

Preventing violent extremism – Winning hearts and minds





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The challenge

1. The London bombings on 7th July 2005 – carried out by British citizens brought up in this country – shocked us all. They were the most horrific manifestation on British soil of a complex Al Qaeda inspired threat to our security. This threat will continue to be one of the most important challenges to Britain’s security for many years to come.
2. This is not about a clash of civilisations or a struggle between Islam and “the West”. It is about standing up to a small fringe of terrorists and their extremist supporters. Indeed, Government is committed to working in partnership with the vast majority of Muslims who reject violence and who share core British values in doing this.
3. The Government’s strategy to counter international terrorism was presented to Parliament in July 2006¹. This document recognises that the threat is global in nature and requires a global response. It sets out a range of measures for improving the UK’s security arrangements that we are constantly building on – for example, the Attorney General has recently announced a comprehensive strategy to improve the prosecution of those who peddle extremist messages and commit public order offences.
4. But it also recognised that while a security response is vital it will not, on its own, be enough. Winning hearts and minds and preventing individuals being attracted to violent extremism in the first place is also crucial.
5. A number of government departments have important roles in this area: the Home Office leads on protecting those individuals most at risk from violent extremist influences, the Department for Education and Skills has an important role in relation to the impact that education can have on this agenda, whilst the Foreign and Commonwealth Office works on the overseas dimensions.
6. The role for the Department for Communities and Local Government, as set out clearly by the Prime Minister, is to enable “local communities ... to be able to challenge robustly the ideas of those extremists who seek to undermine our way of life”². Key to this must be the building of strong communities, confident in themselves, open to others, and resilient to violent extremism.

1 Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom’s Strategy, Cm 6888, July 2006

2 see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1165650>

7. Based on extensive debate and discussion with many in British Muslim communities, this document sets out both priorities for immediate action and areas where we will continue to develop our approach and policies.
8. In developing this action plan, we have drawn on the recommendations from the Preventing Extremism Together working groups³; debates with local communities; roundtable meetings with theologians, academics, practitioners and community groups; and the views of key partners including the intelligence agencies, the police, local government and other government departments.
9. We will continue to build on and develop this Action Plan and will issue updates annually.

Our response

10. The Department for Communities and Local Government, working with others, will take forward work through four key approaches: promoting shared values, supporting local solutions, building civic capacity and leadership, and strengthening the role of faith institutions and leaders.

Promoting shared values

11. As a society we must defend and promote our shared and non-negotiable values: respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, respect for others and responsibility towards others. This is how we have isolated the far right. And it is now how we must stand up to terrorists and their supporters. Government needs to support individuals and organisations who uphold those values and to respond robustly when those values are transgressed.
12. **Our immediate priorities are to:**

Broaden the provision of citizenship education in supplementary schools and madrassahs. It is estimated that around 100,000 children⁴ between the ages of 5 and 14 attend madrassahs (mosque schools). Each child typically attends for two hours after school each day. It is in everyone's interest that the education that is provided is of the highest possible quality. There could be significant benefits if even a small proportion of this time were used to help provide children with a deeper understanding of citizenship and the inter-relationship between their faith and the communities in which they live.

Some organisations, such as the Bradford Council of Mosques, are already producing high-quality teaching material on citizenship for use in madrassahs. These initiatives are designed to demonstrate clearly how Islamic values are

³ see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1501973>

⁴ See <http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk/Documentation/ChildProtectionReport.pdf>

entirely consistent with core British values. **We will support the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Schools, in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills, key educational partners and representatives from the Muslim communities, to develop by Summer 2007 a plan to collate and roll out good practice guidance nationally.** The new National Resource Centre for Supplementary Schools was launched in January 2007 to provide guidance to, and support best practice in, registered supplementary schools.

