

# FAITH, HOPE AND CLARITY

The Reintegration of Terrorist Offenders  
after Custody

A blueprint for change



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# **FAITH, HOPE AND CLARITY**

The reintegration of terrorist offenders after custody

*A blueprint for change*

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## 1. Introduction

The majority of terrorist offenders convicted in this country will someday be released. Many of them, having served sentences relating to acts of violent extremism, will return to communities where their radicalism was nurtured. They will walk amongst us, attending places of worship, pubs, supermarkets and clubs. Some will pick up the threads of their previous lives, others will remain alienated by their own shame and the disapproval of those in their family circle they have let down. A few will have had the grievances which animated their offending only reinforced by what they perceive as persecution by the state.

Added to these numbers are the returning foreign fighters. It is estimated that 850 people went to fight for ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Security sources believe around 400 of them have returned to the United Kingdom, many combat experienced and some under the radar of the security services. Those who still seek to return, on discovery, may well face further sanction from the criminal justice system and will have resettlement risks and needs that ought to give us acute concern.

Whatever their circumstances and levels of engagement, we ought to be actively exploring what successful reintegration looks like and making preparations. Successful resettlement is in many ways a triumph for civilised values but, more importantly, it safeguards the future security of our country. Individual disengagement from hateful and violent ideologies whether inspired by Islamist extremism, far-right nationalism or any other cause makes us collectively safer and deprives terrorism of the psychological space needed for it to grow and take hold both in heads and on the ground. Terrorists hate normality.

Repentance is a powerful signifier in all the Abrahamic religions. Beyond religion, the act of turning away from previous aberrant behaviour has potent symbolism. How we create circumstances in our communities where repentance can be possible is at least as important going forward as a reactive security response that detects and convicts. Our aim, above feeding the criminal justice conveyor belt with convictions, should be to dramatically slow it down through societal goods.

This report seeks to critically evaluate the capability of the current supervision and support offered to people who have been convicted of extremism-related offences when they leave custody. It will highlight good practice here and abroad and make recommendations for improvement. The journey to repentance - or at least desisting from violence - actually starts at the point of detection and so it will also explore the role of the criminal justice system at every point of contact in the offender's journey. There will be a particular but not exclusive focus on the role faith communities can play in encouraging a return to a lawful life for extremists.

Given that the profile of terrorist related offending in the UK after 2000 is predominantly related to Islamist extremism, it would be unusual if this emphasis was not reflected in this analysis.

However, there are lessons to learn from this country's long history in dealing with ethno-religious terrorism relating to Northern Ireland. Moreover, a resurgence in far-right extremism – and offenders detected - means that it is imperative to examine this

phenomenon and understand the role communities can play in successful re-entry for this group.

We need much more clarity in our thinking about how we engage with those who have caused us sometimes catastrophic harm. The public discourse around such people understandably veers between atavistic loathing and well-meaning but vapid messages of social solidarity for their victims. Neither positions, although perfectly understandable, are ultimately helpful in terms of future community safety. The successful reintegration of terrorist offenders offers huge potential for a safer future. As the numbers of those offenders eligible for parole or who enter the community phase of their penalty will grow over time, so we must put our faith in new ways to control and change their behaviours and have these ready to work.

Ultimately, faith acquires meaning through confidence and trust – both essential building blocks of a strong liberal democracy. Faith also requires imagination and courage. Taking controlled risks to successfully reintegrate terrorists when they return to society is a sign of strength not weakness. I hope this report can add to the discourse in ways to achieve this aim.

## 2. Executive summary:

- Ideologically motivated offenders have individual paths into and out of violence.
- Their numbers are growing and will continue to do so as the state's response to detecting terrorist plots upstream becomes more adept and legislative activism criminalises more people for specifically terrorist labelled offences.
- The offender cohort in the United Kingdom is predominantly Muslim men who have committed offences relating to Islamist extremism.
- Far right extremism is growing but at a slower pace. Far right extremists have yet to demonstrate the same capacity and capability for sophisticated terrorism.
- Changing behaviour is not the same as or as complex as changing belief. We must be clearer about what we can and should do to ensure public safety – and take controlled risks in doing so to respond to an evolving threat.
- Desistence and disengagement are both hard to achieve in disordered prison environments where interventions (if available at all) are generic.
- A small but growing number of ideologically inspired offenders have been released from custody to date. It is likely that this number will grow and be added to by those given non-custodial offences for extremist crime and returning foreign fighters who may or may not be subject to formal sanctions.
- Offenders leaving custody face particular resettlement challenges associated with their ideological mind-set, the experience of prison and the response of the host community.
- In the United Kingdom, the state currently has an almost complete monopoly over the management of such offenders.
- That management is focused necessarily on control and coercive measures to maintain public safety.
- This narrow focus may aggravate feelings of alienation and isolation which are risk factors for further offending.
- A new partnership between the state and the community may create new ways of reintegrating terrorist offenders with the community and keeping them (and us) safe in the long term.
- This can be achieved through a variant of a tried and tested conceptual approach for the management of high risk/high harm sex offenders through circles of trust and accountability around the offender created by ordinary people in the community who volunteer to help. The concept relies primarily on high quality, long term mentoring relationships between the offender and individuals in this group.
- There is clear evidence that a high quality, long term mentoring relationship helps offenders stop offending and build crime-free futures.
- 'Re-Humanising' the relationship between terrorist offenders and their potential or actual victims can be important for disengagement.

- **Faith groups have a role to play in a supportive community network. In particular, local Mosques could supply suitably vetted, selected and trained volunteers to support this approach and increase the chance of positive engagement.**
- **This type of partnership would have incidental benefits in terms of community cohesion, perception, resilience to extremism, trust in public institutions and a means of allowing ordinary people to participate in protecting national security.**
- **There are many logistical, security and organisational challenges associated with the 'circles' concept. These are surmountable and the benefits outweigh the risks.**
- **Conceptually, this approach could also be applied to other groups of violent extremists, as evidence from Europe demonstrates.**
- **The Ministry of Justice, in partnership with the Home Office, ought to commission a pilot scheme to test the value of this experimental approach.**

### 3. Faithful offending:

***'How fortunate for leaders that men do not think.'***

#### **Adolf Hitler**

Ideologically motivated offending requires faith in a set of ideas or principles which explain, direct and justify criminal activity. While religious faith has a strong contemporary association with extremism a confident belief in secular ideologies can be an equally potent driver. Terrorism exists as a subset of both these forms of activity because it employs violence to its end:

*'the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.'*<sup>1</sup>

It's worth looking in more detail at the different types of ideologically motivated offending that deploy violence. The definitions below have been created by the Global Terrorism Database<sup>2</sup> and provide a useful frame of reference.

- Left-wing extremism: Violence in support of a revolutionary socialist agenda and the view that one is a protector of the populace. Characterised by disdain for capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism, and by a Marxist political focus. Embraces other forms of decentralised existence such as Anarchism.
- Environmental extremism: Violence in support of biodiversity and bio-centric equality. Characterised by the belief that the earth and/or animals are in imminent danger, that the government and parts of society such as corporations are responsible for this danger, that this danger will ultimately result in the destruction of the modern environment and/or whole species, and that the political system is incapable and/or unwilling to take action to preserve the environment.
- Right-wing extremism: Violence in support of the belief that personal and/or national way of life is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent. Characterised by anti-globalism, racial or ethnic supremacy or nationalism, suspicion of centralized federal authority, reverence for individual liberty, and/or belief in conspiracy theories that involve grave threats to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty.
- Religious extremism: Violence in support of a particular faith-based belief system and its corresponding cultural practices and views, sometimes in opposition to competing belief systems. Characterised by opposition to purported enemies of God, nonbelievers, or heretics; striving to forcibly insert religion into the political or social sphere through the imposition of strict religious tenets or laws.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START\\_IdeologicalMotivationsOfTerrorismInUS\\_Nov2017.pdf](https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_IdeologicalMotivationsOfTerrorismInUS_Nov2017.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

- Nationalist/separatist extremism: Violence in support of ethnic or geo-political self-determination. Characterised by regional concentration and a history of organized political autonomy, traditional rule, or regional government, and a commitment to gaining or regaining political independence. Single-issue extremist violence in support of advancing a specific or narrowly defined cause. This belief may be associated with any space on the political spectrum.

In the United Kingdom since the turn of the century, the predominant threat from terrorist violence has been inspired by forms of Islamist extremism<sup>3</sup> (IE). There is considerable debate over whether this form of terrorism is a wholly religious or political phenomenon or if it exists somewhere on a continuum placed by a large number of different variables including time, location, opportunity, affiliation and perpetrators. For example, the July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 terrorist attack on London was inspired by Al Qaeda involving extensive training and preparation.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the vehicle and knife attack in Westminster in 2017 was carried out spontaneously by a lone terrorist with no formal affiliations in revenge for 'western military actions in Muslim countries.'<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the murder of Akram Ali outside Finsbury mosque by a far right extremist was carried out by a 'loner' who was apparently radicalised by a television drama and the internet<sup>6</sup>.

