

The Prevent Strategy

What it means for library and information professionals

A CILIP Briefing paper

1. This briefing paper outlines the priorities of the Government's Prevent Strategy, including its recent revisions. It explores those areas with especial relevance to libraries and existing CILIP policy statements that are relevant to the issues it raises. It looks especially at plans regarding the internet and various sectoral initiatives in education and public libraries.
2. It calls for CILIP members to inform CILIP of any action under the Prevent strategy that comes to their attention. Indications so far are that libraries have not been subject to interference or intervention because of the Prevent Strategy. Therefore this briefing is more of a discussion document than a policy statement and raises issues rather than proposing new policy or seeking resolution of problems stemming from the Prevent strategy. It is clear that CILIP should continue to exercise a watching brief and may need to engage more actively in the area in the future. Those wanting to look at programmes of activity under the new Prevent strategy should refer to the section on "The New Prevent Strategy".
3. *Prevent*¹ is part of the Government's overall counter-terrorist strategy [CONTEST](#)² designed to counter the threat from international terrorism. *Prevent* involves the identification and referral of those susceptible to violent extremism into appropriate interventions. These interventions aim to divert the susceptible from embarking down the path to radicalisation. The strategy is underpinned by sections 1 and 2 of the Terrorism Act (2006) making it unlawful to encourage terrorism or to disseminate publications that seek to encourage terrorism.
4. Much of the recent debate around Prevent has been based on the belief that the most significant threats of terrorism come from Al Qa'ida and its affiliates. However more recent events in Norway have illustrated that extreme right wing groups also pose a threat. The last [Citizenship Survey in 2010](#) indicated that

only a very small percentage of members of faith groups support violence in the name of religion.

5. Counter-terrorism, including Prevent, is a reserved matter and so it is the responsibility of the UK government but it is delivered through services – the police, schools and universities for instance – that are managed by the devolved administrations. The Prevent Strategy is funded by the Home Office.

The New Prevent strategy

6. In 2010 the Government launched a review into the *Prevent* strategy. This was independently overseen by Lord Carlile of Berriew QC.
7. The review found the previous *Prevent* programme to be flawed in that it confused the delivery of government policy to promote integration within communities with Government policy to prevent terrorism. There is now a clear separation between *Prevent* which is lead by the Home Office, and integration³ (Community cohesion) - lead by Department of Communities and Local Government. No change to the legal framework for *Prevent* is envisaged.
8. The new *Prevent* strategy has three objectives:
 - **Responding to the ideological challenge of terrorism**
 - **Preventing people being drawn into terrorism (ensuring appropriate advice and support)**
 - **Working with a wide range of sectors and institutions (including education) where there are risks of radicalisation which need to be address.**
9. *Prevent* lists five priority areas; education, faith, health, criminal justice and charities. The internet has been given its own section in the document [Pg. 77, P.10.90]

The Library and Information context

The Internet

10. The Strategy focuses on the internet as the means used to facilitate attack planning and for the distribution of terrorist propaganda and the process of radicalisation and recruitment. The Government sees the internet as vital to *Prevent* work and propose to more effectively disrupt terrorist use of the internet and to use it as a means to challenge terrorist ideology.

11. In particular the strategy envisages:

- Limiting access to harmful content online in specific sectors or premises (schools, public libraries and other public buildings are all mentioned) - discussions are taking place between the OSCT (Office Security and Counter Terrorism) and others such as Regional Broadband Consortia and the filtering software industry to explore effective filtering options across the public estate. In the meantime they are seeking to get “violent and unlawful URL lists” to be incorporated into independent national blocking lists such as that provided by the Internet Watch Foundation
- Ensuring action is taken to try and remove unlawful and harmful content from the internet – CTIRU (the Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit) leads on this type of work
- Educating internet users about the problem, especially those at risk. A key objective will be to encourage communities to alert authorities to content that is harmful and unlawful
- Promoting “counter narratives” provided by the Research, Information and Communication Unit (part of the OSCT)

12. Clearly CILIP does not sanction the access of unlawful information within libraries or condone terrorism and is keen that all library and information services and their staff should operate within the law. However our starting point is a belief in the importance of freedom of information as a bulwark of democracy.

13. The third of CILIP’s [Ethical Principles](#) states that the conduct of CILIP members should be characterised by a “Commitment to the defence, and the advancement, of access to information, ideas and works of the imagination”. We recommend that members have regard to the CILIP policy statement on [Intellectual Freedom: access to Information and Censorship](#) when considering issues such as filtering. CILIP has also endorsed the [Council of Europe Guidelines on public access and freedom of expression in networked information](#) which is also a source of good practice.