Ensure the most effective use of the education system in promoting faith understanding. Violent extremists seek to exploit a lack of understanding of Islam. Given this, we want to explore fully the role that schools, colleges and universities can play in providing access to trusted high quality learning about faith and Islam in Britain today. There is much work being done already and much experience to build on:

- Sir Keith Ajegbo's Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review addressed Islam as part of a broader understanding of identity and diversity in the UK. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is currently working with Sir Keith to improve the way in which issues such as faith and culture are addressed through the National Curriculum. Extended schools, which will be rolled out across the country by 2010 offer another opportunity.
- In the Further Education (FE) sector, we are encouraging colleges and providers to support faith needs, with activities such as Faith Awareness weeks and Muslim student voice councils to help colleges understand Islam and their students' faith needs. In addition, the recent external review of *Value, Beliefs and Faiths in Further Education* makes a number of recommendations to give a stronger push to broadening faith understanding within FE, which we will take forward working closely with faith group representatives and other agencies.
- Dr Siddiqui, Director of the Markfield Institute of Further Education, is currently reviewing what information about Islam is available in English universities. The review, due to be published in May 2007, was commissioned to recommend measures to: improve the quality of information about Islam that is available to university students and staff; improve the nature of spiritual advice and support that Muslim students can access; and identify any gaps between the needs and aspirations of Muslim students and the programmes of study currently available at universities in England.

Building on these initiatives, **the Government will consider the recommendations from these reviews and develop them further where appropriate.**

13. Moving forward, we will:

- Do more to promote equality of opportunity. We have a proud track record with improvements in educational attainment, higher employment and

investment in our most deprived areas. But we recognise that we must do more for all low-income groups whatever their faith or ethnicity. Sometimes groups facing specific challenges will require tailored responses. For example, the Partners' Outreach programme, led by the Department for Work and Pensions, provides specific advice on employment to Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who are neither in work nor on benefits. This is not a case of special treatment – rather, a recognition of specific issues experienced by one set of communities.

- Respond to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. The Commission will provide practical recommendations on how to promote cohesion and integration. The Commission is looking at a range of specific issues such as shared values and the role of language in facilitating integration. The Commission will deliver its final report in June 2007.

Supporting local solutions

14. While tackling violent extremism is a national priority, the nature of the challenge can vary greatly from place to place. That is why approaches driven from Whitehall are not enough. Working with local communities, particularly Muslim communities, to deliver local solutions is key. This is not just about local authorities, it is about wider cultural activities and inter faith work in our communities. It is this type of activity that brings people together and emphasises that there is more that unites us than divides us.

15. **Our immediate priorities are to:**

Support local authorities to work with their communities in tackling violent extremism.

The Local Government White Paper⁵ made clear that preventing violent extremism is a major concern for local authorities. The Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund launched in October 2006, supports local authorities to tackle violent extremism at a local level, focusing on those areas facing the greatest challenges. The fund aims to build on what the local authorities most experienced in this area are already doing and encourage others to follow their lead – listening to their communities, working with schools and mosques, forging partnerships between police, community and faith groups.

At the time of its launch, we stated that £5 million would be made available for the financial year 2007/08, to supplement the resources already available through mainstream funding routes. In light of the richness of the proposals identified by local authorities and their partners, **we will make a total of £6 million available to fund work in around 70 local authorities across the country.** Details of the funding

5 See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137789>

provided and case studies of some of the projects supported have been published separately⁶. These projects range from promoting the contributions that Muslims make in local communities, to building the capacity of local communities to tackle violent extremism in their area, to protecting specific groups of individuals being targeted by violent extremists.

Increase the number of Forums on Extremism and Islamophobia. We know that local activity, including that funded through the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund, works best when communities are directly involved. Local forums bring together communities with local authorities, the police and other players to act as the hub for work on tackling violent extremism at a local level. They also provide a safe space for open debate about the issues that matter to communities. We set out our commitment to these forums and what they can deliver in the Local Government White Paper.

To date, we have supported the establishment of 12 forums. **We will support local authorities to deliver at least 40 local forums by April 2008.** As well as community-based forums, we will also support the development of forums that provide a focus for specific groups whose voices are not always heard, such as young people and Muslim women.