The drivers for this profile of terrorist offending are of clear relevance in determining what works to enable reintegration. The individual's personal journey towards radicalised violence will invariably offer some clues as to what will assist in recovery of a healthy identity on release from custody.

First we must examine the scale of the challenge. What numbers of offenders are we talking about? What sentences do they serve under what legislation? When are they likely to be released from prison and under what conditions?

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for the prosecution of all crimes in England and Wales. In relation to terrorism, it employs a specialist unit, the Special Crime and Counter Terrorism Division (SCCTD) to do this work. The throughput of the unit illustrates the increasing numbers of offenders being put through the criminal justice system for extremism related offences.

*In the year ending March 2017, the number of terrorism trials rose by 55% compared to the previous 12 months and this has continued with recent figures showing a 16% rise in the year ending September 2017. In that period, SCCTD convicted 69 people for terrorism offences, up from 61 in the year ending September 2016.*

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<sup>3</sup> In terms of the number of attacks and plots detected and the disproportionately high number of fatalities caused – 88.

<sup>4</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/30/world/al-qaeda-documents-london-bombings/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/khalid-masood-whatsapp-westminster-london-attack-parliament-message-isis-terror-network-contacts-a7649206.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42886464>

*There has been a 54% increase in the number of arrests for terrorism-related offences in the year ending September 2017 compared with the previous year (from 259 to 400 arrests)<sup>7</sup>*

The significant increase in arrests is largely due to the response to the acts of terrorism in Manchester and London in 2017. It can also be related to a number of other related factors:

- Increased pressure on politicians to respond to terrorist outrages.
- Greater permissiveness within society for individual liberties to be curtailed in defence of national security.
- Increased sophistication of police and security service response
- Increased vigilance from the public after high profile anti-terrorism campaigns.
- Increased use of Terrorist Act legislation to catch and convict those who support or peripherally enable or fail to report terrorist planning.<sup>8</sup>
- More vigorous use of penalties to criminalise those accused of ‘glorifying terrorism.’

The cumulative effect of this legal activism and state response is that a small but growing number of people are serving relatively short sentences for offences related to terrorism/extremism who will be released relatively soon. They are joined by an increasing number of ‘heavier end’ offenders who are coming to the end of longer offences and a small but growing number of offenders who have been convicted of terrorism or extremism related offences given non-custodial disposals. The characteristics of the new post 9/11 generation of ideologically inspired offender population are described in the tables which follow provided to Parliament by the CPS and Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).

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<sup>7</sup> Taken from <https://www.cps.gov.uk/terrorism>

<sup>8</sup> For example according to CPS data 25 people were convicted under ‘planning’ legislation – ranging from peripheral involvement to ‘mastermind’ in the year ending September 2016, up from 11 in the previous 12 months.

<b>Proceedings and Convictions by Act</b>				
	<b>2014<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2015<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2016<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2017<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>TACT offences</b>				
Terrorism Act 2000 proceedings	6	15	21	29
Terrorism Act 2000 convictions	5	10	20	24
% conviction	83%	67%	95%	83%
To serve sentence in community on expiry of prison sentence	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Terrorism Act 2006 proceedings	5	18	36	42
Terrorism Act 2006 convictions	5	15	31	38
% conviction	100%	83%	86%	90%
To serve sentence in community on expiry of prison sentence	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Other Terrorism Legislation proceedings <sup>2</sup>	3	1	4	3
Other Terrorism Legislation convictions <sup>2</sup>	1	1	4	3
% conviction	33%	100%	100%	100%
To serve sentence in community on expiry of prison sentence	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
<b>Total TACT offence proceedings</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>74</b>
Total TACT offence convictions	11	26	55	65
Total % conviction	79%	76%	90%	88%
<b>Non-TACT offence proceedings</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>
Non-TACT offence convictions	11	16	6	4
% conviction	69%	94%	100%	100%
To serve sentence in community on expiry of prison sentence	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
<b>Total all offences proceedings</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>78</b>
Total all offences convictions	22	42	61	69
Total all % conviction	73%	82%	91%	88%
% TACT offences	47%	67%	91%	95%
% Non-TACT Offences	53%	33%	9%	5%
<sup>1</sup> Year to September				
<sup>2</sup> Includes Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011.				
<b>SOURCES:</b> Crown Prosecution Service Counter Terrorism Division - "Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000: quarterly update to September 2017: annual data tables" accessed on 02/03/2018 at <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-september-2017">https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-september-2017</a> , Tab C.02 and Tab C.03				

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<sup>9</sup> 'TBC' in tables above relates to figures on community supervision which the Ministry of Justice failed to provide through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the author in April 2017 on the grounds that the numbers were not sufficiently high enough to guarantee privacy.

Non-custodial sentences for terror-related offences				
	2014 <sup>1</sup>	2015 <sup>1</sup>	2016 <sup>1</sup>	2017 <sup>1</sup>
<b>TACT offences</b>	0	0	3	5
<b>Non-TACT offences</b>	0	1	0	1
<b>Total all offences</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>% all sentences</b>	0%	2%	5%	9%

<sup>1</sup> Year to September

**SOURCE:** Crown Prosecution Service Counter Terrorism Division - "Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000: quarterly update to September 2017: annual data tables" accessed on 02/03/2018 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-september-2017>, tab C.04

P.01: Number of persons in custody for terrorism-related offences, by ideology									
<i>Numbers</i>									Great Britain
Category of prisoner	30 Sep 2015	31 Dec 2015	31 Mar 2016	30 Jun 2016	30 Sep 2016	31 Dec 2016	31 Mar 2017	30 Jun 2017	30 Sep 2017
Islamist Extremist	130	138	139	142	152	163	164	185	187
Far Right	5	5	4	6	10	10	9	10	16
Other	5	4	3	3	7	8	7	9	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>213</b>

*Source: Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and Scottish Prisons Service (SPS)*

'-' = Nil

- See the user guide for a description of the prisoner categories used in this bulletin.
- Includes persons on remand as well as those sentenced to prison custody for a criminal offence.
- The number of prisoners broken down by ideology is not available for previous years.

**A.09: Gender of persons arrested, charged and convicted after a charge for terrorism-related offences<sup>1</sup>**

<i>Numbers</i>										<b>Great Britain</b>				
Gender	Jul-Sep 2015	Oct-Dec 2015	Jan-Mar 2016	Apr-Jun 2016	Jul-Sep 2016	Oct-Dec 2016	Jan-Mar 2017	Apr-Jun 2017	Jul-Sep 2017	Total year ending		Change <sup>2</sup>		Total since Sep 11 2001
										30 Sep 2016	30 Sep 2017	Number	%	
<b>Arrests</b>														
Males	39	64	38	55	73	67	71	119	85	230	342	112	49	3,410
Females	9	9	3	9	8	8	14	24	12	29	58	29	*	343
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>3,753</b>
<b>Charged for terrorism-related offences<sup>3,5</sup></b>														
Males	15	22	19	18	33	16	25	24	17	92	82	-10	-11	920
Females	2	2	2	4	3	2	5	6	2	11	15	4	*	89
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>1,009</b>
<b>Convicted after a charge for a terrorism-related offence<sup>4,5</sup></b>														
Males	11	21	14	14	25	11	16	-	1	74	28	-46	*	643
Females	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	5	2	-3	*	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>-49</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>695</b>

Source: National Counter-Terrorism Police Operations Centre (NCTPOC)

' - ' = Nil

' \* ' = Not applicable

1. Data presented here are based on the latest position with each case as at the date of data provision from NCTPOC (6 November 2017).

2. Difference in numbers and percentages between the totals for the 12 months ending 30 September 2016 and 30 September 2017.

3. Includes all charges under terrorism legislation and all charges under non-terrorism legislation where the offence was considered by the NCTPOC to be terrorism related.

4. Includes convictions for both terrorism-related and non-terrorism-related offences, where the initial charge was terrorism related.

5. As more cases reach completion, the number of charges/convictions are likely to increase. More recent periods are likely to have a larger number of incomplete cases. This should be borne in mind when comparing trends over time.

**P.04: Number of persons in custody for terrorism-related offences, by self-declared religion<sup>1</sup>, as at 30 September 2017**

<i>Numbers</i>	<b>Great Britain</b>
Religion	Terrorism legislation or terrorism related <sup>2</sup>
<b>Christian</b>	<b>13</b>
Anglican	4
Free Church	-
Roman Catholic	6
Other Christian	3
<b>Muslim</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Buddhist</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Hindu</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Jewish</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sikh</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>No religion</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Other religious groups</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not declared</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>

Source: Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and Scottish Prisons Service (SPS)

' - ' = Nil

1. Prisoners self-declared their religion on entry to prison. Prisoners may change religion while in prison. These changes will not be accounted for in the figures.