14. Where the above statement and guidance focus on access to information, CILIP’s [User privacy in libraries: guidelines for the reflective practitioner](#) has a section dealing with third party requests for personal data held by libraries, including requests for such data by the police or security agencies. There are exceptions within the Data Protection Act relating to the non-disclosure of personal information especially where such disclosure is sanctioned by the law or by court order. One exception to this is on grounds of national security. In this area the information requested is as likely to be about websites visited or

books loaned as on membership details. But CILIP's starting point is set out in its Ethical Principle 8 stating that the conduct of members should be characterised by "Respect for confidentiality and privacy in dealing with information users".

Public libraries

15. There is no section specifically on public libraries in the *Prevent* document. Libraries are only mentioned under the Internet section in the paragraph that begins "Internet filtering across the public estate is essential" and this includes public libraries. However the issue of radicalisation and the stock provided by public libraries has made national headlines.
16. In 2008 the Centre for Social Cohesion published [Hate on the State: How British libraries encourage Islamic extremism](#)⁴ by James Brandon and Douglas Murray. The report attacked some London boroughs and other authorities for stocking works by convicted extremists leading to the accusation that they were effectively promoting terrorism. In response to this report came the MLA's [Guidance on the management of controversial material in public libraries](#)⁵, commissioned by DCMS which sets out the selection principles that should underlay a good stock development policy.
17. The aim of the MLA guidelines was to provide guidance based on responsive stock planning, good management and proactive community librarianship while ensuring there was no undue interference in the independence of public libraries to provide for the widest range of interests. The guidelines also have a section on the specific challenges of content on the internet. The Guidance was informed by CILIP's policy statement on [Intellectual Freedom, Access to Information and Censorship](#).

Education

18. The Government has issued advice to schools, FE Colleges and Higher Education Institutions regarding the dangers of radicalisation. These will provide important context for LIS practitioners in those fields although libraries are not specifically mentioned. Generally the Government are more concerned at the potential for radicalisation of students within Higher Education and less so in schools. But interestingly a recent [Demos publication](#) has drawn a direct relationship between the poor information literacy skills (called digital fluency in the report) of school children and their susceptibility to radicalisation through hate and conspiracy websites.

Current Government advice can be found in the following publications:

[Guidance for police officers and police staff to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism](#)⁶

[ACT NOW for schools](#)⁷ (four lessons exploring issues around terrorism for delivery by police in schools)

[ACT NOW for FE and HE](#)⁸

[Learning together to be safe: a toolkit to help colleges contribute to the prevention of violent extremism](#)⁹

[Promoting good campus relations, fostering shared values and preventing violent extremism in universities and higher education colleges](#)¹⁰

Other Sectors

19. Work too is being undertaken within the healthcare sector including published guidance and a toolkit. The Charity Commission has a regulatory role in regard to charities incorporating aspects of Prevent. And as you would expect Prevent is well-known within the criminal justice system and youth offender services

Conclusion

20. Resilience and cohesion are both recognised as important in helping to lessen the threat of radicalisation and violent extremism and CILIP believes that all library and information services have a role to play in building “resilience” within the communities they serve. A proper strategy to prevent radicalisation would be one which provides people with the necessary tools and allows them to evaluate information and make up their own minds about material accessed via the internet. This strategy would be far more successful in building resilience than just following a blocking strategy. CILIP’s work in promoting the role of LIS practitioners as facilitators of information literacy is key and we must work as a professional community to increase acceptance and funding of this role.

21. But for our members the immediate concern is how implementation of the various strands of the *Prevent* Strategy could impact upon their professional and ethical duty to provide access to information and resources. The quick survey we did in preparing this briefing suggests that there is not, at least as yet, a problem with an over-zealous implementation of the Prevent Strategy. We are keen that CILIP should be informed if this proves not to be the case in future. So please contact us if you have concerns about interventions under the Prevent strategy.

**CILIP, Policy Department
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Notes

¹ Prevent strategy, 2011. (Cm 8092) London TSO

² CONTEST is organised around four principal workstreams:

- **Pursue:** to stop terrorist attacks
- **Prevent:** to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism
- **Protect:** to strengthen our protection against terrorist attack
- **Prepare:** where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact

³ “The relationship between Prevent and cohesion and integration needs to be very carefully managed. Prevent depends on a successful cohesion and integration strategy. But as a general rule, the two strategies and programmes must not be merged together” (See Para. 6.30 of the strategy document)

⁴ Brandon, J. & Murray, D., 2007. *Hate on the state how British libraries encourage Islamic extremism*. London: Centre for Social Cohesion

⁵ Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), 2008. *Guidance on the management of controversial material in public libraries*. London: MLA Council

⁶ Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ACPO). 2009. *Guidance for police officers and police staff to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism*. London: Prevent Delivery Unit

⁷ Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). *Act now for schools*

⁸ Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). *Act now for FE and HE*

⁹ Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2008. *Learning together to be safe: a toolkit to help colleges contribute to the prevention of violent extremism*. Nottingham: DCSF Publications

¹⁰ Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills, *Promoting good campus relations, fostering shared values and preventing violent extremism in Universities of Higher Education Colleges*. (Note: This is an updated version of the 2006 guidelines. No publication date is given on the online or hard copy version).