Support the development of ‘tackling violent extremism roadshows’. Initiated and organised by Muslim organisations, these events seek to provide practical steps for people to respond to the challenges in their own communities. We have already supported a number of pilot events. **We will now provide additional funding to support a series of events across the country over the next year, enabling a wider participation.**

16. Moving forward, we will:

- Learn the lessons of the Pathfinder projects, working closely with all involved and the Improvement and Development Agency to identify and disseminate good practice. This will inform our work in future years and help local authorities draw on the experience of what has worked in different areas.
- Build on existing work with universities. We have issued guidance to higher education establishments to assist them in supporting students vulnerable to violent extremism⁷. Violent extremists often focus their attention on places where young people are more vulnerable to their messages, so we must ensure that higher education institutions are equipped and empowered to robustly challenge violent extremists.

6 Available through www.communities.gov.uk

7 <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/guidance/index.cfm>

Building civic capacity and leadership

17. Many individuals and organisations have a role to play in defeating terrorism – but voices from within Muslim communities and the actions of Muslim organisations can be more powerful than most. Many have come forward already to make their voices heard. The Government will work with the vast majority of British Muslims who reject violence and who share society's core values. We are fundamentally rebalancing our engagement to work more closely with those organisations displaying proactive leadership on these issues.

18. **Our immediate priorities are to:**

Fundamentally rebalance our engagement towards those organisations that uphold shared values and reject and condemn violent extremism. We have made it clear that it is not acceptable for leadership organisations merely to pay lip service to tackling violent extremism. **Government is giving priority, in its support and funding decisions, to those leadership organisations actively working to tackle violent extremism, supporting community cohesion and speaking out for the vast majority who reject violence.** The Government will also broaden and deepen the range of individuals and groups we work with, in particular with those voices which have too often been excluded – women and young people. We will work with the LGA and others to support and enable similar approaches locally.

Strengthen the role that women can play within their communities. Women can play a vital role in building strong communities and tackling violent extremism. It is important to enable their voices to be heard and empower them to engage with disillusioned youths. There is already important work underway across Government to help Muslim women get on in the workplace and to play a bigger role in civil society. But further specific action is required. We have funded a range of local initiatives aimed at enabling women to play a part in tackling violent extremism. For example, leadership training enables women to develop the skills and build the confidence necessary to be able to influence members of the community more widely. With those organisations we are funding locally, we **will support the publication of a good practice guide on effective initiatives to strengthen the role that Muslim women can play in their communities by Autumn 2007.**

Mosques are community hubs. The Government's dialogue with Muslim women has shown that access to Mosque life is vital for them to engage effectively in the community. Before the summer, **we will organise a series of roundtables with academics, theologians and community leaders to stimulate debate on this important issue and to gain an understanding of why women are sometimes not allowed access.** We will then support and encourage local communities to help break down these barriers.

19. **Moving forward, we will:**

- Promote links between Muslim communities here and overseas to develop joint projects to support the promotion of shared values and to tackle violent extremism, building on existing work with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, such as the Projecting British Islam delegations abroad.
- Work over the coming year to provide additional support to help develop leadership skills. We will build on a pilot of sponsoring individuals through media skills training, ensuring that more Muslim women and young people have the opportunity to participate in this programme.
- Develop and promote mentoring opportunities for young people who would otherwise not have access to support. Our aim is to ensure a coordinated approach that best meets the needs of those who would benefit from such opportunities, widening provision and take up.

Strengthening the role of faith institutions and leaders

20. The overwhelming majority of Muslims condemn terrorism as morally wrong and contrary to the teachings of Islam. But community and faith leaders are not always able to convey their arguments to those vulnerable to violent extremists' messages. It is not for Government to intervene in theological debates. But there is a role for Government in providing support where it is sought or needed. We will support the development of strong faith institutions and leaders capable of engaging effectively with all members of Muslim communities. Many imams still come from overseas; we have introduced new immigration rules for all Ministers of Religion to ensure that those seeking to enter the country meet certain requirements such as basic English skills. But more urgently needs to be done to ensure that imams can connect with all parts of society, particularly young people.