2. See user guide for a description of the prisoner classifications used in this bulletin.

## Significant facts:

- 87.7% of extremist prisoners in custody in September 2017 were inspired by Islamist ideologies.
- 87.3% of those are self-declared Muslims. There is also a disproportionate number of Muslims convicted of **all** offences in the prison population when compared with their community representation.<sup>10</sup>
- 695 people have been convicted of terrorism related offences since 9.11.2001
- 52 of these are female (7.4%)
- 700 prisoners in custody have been detected through screening as 'at risk' of being radicalised.<sup>11</sup>
- Between January 2015 and September 2017 20 offenders sentenced under TACT legislation have been released from custody.<sup>12</sup>

The offender profile in the tables above shows that a significant number of offenders convicted under Terrorism Act legislation are likely to remain in custody in the foreseeable future. Severe sentences are commonplace for those directly involved in planning or carrying out terrorist attacks which are iconic and/or result in multiple casualties. Two convicted terrorists, Michael Adbolajo and Thomas Mair, from extreme ends of the ideological spectrum have been given 'whole life' tariffs for their actions which means they will almost certainly die in prison<sup>13</sup>. However, the vast majority of terrorist offenders will eventually be released into the community in England and Wales. There they will be supervised by the National Probation Service<sup>14</sup> and other multi agency arrangements for an often significantly greater amount of time than other offenders due to their potential dangerousness.

The successful reintegration of such offenders poses huge challenges but also exceptional opportunities. Their riskiness is exceptional but so too is the potential to demonstrate remorse and, by example, deter others from following in their footsteps. As has already been said, the key to meeting these challenges is to understand what motivates extremist offenders to offend in the first instance and how this can be related to efforts to prepare them for successful re-entry into society.

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<sup>10</sup> The Lammy Report in 2017 stated that 13,200 prisoners or 15% of the total prison population was Muslim compared with a community representation of 5%. The proportion reaches close to half in some High Security prisons.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-bolsters-crackdown-on-extremism-in-prisons>

<sup>12</sup> Data from a FOIA response to the author dated 9.4.17

<sup>13</sup> Out of a total of approximately 70 prisoners serving 'whole life' prison sentences for non-terrorist crimes

<sup>14</sup> Different probation services operate in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Both jurisdictions handle extremist offenders and will be referred to later in this report.

## What mobilises religious terrorism?

While it is essential to avoid stereotyping groups of offenders with heterogeneous characteristics, it is useful to establish a benchmark for what we mean by terrorism inspired by religious belief.

*'Religious terrorism is a type of political violence motivated by an absolute belief that an otherworldly power has sanctioned—and commanded—terrorist violence for the greater glory of the faith. Acts committed in the name of the faith will be forgiven by the otherworldly power and perhaps rewarded in an afterlife.'*<sup>15</sup>

The data shows that people who identify as Muslim are by some margin the largest group of those convicted of an extremist related offence.

On 31 March 2017 there were 186 individuals in prison classed as terrorist or extremist prisoners: 183 were being held having been convicted of, or on remand for, terrorism related offences; 3 were classed as domestic extremists or separatists.

On 31 March 2017, 105 (57%) of the prisoners in custody for terrorism related offences defined themselves as Asian or Asian British and 38 (21%) White.

The majority (90%) of prisoners in custody for terrorism related offences on 31 March 2017 declared themselves as Muslim. Nine prisoners (5%) were of a Christian denomination.<sup>16</sup>

So what makes people want to kill in the name of a religion? What factors are involved and what can we learn from this information in terms of reintegration post-release for all ideologically motivated offenders?

There is little agreement in academic study in this area even about what defines a religious terrorist. Indeed, there is quite a lot of evidence to suggest that the apparent distinction between, for example, Islamist and far right terrorism is far more blurred than one might accept at face value. Professor William Cavanaugh, writing in the Harvard Divinity review takes issue with what he sees as an artificial divide created when:

*'...authors in question attempt to explain why religion is so prone to violence. Although theories vary, we can sort them into three categories: religion is absolutist, religion is divisive, and religion is irrational. Many authors appeal to more than one of these arguments. In the face of evidence that so-called secular ideologies and institutions can be just as absolutist, divisive, or irrational, these authors tend to erect an arbitrary barrier between "secular" and "religious" ideologies and institutions, and ignore the former.'*<sup>17</sup>

The criminological study of how and why Islamist extremists carry out murderous attacks against innocent people is still in its infancy. There is, for example, much work still to do to explore the relationship between desistance and time in a group of

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/33557\\_6.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/33557_6.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> House of Commons Library briefing paper Number CBP7613, 6 October 2017

<sup>17</sup> <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/springsummer2007/does-religion-cause-violence>

offenders in a relatively recent timeframe who are in extreme cases only at or near the starting point of their sentences. One theory which seeks to explain why such offenders are able to discard their common humanity to carry out atrocious acts comes from Neutralisation Theory<sup>18</sup> – a description of the methods that offenders use to enable them to carry out illegitimate acts.

The theory includes four methods used by offenders to allow them to offend by neutralising values in themselves which would normally prohibit them from that course of action. These are:

- **Denial of responsibility.** The terrorist offender will propose that they were victims of circumstance or were forced into actions, including mass murder, beyond their control.
- **Denial of injury.** The terrorist offender believes that his actions while cruel are necessary and will have no personal consequences since they will lead him to paradise and the world to an Islamic Caliphate.
- **Denial of the victim.** The terrorist offender believes that civilians are complicit in oppression against Islam as they support governments who occupy and attack ‘Muslim lands.’ Therefore they become dehumanised and legitimate targets.
- **Condemnation of the condemners.** The offenders maintain that those who condemn their actions are themselves corrupted, hypocritical and depraved unbelievers. Thus jihadists often employ *takfir* – The ‘othering’ of infidels who deserve death.<sup>19</sup>

The methods listed above all depend to some extent on moralising what would otherwise be aberrant behaviour. Dehumanisation as a process seems like a particularly significant precursor to religiously inspired terrorist offending. Those drawn into forms of Islamist extremism are provided with:

*‘moral justifications for violent acts that seem to breach Islamic law, such as suicidal bombings and hostage-taking. These efforts are designed not only to persuade themselves of the morality of their actions but to preserve their integrity in the eyes of other nations. The religious code permits neither suicide nor the terrorizing of innocent people. On the one hand, the clerics justify such acts by invoking situational imperatives and utilitarian reasons, namely that tyrannical circumstances drive oppressed people to resort to unconventional means in order to rout aggressors who wield massive destructive power. On the other hand, they reconstrue terrorist acts as conventional means in which dying in a suicidal bombing for a moral cause is no different than dying at the hands of an enemy soldier.’<sup>20</sup>*

The process of ‘dehumanisation’ takes place when the subjects of violence are rendered inhuman or less than human because they do not adhere to the perpetrator’s religious affiliation. This can of course occur within sectarian religious faiths such as

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<sup>18</sup> After Matza and Sykes *Delinquency and Drift* (1964)

<sup>19</sup> After Bernard (2016)

<sup>20</sup> Bandura, A. (1990). Mechanisms of moral disengagement in terrorism.

Islam as well as between religions and in relation to ‘unbelievers.’ The process of ‘othering’ to create the moral circumstances for violence has been widely observed in some of the darkest chapters of our recent history. The Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda are two examples where a dehumanising process allowed people to take part in, collude with or simply be indifferent to enormous cruelty and suffering.

The dehumanising process within religiously inspired terrorism also applies to the target audience of extremists and, more particularly, their victims. In the United Kingdom where domestic terrorism has been a feature in the national consciousness for over 40 years, resilience against terrorist acts draws strength from a dehumanised enemy carrying out indiscriminate acts of violence against defenceless and innocent people. Given the gruesome nature of recent mass-casualty attacks it is difficult not to have sympathy with a perception that we are confronted by ‘monsters.’

**Yet this seductive caricature is problematic both in terms of understanding the motivations of those perpetrators and the risk it carries in drawing in and possibly radicalising otherwise blameless co-religionists. The uncomfortable truth is that religious extremists who commit terrorist acts are behaving in ways which they regard as rational, moral and even virtuous. If we accept that re-socialising such people will make us more not less safe, we cannot operate effectively in policy terms from a mind-set which doesn’t at least acknowledge this self-conferred legitimacy.**

Moreover, the demonisation of Islamist extremists who make up the vast majority of those imprisoned for terrorist offences in this country risks being interpreted as an attack on all Muslims. It is ironic that, globally, Muslims are victimised by Islamist extremism more than any other ethnic or religious group. Here in the United Kingdom, the conflation of Islamist terrorism with wider suspicion towards Muslims in our communities is particularly relevant to young Asians with fluid identities.

