald: With respect, it would be helpful if you were able to give us slightly more tangible examples of what you would like a counter-extremism strategy to look like, rather than simply saying “Prevent is wrong and what we need to do is to offer solutions”. We are at the stage where we need solutions.

Dr Siddiqui: In all of the criticisms, one thing that has been said very often to us is to look at policy. We are not in policy making, but we need to look at what things identify people as radicals and extremists, and then to give the other narrative. If you are saying, “How do you deal with it?” there is youth work that can be involved in it, there is forensics that needs to be involved, there are social workers—there is a whole gamut of health professionals and public sector workers if we are able to discuss these kinds of cases and go over it.

One of the things I would bring up is that I have wanted to do my Prevent training, but the problem with Prevent is that it is shrouded in secrecy. We are aware of a guidance for us as doctors that we want to know about the signs and symptoms. The headmaster of Bethnal Green Academy mentioned, “What are the signs and symptoms of radicalisation?” It is all shrouded in secrecy. There is a thing that is called the ERG 22 that we have been trying to find out more about, and whether it has strength of evidence behind it. If you are saying, “What is the alternative?” the first thing is to see whether these things like ERG 22 and other markers are legitimate in dealing with a serious issue.

Q365 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Farooq gave some very compelling evidence, but I must say that with the rest of the evidence you have given, it has been very hard for me to take anything you say seriously. It has been very difficult to digest your evidence today. I am yet to understand which voices you represent. I am yet to understand how many people you have come across who have been radicalised, if you have some expertise in what has radicalised them, and if you have been able to turn them around. I note that you said on 19 October 2015: “The Government only consults those who lack any credibility and are loathed”. I assume that is a complaint that the Government were not working with you, but I am yet to see what credibility you have and what extra you can add to this debate. You talk about being just 12 years young, yet you are old enough to send out tweets that could be damaging to young girls who may possibly want to return.

You also made a statement on Friday 13 November when you said, “CAGE’s repeated efforts and offers to negotiate for the release of Alan Henning were obstructed and squandered by the UK Government, and serious questions remain regarding these failures”. I

just find it absolutely irresponsible that you believe that you had some authority to negotiate on someone's behalf and deliver them safely home.

Chair: Ms Ghani, could you put a question to the witness?

Nusrat Ghani: I just find it utterly irresponsible. What credibility do you have to show that you can negotiate on behalf of anybody?

Dr Siddiqui: I agree. What authority do we have? The thing is that Moazzam Begg, who had been there, has plenty of authority. That is what we are talking about. We are not talking about us individually as an organisation. You may shake your head but the reality is that the Government did not save him.

Q366 Naz Shah: I must say this is probably one of the most difficult evidence sessions that I have taken part in. One of the things I am still struggling to understand—I would like to understand and I would like you to explain—is when you talk about one of many caliphates, because I think if we do not get the bottom of that, it could be misconstrued, or not. What is your understanding when you talk about the caliphate model that you are supporting or that you would endorse?

Dr Siddiqui: Like I said to you, the Muslim world is in political turmoil. That you can certainly agree to.

Q367 Chair: We understand that. Ms Shah particularly wants to know the model that you support so that she can get an understanding. We know that it is turmoil, but what is it specifically, since you said you supported it?

Dr Siddiqui: Are you asking me personally?

Chair: Yes.

Dr Siddiqui: My model is the Ottoman caliphate. That for me—

Q368 Chair: For those who do not know what an Ottoman caliphate is, give me the main features.

Dr Siddiqui: There was obviously a temporal ruler. However, the main thing that I would say is that they had—which is replicated here—a very vibrant multiculturalism.

Q369 Chair: Is that in the United Kingdom?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Q370 Chair: You would like an Ottoman caliphate in the United Kingdom?

Dr Siddiqui: No, no, no. Please don't twist that. I am saying that the multiculturalism that we see here—you can see the diversity and everything—has echoes of what was happening in the Ottoman empire.