21. **Our immediate priorities are to:**

Work with the Charity Commission to raise standards of governance in mosques. The Charity Commission has a key role to play in supporting faith-based charities, both in strengthening their governance and in promoting the valuable contribution they make to their communities and to wider society. There are concerns from many in Muslim

communities that the governance arrangements of mosques should be strengthened. The Commission's experience is that there are a large number of faith-based organisations which could be registered but do not realise that they could apply for charitable status. They would benefit from registration as a charity – for example by gaining substantial tax benefits (through the ability to reclaim gift-aid on donation) and an increased credibility with the public. As attention turns to the new Charities Act 2006, relevant provisions of which will come in to force on 23rd April 2007, the removal of the existing exception from registration of certain places of worship is expected to trigger more religious organisations and places of worship, including mosques and madrassahs, being aware of the requirements and standards required of those benefiting from charitable status as well as the advantages of registration. The Commission will work with faith communities to encourage registration where this is appropriate, and with faith based charities, with mosques as a priority, to promote best practice, provide advice, guidance and training on issues such as governance, finance and the role of mosques as community centres. **We will provide funding of £600 000, alongside £200 000 earmarked by the Commission itself, to establish a Faith and Social Cohesion Unit within the Charity Commission to support this work.**

Deliver a new fully-accredited Continuous Professional Development Programme for Faith Leaders. The Preventing Extremism Together working groups identified a real need to support the development of the skills of imams and Muslim chaplains as effective community leaders. **The Department for Education and Skills will support the development of an accredited Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Programme for Faith Leaders from September 2007.** This course, which will be developed with key educational organisations (including the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) and key faith organisations, will be available to all faith leaders. It will help imams and other faith leaders understand their responsibilities – relating, for example, to the protection of children – and develop the skills to engage with communities more effectively.

Establish a framework of minimum requirements for all imams engaged by the state. We believe that Government has a duty to ensure the highest possible standards of those imams it engages. **We will therefore work with other departments and community organisations to develop, by early 2008, a framework of minimum standards for all imams and Muslim chaplains engaged by the state.** This work will take account of the work done by the Prison Service Chaplaincy over a number of years to develop eligibility criteria, model competencies and an endorsement process for Muslim Chaplains. It will also draw on the statement of healthcare chaplaincy occupational standards that the Chaplaincy Education and Development Group in the Health sector have in place. Working with relevant Government departments we will develop a framework of standards which will allow for a flexible yet targeted approach for imams

employed by the Prison Service, the health sector, the Ministry of Defence and also colleges and Higher Education institutions.

22. Moving forward, we will:

- Support platforms for mainstream interpretations of the role of Islam in modern societies including by continuing to support, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Radical Middle Way Roadshows⁸, which over 60,000 young people aged 18-30 have attended to date.
- Continue to work with the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) to ensure they are capable of stepping up to the challenge of their role as the national body with responsibility for mosques and imams. MINAB has committed itself to making early progress in five core areas: the accreditation of imams; the development of leadership skills for imams and mosque officials; progress in the inclusion of young people and women; improvement in the governance of mosques and; supporting mosques to contribute to community cohesion and to tackling extremism. We will explore the effectiveness of other routes to drive forward change and gather an evidence base on what works overseas. The Government would greatly welcome early progress on MINAB's important agenda and will do all it can to support this.

Conclusion

23. This document sets out a range of concrete actions by which the Government will work with mainstream Muslim organisations to tackle violent extremism. Most of the actions flow directly from suggestions made to us by those working most actively to tackle these issues in their own communities. These four key strands of work will form the foundation for a long-term response to the threat of violent extremism.
24. Our task is to take direct responsibility for those areas where Government action is required and to provide sustained support and encouragement to those organisations displaying true leadership. We will report annually on the progress we are making on these actions.

8 See <http://www.radicalmiddleway.org.uk/>