*‘Aside from the fitful contemporary atmosphere around national security, young Asians in Britain navigate their identities in the midst of various pulls and pushes. Second-generation South-Asian British Muslims find themselves in between the robust cultural ties with heritage cemented by their parents and the diffuse needs and demands of white British culture. The identities of young British Muslims are thus contested in many ways, most obviously between sections of British society that refuse to accept their ‘Britishness’ and the pressure exerted by elders to retain and nurture Islamic cultures and traditions.’<sup>21</sup>*

Some research posits that the dehumanising or de-civilising process which allows perpetrators to carry out appalling violence is affiliated with a prior process of brutalisation which may relate to the isolation described above, that is to say that a

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<sup>21</sup> ‘I’m a Muslim, but I’m not a terrorist’: Victimisation, risky identities and the performance of safety: Mythen, Walkgate and Khan (2009)

small number of people who already have strong feelings of social and societal disconnect may begin their journey into radicalised violence from there.

*'At this point, they may well start to feel even more like detached outsiders and even as enemies of whatever Western country they live in. Nevertheless, they are likely to have knowledge of the 'global jihadist movement,' as well as a belief that Islam has a 'golden past' as an almost Utopian society. This kind of fantasy-based knowledge and its related praise gossip tends to give them a sense of superiority and a feeling that non-Muslims are inferior. The existence of the 'global jihadist movement' offers a way out of their detached-outsider status in the West and many travel abroad to undertake 'jihad.'*<sup>22</sup>

Terrorist offenders and other extremists convicted, released from custody (or returning from abroad) therefore step back into already contested often geographically narrow spaces where versions of Islam and national identity compete and interact with each other in an environment which is perceived to be risky. The ideologies, beliefs and behaviour that mobilised their offending may be intact, fractured or defunct. Their resocialisation in an environment fraught with surveillance, suspicion, shame, adulation and fear is far from assured.

For reintegration to work effectively, the process must be built around the extremists' individual experience of this process where he or she was able to dehumanise large sections of the population. The possibility of a new identity needs to be created without necessarily the need for the wholesale rejection and destruction of the old one. This is why the reintegration process should start with the tactical aim of desistance as opposed to the strategic goal of disengagement.

### **Desistance and disengagement:**

It is important to emphasise the differences which exist between desistance and disengagement as these terms are often used interchangeably but in reality mean distinct if related processes whereby an offender abandons his or her violent intent. This has implications for the development and appropriateness of interventions pre and post release.

Desistance from violent extremism is widely regarded as a process whereby the offender changes his behaviour, making a conscious decision to step away from instrumental violence in pursuit of an ideological goal. Unlike disengagement, this process may leave the belief system which justifies and supports violence intact. Desistance motives range along a spectrum of practical responses – perhaps as a function of age, infirmity, confinement, surveillance or a change in life circumstances such as marriage or becoming a parent.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Established and Outsiders': Brutalisation Processes and the Development of 'Jihadist Terrorists' Dunning (2016)

Disengagement, by contrast, is a process whereby the offender completely abandons the belief system which drove his or her offending. It implies a moral and permanent dimension to the change as opposed to one driven by pragmatism and situational factors. Disengagement can be temporary and is reversible under certain circumstances. Disengagement, to the extent it has been shown to work on contemporary terrorist offenders, implies a much longer term process and one which is more specific to the offender's personal circumstances and life journey including both protective and predictive factors for extremist ideology.

The reintegration of terrorist offenders in the community is still a process in its infancy across the world. This is due to a number of factors:

- Punitive punishment regimes delivering very long custodial sentences.
- A lack of a compelling body of research on effective responses.
- A diversity of global approaches reflecting cultural and threat differences.
- The political difficulty of justifying special attention to high risk/high harm individuals beyond punitive control.
- Offenders in other countries returning to jurisdictions who are unknown to authorities or not subject to domestic law for their activities.

**Deradicalisation:**

I prefer to use the term 'disengagement' in this paper (except when quoting others) when describing the complex offender journey from ideologically inspired violence to the ultimate rejection of that belief system. This is a personal choice although I have never felt comfortable about using a descriptor which implies a 'binary' existence. 'Disengagement' feels like a more appropriate and realistic way of describing the necessary self-directed change required to gradually 'shrug off' a toxic worldview.

#### 4. Faith in the system:

***‘The eyes of others our prisons: their thoughts, our cages.’***

##### **Virginia Woolf**

In the countries of the United Kingdom, those imprisoned for terrorist or extremism related offences will be predominantly supervised in the community post-custody by agencies of the state<sup>23</sup>.

The majority of this supervision will take place under instructions produced by the prison service in 2014, ‘Managing terrorist and extremist offenders in the community.’<sup>24</sup>

This instruction provides the framework and rationale for managing extremism related offenders, ‘through the gate,’ requiring preparation by prisons and the National Probation Service who are responsible for the management of high-risk offenders. The summary of the objective for this framework is:

*‘This Probation Instruction aims to ensure that those offenders who have committed offences of terrorism, included in Schedule 15, or terrorism related offences or whose offences are linked to other forms of extremism, or who are vulnerable to engagement in forms of extremism are correctly **identified, assessed and managed** within offender management.’*

The instruction has been recently updated to take account of:

- Changes in the Government’s strategic counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST to acknowledge an emerging threat of far-right terrorism
- Significant reforms of the probation system through the ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ process.
- To accommodate the existing multi-agency approach for monitoring dangerous offenders after release.

The practical reality of managing a multi-agency relationship based on the sharing of sensitive security information cannot be overlooked and is highly relevant to the development of effective reintegration.

Special arrangements for managing high risk/high harm individuals released from custody have been in place in England and Wales (with Scottish and Northern Irish variants) since 2000. These teams which involve police, probation and other ‘responsible agencies working together are known as Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements or MAPPA

By far the largest number of cases managed by MAPPA were and remain sex-offenders or those who pose a risk in the community due to non-ideologically motivated dangerousness. This coupled with a dramatically smaller caseload means that specialist police and counter terrorism agencies with a culture of secrecy such

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<sup>23</sup> This assumes a sentence which carries a period of mandatory community supervision

<sup>24</sup> National Offender Management Service (NOMS) 10/14

as SO15 and MI5 have had less time to develop trustful relationships with other partners. A study by the RAND Corporation into how well MAPPA functioned in managing terrorist offenders found examples of this:

*'it's... like a micro version of MAPPA in the sense that the problems that we had when MAPPA first started about getting probation on board and working alongside probation and not just probation but other agencies, and the police, encouraging them to be more forthcoming with information... because people are very guarded initially.'*<sup>25</sup>

The absence of any bespoke predictive tool to identify the risk of terrorist reoffending is another important factor. There is a generic tool for all offenders – OaSys – but doubt exists about the effectiveness of this tool as a predictor of future risk because:

- Common criminogenic 'flags' may be absent. In other words joblessness and anti-social behaviour may be absent in this cohort which would otherwise be predictors of future offending.
- Extremist offenders may have no prior convictions which is another important predictive factor in OaSys.

Another highly relevant problem highlighted by the RAND report relates to the cultural 'dissonance' between professionals and extremist offenders. This was neatly summed up by a forensic psychiatrist working for the probation service:

*'If I was to sit down with a terrorist, I just feel that the ability for that individual to relate to my experience and me to relate to theirs, it is far removed from any other offence type for me... the cultural differences somehow ... make it hard.'*

Finally, the motivation and commitment of the offender to co-operate with statutory authorities is problematic. There is a strong association between those who display or have acquired radical beliefs in custody and oppositional behaviour<sup>26</sup>. It is unlikely that those terrorist offenders who leave custody with their ideology intact perceive their engagement with the state in a positive light.

As one probation professional in the RAND study put it:

*'One of the issues about this group is that for some of them, they have an anti-West standpoint and will not engage in any way because you're authority. So one of the things we're developing is a motivational engagement intervention which ... doesn't talk about their offending in any way, just looks at what's important to them in their lives, and their issues in their lives and their life in the future.'*

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<sup>25</sup> Senior probation officer interviewed for RAND report on MAPPA and terrorist offenders (2016)  
[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR441.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR441.html)

<sup>26</sup> As revealed in the Independent review of Islamist extremism in prisons, probation and youth justice Acheson (2016)

On the contrary, it is also quite possible that the positive ‘disruption’ caused by being engaged with professionally by someone from another culture could be beneficial as this Ministry of Justice professional put it:

*‘For someone who might not have had really any contact outside a fairly narrow group of Muslim people, to have someone from the hated group, and I’m not saying all our staff achieve this, but the best of our staff do... to form an alliance and form a relationship...just that, is very important in beginning to get people to question some of their assumptions around how they construct the world.’*

Their successful reintegration would seem to depend ultimately on a careful blend of control and encouragement. It is unlikely that they regard the MAPPA system - dominated by understandable concerns of control and risk from state agencies - as acting in their interests.