Q371 Chair: I am a big supporter of multiculturalism, as are members of this Committee. I would not have described that as what happened in the Ottoman caliphate.

Dr Siddiqui: You may say that about the ending of it but—that is what I am saying to you—if you brought in an Ottoman historian, they would be very easily able to tell you.

Q372 Chair: We will consider doing that. You would like this in the United Kingdom?

Dr Siddiqui: We have multiculturalism here.

Q373 Chair: You think the Ottoman caliphate is the same as our definition of multiculturalism.

Dr Siddiqui: No, I am saying in terms of the ability to have diverse opinions and diverse people together—

Q374 Chair: And diverse religions?

Dr Siddiqui: And diverse religions, absolutely. Like I said to you, I think—

Q375 Chair: How can that be part of a caliphate? For example, myself, as a Catholic, how would I fit into that?

Dr Siddiqui: You have not read Ottoman history.

Chair: No, I have not. That is why I am asking you.

Dr Siddiqui: You had complete jurisdiction for all communities. It was called the millet system and it was very vibrant.

Q376 Chair: This is completely different from what Daesh wants.

Dr Siddiqui: Absolutely.

Q377 James Berry: Dr Siddiqui, this Committee has heard criticisms, not just from you, of the roles of Government, the police and teachers in countering radicalisation. Do you think CAGE has done enough to counter radicalisation in its 12 years?

Dr Siddiqui: No.

Q378 Chair: Would you like to do more?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Q379 Chair: Let me sum up, in conclusion. Thank you for coming to give evidence, all three of you. Mr Farooq, you had some very interesting evidence to give. If you would like to write to the Committee with further evidence, we would be very happy to accept it on the basis of what I was talking about—the tipping point—because you obviously have been through this experience and it could easily have gone the other way. We are very grateful to you for coming here. Mr Mohamoud, thank you for coming as well. We are grateful.

Dr Siddiqui, the Committee feels as a whole that it was deeply misguided for you not to have issued a statement following the atrocities in Paris. We do not think it is an acceptable excuse that you were at a restaurant. In view of your past mistakes—which you have readily admitted today; you have come before this Committee and you have said you made many errors of judgment—and in view of what your public affairs specialists have said, that was a big opportunity to show that you had condemned what was happening in Paris. You said that you would take it on board and you would look at it. Please do, because we would be keen for you to do that.

Our concern also is at the sharing of a platform with organisations like Hizb ut-Tahrir, as you did last Friday. There are people who say that these organisations encourage British citizens to go abroad and fight there. You have told us quite forcefully today that you do not support British citizens going to fight abroad. That is right, is it not?

Dr Siddiqui: Yes.

Q380 Chair: You want to create a caliphate called an Ottoman caliphate, which you say is the same as multicultural Britain?

Dr Siddiqui: Aspects of it.

Q381 Chair: Aspects, right. Obviously we are not experts in Ottoman caliphates, but just judging from what you have said so far, I do not think it is quite what this Committee regards as being multiculturalism, but we will look into that further. I would be grateful, if you have any further evidence on the matters that have been raised by this Committee or any further information you can give us on your deradicalisation efforts, if you would send that on to the Committee.

Finally, have you come across those who have come back from Syria into the United Kingdom? Have you dealt with any of those kinds of people?

Dr Siddiqui: You would have to speak to our case workers about that.

Ibrahim Mohamoud: Not that I am aware of.

Q382 Chair: Nobody has come back from Syria having fought there and visited CAGE?

Ibrahim Mohamoud: Not that I am aware of, no.

Chair: No. Dr Siddiqui?

Dr Siddiqui: No, not that I am aware of.

Chair: Mr Farooq, you have not come into contact with anyone like that?

Mohammed Umar Farooq: No. I am not part of CAGE.

Chair: I am aware of that.

Mohammed Umar Farooq: I am here on a separate issue, but no. I would not mind. For research purposes, I think it would be quite an interesting narrative to try to understand why people do what they do—to get into the psychology of it—but as of yet, no.

Chair: Thank you very much for coming in today. Thank you.