As unpalatable as this concern might seem for people who may have planned for, caused or facilitated horrific harm, it is one we must pay attention to in the design of an effective re-entry process for these offenders which keeps them – and us – safe.

It is also worth dwelling on the impact of imprisonment itself as a motivating or demotivating factor for successful reintegration. Our prison system is struggling in many ways to maintain basic levels of decency and control due to a combination of understaffing and overcrowding. Within this febrile environment the threat of radicalisation is growing. Insufficient staff, poorly trained and lacking confidence, have been unable to counter the spread of hateful ideologies pedalled by sophisticated and charismatic prisoners. Ungoverned spaces, taken over by gangs - some of these ideologically motivated - flourish. A lack of training, supervision and proper management means that prison Imams who ought to be front and centre in the battle to counter extremism have neither the tools nor sometimes the will to be effective.

Moreover, the offending behaviour tools which have been created to help extremists tackle their identity based offending are at best generic and primitive and at worst able to be manipulated by offenders to feign disengagement. The lack of engagement by extremist offenders was starkly revealed in a Sky News investigation in November 2016<sup>27</sup>. It found that of the 583 people given custodial sentences for terrorism since September 2001, almost 75% (418) had been released from custody. It found that 2/3 of those imprisoned refused to engage with deradicalisation programmes available then.

Although these figures include those given short sentences and may well also reflect the availability and suitability of programmes, it gives a disturbing shape to the numbers of released extremists who may not have had their offending behaviour challenged in any meaningful way.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://news.sky.com/story/warning-as-hundreds-of-jailed-terrorists-back-on-uk-streets-10639848>

Finally, the lack of a coherent strategy to understand the threat of extremism properly or take action against it has meant that in some instances, prisons have become incubators for extremism allowing radicalisers and prisoners vulnerable to hateful and anti-British ideas relatively free access to each other.

While these deficiencies are being tackled, the fact remains that a permissive environment for extremist ideas has been allowed to grow unchecked and this will have a direct impact on the mindset, motivation and values of some of those imprisoned for extremism or terrorist related offences. It also creates a new and dangerous subset of risky offenders – those who may have been imprisoned for ‘ordinary’ offences who are emerging after relatively short periods of custody having been radicalised by subversive elements in custody. The dangers posed by these offenders are still poorly understood – in part because the systems which may identify them as being at risk have failed or because they have completed their sentences entirely ‘below the radar’ in lower security prisons with neither the capacity nor capability to pick up their offending. Any effective re-integration process can only work if those at risk of continuing or new extremist offending are picked up and communication goes ‘through the gate’ to agencies, ahead of the offender’s release.

In summary, the challenges attached to extremist offenders emerging from our criminal justice system are formidable in terms of their successful re-entry into the community. Their past and future offending has been shaped by an experience unlikely to have been positive with few meaningful opportunities to explore other forms of being. This depressing reality is underlined by the paucity of effective treatment in custody for those convicted of extremist offences. There is also some concern that this, coupled with more punitive sentencing for those offenders peripheral to actual terrorist planning, might actually increase their dangerousness in custody and on release. The House of Commons Justice select committee reported on proposals to increase sentences for terrorist offenders. The committee had sought views from the Parole Board who said:

*‘In the Board’s assessment, there are concerns that increasing the penalties for less serious offenders will result in them becoming more likely to commit terrorist acts when they are released. The Board goes on to observe: Most of the rest of Europe is devising interventions in the community to deradicalise less serious offenders. These programmes are more likely to be successful in the community than in prison where the influence of extremist inmates is likely to be stronger.’*

These comments plainly illustrate the value and importance of community based interventions to reintegrate offenders after custody.

It will continue to be shaped by official power which controls, curtails and supervises freedom. This power will be applied differentially according to risk algorithms which are not designed specifically for them and by people largely culturally disconnected from their experience. Their needs will be as diverse as the factors which led them into their offending and they may experience feelings of shame, alienation and dislocation unique to their offender profile. Their prospects for employment will likely be even more constrained than those of ‘ordinary decent criminals.’ Their prospects for desistance and disengagement will depend on a response that meets these variables and allows

them to buy into a process which calls on them, essentially, to jettison what may be deeply rooted beliefs and behaviours.

## 5. Faith in the future:

***'Where there is ruin, there is hope for a treasure.'***

### **Rumi**

This section examines what community based reintegration strategies exist here and abroad and what role faith communities might play in existing or potential provision moving forward.

Comparing any programmes seeking to deradicalise offenders of this nature around the world is not a simple exercise, in part because of unreliable data and in part due to a country/culture specific approach.

*'Although the past few years have seen some reports attempting to compare various programs, these comparisons typically fail to identify anything beyond the most public and superficial features of the programs, neglecting an analysis of the metrics, methodologies, and actual data necessary for systematic evaluation.....Identifying which programs appear to be most successful (a task often expected of such reports) is not as important as understanding how and why a given program effectively reduces the risk of terrorist re-engagement.'*<sup>28</sup>

Listed below are some examples of programmes used in other countries which engage with those engaged with both Muslim and Far Right offending. There are also examples of other community based programmes which could be adapted for use to challenge an extremist mindset.

#### **a. PRAC Strategy, Saudi Arabia (Boucek, 2008)**

One of the first comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies from the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks was orchestrated by Saudi Arabia. PRAC (Prevention, Rehabilitation and Aftercare) is popular among scholars because of a three-pronged effort to break and replace all levels of offenders' commitment to violent extremism. The re-integration process tackles affective (social factors), pragmatic (logistical factors), and ideological bonds. There is a strong emphasis on counselling. While the process is run by the regime, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) frequently contribute to the work. For example, the Centennial Fund grants loans for released prisoners to help them start in business. It is also noteworthy that the programme uses cultural norms and traditions to influence deradicalisation.

#### **b. IMAN Green ReEntry Program, Chicago<sup>29</sup>**

The plight of formerly incarcerated individuals, predominantly from the Muslim community, who face barriers to employment and community reintegration has been a cornerstone of IMAN's work since its inception. Through Green ReEntry, IMAN

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<sup>28</sup> Horgan et al (2012) The future of terrorist 'deradicalisation' programmes.

<sup>29</sup> Inner city Muslim Action Network

provides transitional housing, life skills education, and sustainable construction training for returning citizens in Chicago and Atlanta. Green ReEntry cohorts now utilise an intergenerational, mentorship-based model that facilitates personal and professional growth.

### **c. Good Lives Model (GLM), Multinational**

The Good Lives Model (GLM) is a framework of offender rehabilitation which, given its holistic nature, addresses the limitations of the traditional risk management approach. The GLM has been adopted as a grounding theoretical framework by several sex offender treatment programmes internationally and is now being applied successfully in a case management setting for other offenders including violent extremists.

The GLM is a strengths-based approach to offender rehabilitation, and is therefore premised on the idea that we need to build capabilities and strengths in people, in order to reduce their risk of reoffending. It recognises that reducing criminological needs is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition, for effective interventions. GLM assumes that offenders, like all humans, value certain states of mind, personal characteristics, and experiences, which are defined as “primary goods”. These are:

1. Life (including healthy living and functioning)
2. Knowledge (how well informed one feels about things that are important to them)
3. Excellence in play (hobbies and recreational pursuits)
4. Excellence in work (including mastery experiences)
5. Excellence in agency (autonomy, power and self-directedness)
6. Inner peace (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress)
7. Relatedness (including intimate, romantic, and familial relationships)
8. Community (connection to wider social groups)
9. Spirituality (in the broad sense of finding meaning and purpose in life)
10. Pleasure (feeling good in the here and now)
11. Creativity (expressing oneself through alternative forms).

GLM appears to be a powerful psychosocial construct for rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, but has yet to be fully incorporated into any programme designed specifically for violent extremist offenders.

#### **d. Violence Prevention Network, Germany (VPN, 2018)**

Whilst this NGO's primary focus is the deradicalisation of offenders in prison, their Verantwortungspädagogik [Education of Responsibility] is also applied to probationers during resettlement back in the community. Since a national roll-out in 2017, training and support is available to both offenders and staff in the judicial system and probationary services. This is delivered through group and individual training, workshops on political education, and transition management and stabilization coaching. The "Education of Responsibility" includes:

- the recognition and understanding of one's own range of emotions and values, its "history of origin" and the resulting actions
- the assumption of responsibility for sensible and constructive integration of these parts, concomitant with dissociation of inhuman and anti-democratic thoughts and expression
- the development of an individual perspective and the strengthening of empathy, self-reflection, self-esteem, problem awareness, and confidence in crisis situations

#### **e. Al-Manara Project, Germany (VPN, 2018)**

Despite not relating to prisoners, this project is noteworthy because of the relativity of the intervention and audience to offenders leaving prison. The project provides counselling and attendance for unaccompanied minor refugees that have come to Germany by immunizing them against Salafist extremism and Islamicist recruiters. The key aspects of the counselling are:

- continuous dialogues that encourage questioning and arouse curiosity regarding new perspectives and which allow different perspectives regarding Islam
- the recognition of the specific danger situation for the young person concerned
- promoting the young people to recognise their own processes in respect of their previous course of life as well as the biographical understanding of their experiences and traumas
- assuming responsibility for independent living – creating conditions and planning a future
- support and advice in difficult life situations

#### **f. EXIT Fryshuset, Sweden (EXIT, 2018)**

This project is primarily designed for members of extremist (often) far-right groups who wish to change. This includes offenders released from prisons. EXIT's model relies heavily on a special client-coach relationship. Each "client" is connected to a coach – an employee of EXIT who typically had extremist far-right views in the past but has reformed. Their approach is consistent with theories that state the desistance from offending is co-produced with others<sup>30</sup>

The project's main activities are:

- Working with individuals to help them leave behind these groups and forge sustainable new lives.
- Working with the families of neo-Nazis to enable them to support young people engaged in or involved with white supremacist groups.
- Education for those frontline workers who engage with young people to enable them to spot vulnerable young people and provide help and support.

#### **g. Aarhus Model, Denmark (Bertelsen, 2015)**

The Aarhus Model comprises programmes for both early prevention and exit processes, and is government-led as a whole. However, many of the constituent parts of the model are carried out by NGOs. The main initiatives are:

- InfoHouse: this is a centralized information agency where actual or potential offenders are case-managed and resources are called upon depending on individual need.
- Mentoring.
- Workshops.
- Parents' network.
- Dialogues, especially with Muslim communities.
- Exit Programme for returning foreign fighters.
- Education and supervision of staff.

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<sup>30</sup> See EC Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) practice and policy bulletins (2016)

This is not an exhaustive list of community based initiatives that support integration and reintegration and many are either controversial or have not been subject to independent evaluation. As Horgan and Altier succinctly put it:

*‘The language, terminology, and official descriptions of these programs remain as varied as the expectations surrounding them. They remain....a product of their own time and place and not easily transferrable.’*

However, some common themes emerge from these and other nascent programmes that could assist in establishing a framework for a new UK approach to reintegration:

- In many jurisdictions, the imminence of release of extremist terrorists and the continuing threat they pose has spurred inventiveness and necessitated trade-offs between morality and pragmatism.
- In the case of Islamist extremism, there is an emphasis on ‘corrective teaching’ by scholars to combat extreme interpretations.
- Sustainability – whether of desistance from violence or disengagement from the ideology that animates it requires long term and stable engagement.
- The importance of owning one’s actions by taking personal responsibility for them
- The importance of collaboration with the local (including faith) community and families
- The significance of a good mentoring relationship with trusted individuals
- The importance of replacing one ‘immersive’ set of problematic values with something different and healthier - but as complete.
- The importance of promoting curiosity and critical thinking in the subject group.
- The significance of protective factors like employment, family reconciliation and somewhere to live. The additional barriers to these goals created by terrorist offending.

The potential for implementing such programmes in the offenders' localities, utilising a co-ordinated mix of state and NGO support, is huge. Communities are, relatively speaking, untapped resources when it comes to reintegration and the benefits are obvious:

*'Successful partnerships between government and the community for the implementation of reintegration and aftercare programmes can lead to a better understanding between them across a range of other issues that may help to reduce the vulnerability of other members of the community to violent extremism.'*<sup>31</sup>

Within the Prevent strand of the UK Counter Terrorism strategy, a programme called Channel exists to assertively support those referred to it who have been assessed as particularly at risk of being drawn into terrorism. While this intervention happens near the beginning of the 'arc of radicalisation,' anecdotal reports from practitioners emphasise the life-changing potential of a positive mentoring relationship, frequently developed between an offender and someone of standing in his or her community and typically from the same racial or religious background.

As the evidence cited from around the world demonstrates, mentoring seems to work when used to effect pro-social change in offenders from both Islamist and far right ends of the ideological spectrum. Moreover, the case studies demonstrate the value in engaging with Muslim offenders who are often from and returning to disadvantaged backgrounds. It is reasonable to assume that community based interventions that centre on developing long-term and trusted relationships with credible mentor(s) would support successful and safe re-entry of extremists into British society after custody.

Mentoring terrorist offenders is in many ways more challenging than a conventional mentoring relationship. What is the focus - desistance from violent extremism, deradicalisation or both? There are also contrasting views from mentors who have been interviewed in terms of the importance of ideological competence when dealing with these specialised clients:

*'This isn't just about quoting lines from a particular holy book or a particular tradition, it's about understanding the individual you're faced with, and what that individual may have gone through may be far more complicated than actually a theological argument. Theology might be a very small part of it. Theology might be just a way of that individual expressing other issues that may have happened in their lives.'*

*'I don't think you can challenge extremist ideology with employability. You need an articulation of the counter narrative, you need to deliver that in a fashion that retains your trust and credibility with the person but they have to go from point A to B'*

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<sup>31</sup> Additional Guidance on Aftercare and Reintegration Programmes for Violent Extremist Offenders. UN Counter Terrorism centre (2014)

*because I do not see flirting with point A as the result of the intervention. There has to be a viable theological alternative.*<sup>32</sup>

These views simply underline the importance of an individualised approach to the offender's needs in the community which ought to be integrated with the no less critical arrangements to control the risks s/he poses.

In the United Kingdom, there are very few non-state actors on the stage when it comes to interventions which assist with reintegration post-custody. The state's monopoly on supervision is in many ways understandable and certainly no-one credible would argue that it ought not to have a primary role or that the focus must be on protecting community safety and national security. However, when it comes to offending which is ideologically motivated and has opposition to the state 'baked in,' it is easy to see where this form of 'aftercare' might in fact increase the risk of reoffending and make desistance or disengagement harder.

There are many instances of NGOs working collaboratively with the state to manage offenders in the community. Recent changes in the way the probation service is organised in England and Wales have created both opportunities and risks for this continuing beneficial relationship. 'Transforming Rehabilitation' separated the management of serious offenders – via the National Probation Service - from those at low and medium risk, extending supervision to all convicted prisoners after release.

The new separated arrangements have been criticised for being inefficient and poorly conceived. In particular the new arrangements for dealing with low or medium risk offenders whereby public, private and NGO consortia bid against a specification has in some areas resulted in a significant reduction in the involvement of smaller NGOs in rehabilitation work which they had formerly been contracted to provide.<sup>33</sup>

Where involvement with NGOs supplying services to offenders has survived – typically in custody, the potential for their involvement with extremists, 'through the door' is clear to see. There is also potential to build on existing provision for disenfranchised 'mainstream' offenders leaving custody.

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<sup>32</sup> B. Spalek and L. Davies (2012) Mentoring in Relation to Violent Extremism: A Study of Role, Purpose, and Outcomes

<sup>33</sup> As found by HM Inspector of probation in annual report (2017)

<https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/aspirations-for-charities-in-probation-not-met-in-any-meaningful-way.html>

Two United Kingdom case studies illustrate the possibilities for development in these areas:

### Case study 1: Catch 22

Catch 22, a social business NGO with a 200 year heritage in working with marginalised people, is currently working in 20 prisons nationally delivering a range of provision including resettlement work to address complex needs of offenders. This includes developing resettlement plans and working with other agencies to support offenders on release access education, training, employment, housing, health etc. They also currently deliver the Returning Families Project for the Home Office. Here they deliver family support services to children, young people and parents/families who have recently returned from IE war zones.

Catch 22 has recently submitted a bid to the Ministry of Justice to deliver services at HMP Thameside, a privately run<sup>34</sup> category B local prison for adults in south east London, which would work to specifically support Muslim prisoners on release from custody using positive engagement with faith group elders to help reintegrate them into local communities where their offending behaviour may be treated as shameful for both them and their families.

The aim was to use religious leaders (Imams) to help facilitate this process by introducing them back into communities through faith by welcoming them back into the Mosque.

This model illustrates how a ‘through the gate’ approach might be adapted and tailored to meet similar needs of terrorist offenders using positive peer groups/networks to reach into custody and act as a conduit between the service user and criminal justice agencies for whom they may have limited or no trust.

Catch 22 already delivers offender management services at Thameside where prisoners who identify as Muslim are disproportionately associated with violent incidents in the prison in terms of their overall numbers.<sup>35</sup> While there will be a variety of factors – some wholly unrelated to ethnicity and belief – which drive these statistics, it is also clear from other data that prisoners who are reported through the Pathfinder radicalisation screening system were also disproportionately represented in violent incidents<sup>36</sup>It seems clear to me that successful reintegration of terrorist offenders must involve understanding and overcoming an oppositional culture to the legitimacy of the state and its agencies. It seems reasonable to conclude that a ‘non-aligned’ group such as an NGO would have a greater chance to successfully deliver this benefit.

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<sup>34</sup> Currently contracted to Serco group Plc

<sup>35</sup> According to Catch 22 analysis submitted to the Lammy Review (2017) of treatment of, and outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system.

<sup>36</sup> Data gathered for the Acheson (2016) review of Islamist extremism in the prisons, probation and youth justice system.

## Case study 2: Mosaic

Mosaic is a mentoring service NGO operating under the umbrella of the Princes Trust. Mosaic is designed to match young people in deprived communities with experienced mentors. It started with a particular focus on Muslim communities but has now extended its range of services.

Mosaic specifically does not work with people suspected of or convicted of terrorism offences. It does, however, have a specific service for young Muslim ex-offenders leaving custody. This, they say, is because there are:

*'particularly acute difficulties faced by Muslim prisoners returning to mainstream<sup>37</sup> society, such as the stigma that often attaches to them and their families. This leaves them vulnerable to negative influences.'*

The organisation provides trained volunteer mentors to provide support in the six months prior to release and for at least six months post-release. They report that the re-offending rate of those supported is up to 20% lower than the national average. The Mosaic approach is focused on getting offenders into work by long-term and structured 1-1 mentoring to improve employability, skills and training, accommodation and relationships. The emphasis is on developing a meaningful and authentic long-term relationship between the offender and someone who is not an agent of the state. In the case of the Mosaic ex-offender programme, mentors often come from business partners who can provide encouragement for those less likely to succeed in 'mainstream' employment to become entrepreneurs.

An independent evaluation of the programme (which also included those of high risk of offending) in 2012 by Demos concluded that mentoring was a positive and useful experience for the majority of clients. It also emphasised the need for increased attention to developing 'soft skills' such as aspiration, empathy and what it called, 'social graces' necessary for success in Britain today.<sup>38</sup>

The available evidence from nationally and international practice suggests that reintegration services for terrorist offenders will have the best chance of working if they possess the following characteristics:

✓	Delivered 'through the gate' with transition needs established in prison prior to release between client and provider
✓	Delivered separate to but in conjunction with the mandatory public protection work of statutory service providers

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.mosaicnetwork.co.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/Mosaic-Ex-Offender-Mentoring-Programme-Mentor-Handbook-070917.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> [https://www.demos.co.uk/files/A\\_Model\\_Role\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://www.demos.co.uk/files/A_Model_Role_-_web.pdf) Demos 2012

✓	Delivered with a high emphasis on trust built through 1-1 relationships which are enduring and pro-social.
✓	Are able to respond to the particular needs of ideological offending including religious extremism.
✓	Are pragmatic in scope with a short term objective of desistance from harmful behaviour and longer term focus on harmful beliefs.
✓	Emphasise 'repluralisation' through exposure to diverse ideas and people.
✓	Are practical in scale to solve problems which reduce vulnerability such as a place to live, training and employment and repairing damaged relationships.
✓	Are rooted in the communities which offenders return to.
✓	Are highly individualised to offenders' circumstances and needs.

This is not an exhaustive list and the heterogeneous characteristics of the contemporary terrorist offender population makes it difficult and even dangerous to generalise. Moreover, it is not possible yet to speak with any certainty about the relationship between today's terrorist offenders and time when it comes to desistance. Many offenders are only a short way into relatively long sentences. Others, serving custodial sentences for newly created terrorist offences are not yet even onto the criminal justice conveyor belt. It is possible that the greatest protection against reoffending is the prison sentence itself, particularly for those who do not enter ideological extremism from an offending background and who re-enter the community ashamed of their previous identity. Additionally, the largest body of experience to draw on relates to managing the transition of Muslim men and young adults. In particular, women who are under-represented as far-right and far-left ideological offenders may need additional or different forms of support. In terms of far right offending, much of the existing deradicalisation evidence base, particularly the concept of 'repluralisation', has been based on interventions in place since the mid-1980s in European countries to resocialise those convicted of belonging to violent neo-Nazi groups.

What unites these different approaches is the necessary inclusion of hope as the currency of personal transformation. Conversely, interventions and restrictions which, although necessary, have no basis in hope, merely control, would not appear sufficient to protect offenders from relapse back into violence. Hope, of course, is the wellspring of faith.

## 6. Trust and accountability:

What would a new model for delivering the ingredients for success look like and how could it be delivered? What role could faith communities play in this delivery?

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) was established in Ontario, Canada, in 1994 by a Mennonite pastor who was looking for ways to prevent a serial sex offender from victimising more people. He and some parishioners formed a support 'circle' around the offender. He did not re-offend. An international movement has emerged from this experiment which now supports the safe re-integration of hundreds of high risk sex-offenders worldwide.

CoSA in the UK was set up by the Quakers in 2002. The CoSA model was based on projects which had been running in Canada for a number of years that had supported the safe integration of high risk and high profile sexual offenders in local communities.

'Circles' consist of four to six local volunteers and one sexual offender who has recently been released from custody and is subject to statutory supervision on licence. The volunteers are known as 'Lay Members' of the Circle, whilst the sexual offender is referred to as the 'Core Member'. The volunteers regularly meet with the Core Member and aim to provide social and practical support to reduce the risk of social isolation, to monitor their actions to ensure the local community is safe, and to hold them accountable for their actions and participation in treatment programmes. The aim is to reintegrate the Core Member safely into his/her community and to reduce their risk of re-offending.<sup>39</sup>

The UK organisation has established an umbrella group, Circles UK which sets standards for volunteer recruitment, training and supervision. Participation is based on a level of acceptance by the offender that s/he requires assistance and wants to change. The delivery is complementary to statutory service supervision which is a mandatory feature of all high risk/high harm offenders in this category. The model is conceptualised as two concentric rings of support around an offender, the inner ring around the 'core' – the offender – consists of volunteer mentors who monitor and support the offender day-to-day. The outer rings consists of professionals including probation, psychology and police who deal with enforcement and treatment.

The process has been subject to validation in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. In all studies rates of recidivism<sup>40</sup> and parole violations were lower than for individuals in control groups that did not participate.

There are distinct similarities between ideologically motivated offenders and those who commit sexual offences in terms of their criminogenic development and needs:

- Both groups are regarded as 'taboo' offenders
- Dehumanisation of others is a pre-requisite
- Notions of power and control are dominant

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<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Justice research summary 2014

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/293400/cosa-research-summary.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293400/cosa-research-summary.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> In *all* forms of offending – sexual and non-sexual

- Both may experience isolation and alienation in prison
- Both are routinely subject to stringent controls on release into the community and extended periods of supervision through MAPPA.
- Both may encounter particular forms of shame and shunning in the community and within the family environment that are risk factors for repeat offending
- Both are likely to encounter social isolation
- Both will have particular difficulty in obtaining housing and employment

The Circles concept combines the theoretical frameworks of Restorative Justice (RJ) and the Good Lives Model (GLM) which has been described earlier in section 4. Restorative Justice is based on remorse, repair and reconciliation. It can involve communication between the perpetrator and victim where the perpetrator takes responsibility for their actions and attempts some form of repair within his means. The Good Lives Model is predicated on the idea that, with assistance, offenders can develop life plans which are incompatible with future offending.

Would the elements of this approach work with ideologically motivated offenders? CoSA has not been applied to any other offender group but this is not because it has been deemed incompatible, it is more a reflection of professional focus and competence. The Head of Policy at Circles UK has indicated that in principle there is no conceptual reason why this approach could not be employed with ideologically motivated offenders.

Moreover, a CoSA rooted approach could be delivered through faith groups where it is appropriate. CoSA emerged from such a group and in the UK started life through the Quakers. While it has a secular, humanist approach now, the process seems equally compatible with delivery from a Mosque or Church. Indeed for the predominant ideological offender cohort – Islamist extremists – this might be the only approach which would gain acceptance and traction with the offender.

There are obvious challenges associated with such an approach. In the first instance, this sort of intervention would need to be branded entirely separately from CoSA. The stigma of sexual offending transcends most ideologies and none. Association with a concept solely associated with sexual violence could make the concept unworkable.

Moreover, identifying, attracting, training and supervising ‘civilian’ mentors working closely with people convicted of terrorism offences and who live in the same community is problematic. There would necessarily need to be security clearance for individuals working in close proximity with such offenders. The available evidence suggests that long-term engagement provides the key to desistance and eventual disengagement from terrorism. Conditioning and manipulation are also risk factors.

Finally, the distinction between state supervision and community engagement would require very careful management. There must be a two-way relationship to protect public safety and make efficient use of resources. With this offender group, however, building a relationship of trust with someone who offends in opposition to the state is key to success. This will be a difficult circle to square.

These difficulties are not insurmountable. There are obvious and large gains in mobilising the talent in communities to be part of the solution to violent extremism. The experience of Northern Ireland teaches us that, whatever the security response, extremism can survive unless and until communities are brought into the fold as partners against violence. In Great Britain, recent experience of Islamist extremism terrorist outrages has brought with it unfair stigmatisation of whole communities. By participating in such a programme Muslim communities could counter some of this misplaced and undeserved suspicion.

**Community interaction with ideologically inspired offenders is also likely to make compliance and desistance more likely to succeed as the burden is shared between the state and the community like in many jurisdictions in Europe. Behaviours demonstrated by people from the same heritage who demonstrate empathy and pro-social ways of being who model ‘good lives’ are more likely to take root in the offender than those imposed remotely by criminal justice professionals concerned only with risk.**

Reflecting on the ingredients of a successful reintegration programme described in the last section, how might the CoSA process operate in practice in the Muslim community? Here is a simple and illustrative ‘worked example.’

**The ‘Sunnah’ (Arabic for ‘path’) network:**

<b>Conviction</b>	Saafir, 19, is sentenced to 3 years in prison under Terrorism Act 2006 legislation for Preparation of Terrorist Acts. This is the low end of the scale.
<b>Identification</b>	During his custody in a young adult prison establishment he is identified by the inreach team as suitable for the ‘Sunnah’ support network on release. Saafir’s family is involved in this decision.
<b>Engagement</b>	The inreach team liaise with the MAPPA team in Saafir’s community to set up a circle of support for him on release. A comprehensive needs assessment is made.
<b>Co-ordination</b>	MAPPA liaise with the Sunnah lead, the Imam of Saafir’s local Mosque who will be co-ordinating the community support. Participation in the programme is made a licence condition for Saafir’s release. The Imam is asked to sit on the local MAPPA strategic board as a lay advisor.
<b>Community response</b>	Saafir is released from custody. His supervision is managed by MAPPA in close conjunction with the Sunnah lead. He is collected from custody by his lead mentor.
<b>Desistence</b>	Sunnah programme volunteer mentors meet regularly with Saafir. His community support and supervision programme is a tailored combination of theological instruction and exposure to diverse cultures, communities and people. Saafir visits a Synagogue and joins a local multi-ethnic

	football team. Sunnah mentors help Saafir set up a life plan which meets his ambition to work for himself.
<b>Disengagement</b>	MAPPA supervision formally ends as Saafir's licence expires. Saafir continues to receive close support from the Sunnah programme. Saafir agrees to become part of the Sunnah team and speaks in schools and in his Mosque about the benefits of the programme.

This is, of course, a stylised description with a successful outcome but it conveys a sense of what could be possible in terms of community safety and reintegration if such a process existed. The concept is subjected to a Theory of change examination in Annex A.

## **7. Conclusion:**

A small but growing number of ideologically inspired extremist offenders is working its way through the criminal justice system. These numbers will be joined by increasing numbers of offenders that have been subjected to legal proceedings as police action improves and legislation expands to cope with changing terrorist tactics. Added to this cohort will be unquantified numbers of combat experienced British citizens who have become foreign fighters and are now returning to this country after the collapse of the IS caliphate.

Many of these people will be subject to a criminal justice response which will contain their risk and to a great extent incapacitate them through custody. The opportunities available to them to address their particular offending behaviour are very limited in a prison system which is struggling to contain a crisis of order and control, indeed this crisis aids and abets the development of powerbases and toxic ideologies and inhibits rehabilitation.

In all likelihood this will mean that offenders, who are predominantly Muslim men imprisoned for Islamist inspired offences, will leave custody at best no more dangerous than they went in and at worst further radicalised by what many perceive is state repression of their beliefs.

When released, these offenders are subject to some of the most stringent forms of surveillance and control available to ensure public protection. Whether these measures, administered through a state monopoly, will reduce their likelihood of further harm is arguable at best.

The first concern of the state in relation to these offenders must be to protect the public from any future risk they pose to national security. However, it is quite possible that the current arrangements, overseen exclusively by police, security and probation services, might have adverse effects in terms of limited engagement and an oppositional response from the offender, honed in custody and reflecting social isolation and grievance.

A robust response to the threat posed by this special cohort of offenders ought to include members of the community. An enlightened threat response should focus on ways local community members can reintegrate offenders who may feel ostracised and have no social capital. There are ways to mitigate these risk factors for further offending which the state cannot deliver as efficiently or with the same prospect of success.

The 'Sunnah network,' as described in the previous section, offers a framework to join both state and local community in a partnership to manage the successful reintegration of terrorist offenders. This is a separate but complimentary approach where the state can focus on the risk of further harm and the community can focus on the individual. Management of risk in the community becomes more than a function of restriction and surveillance – it relies on positive relationships of trust with significant peers. It can create a 'cognitive opening' where the neutralisation process described in section three which assists an extremist mindset can be best challenged and repaired. In this way it is possible to enable both behavioural desistance and eventual belief

disengagement in a more sophisticated way which is more likely to gain acceptance by the offender. The longer term benefits for community safety are obvious.

Moreover, where these networks can exist, communities who might have otherwise felt disempowered and disengaged from counter extremism work can be directly involved. Such schemes have the power to radically improve the relationship between the community and the state in a very sensitive area. This will be particularly the case in Muslim communities where Islamist extremist offenders that struggle with negativity and suspicion settle. There is no reason why a similar conceptual framework might not be applied to far right extremist offenders. Examples from Europe show the benefits of community engagement with neo-Nazi offenders.

The concept has three formidable challenges. The selection, training, supervision and support of the network circle of support must be high quality and design out risks such as collusion or conditioning. Moreover, research shows that the best mentoring requires a patient and consistent relationship of trust built over a long period and this will be psychologically challenging for both mentor and mentee. Finally, the relationship between the offender on licence, the support network and the state will be fraught with tensions and not always mutually reinforcing.

Nevertheless it is my firm conviction based on several decades of counter-extremism work from front line to policy making, that a clear eyed strategy for reintegration which involves the state and community in partnership can be made to work in the interests of safer communities in this country.

Will the Government have the courage to explore its potential? It requires faith.

IAN ACHESON

April 2018

ANNEX A:

**Theory of change model:**

Creation of ‘Ummah’ reintegration network for extremism related offenders released from custody and under statutory supervision in the community:

<p><b>ULTIMATE GOALS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former terrorist offenders (Beneficiaries) disengage from their belief in violent extremism as a legitimate means of achieving change in society.</li> <li>• Host communities assisting reintegration become more resilient against violent extremism.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beneficiaries are insulated against contact with violent extremists</li> <li>• Beneficiaries are less socially isolated</li> <li>• Beneficiaries have their immediate practical needs met to have somewhere suitable to live, support themselves and plan for a future free from violence.</li> <li>• Beneficiaries develop lasting pro-social relationships of trust with local people acting as mentors</li> <li>• Beneficiaries are able to explore and understand their individual pathway to violent extremism and enabled to plan for an alternative future.</li> <li>• Beneficiaries get access to theological perspectives which counter extremist or absolutist beliefs</li> <li>• Local community is able to work (and seen to be working) in partnership with state agencies to tackle terrorism.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ASSUMPTIONS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beneficiaries are willing to engage.</li> <li>• Beneficiaries have the capacity to change.</li> <li>• Beneficiaries have access to long terms support potentially beyond the expiry of licence conditions.</li> <li>• Information sharing protocols between civilian support networks is suitable to detect/manage risk and integrate approaches.</li> <li>• Sufficient numbers of community support network volunteers are available and suitable for the task in terms of their psychological fitness and security clearance.</li> <li>• High level ongoing and high quality support is available for core volunteers around beneficiary</li> </ul>
<p><b>ACTIVITIES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beneficiary has pre-release needs assessment completed with network approaching release.</li> <li>• These needs are co-ordinated with probation service and in the case of high risk/high harm individuals with MAPPA.</li> <li>• Licence conditions established paying due regard to support network activity.</li> <li>• Individual reintegration plan completed by network with beneficiary and family input.</li> <li>• Network volunteers collect beneficiary on day of release and start debrief work – establish a contract for engagement.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High intensity/frequency support and mentoring begins to manage post-release transition risks and encourage desistance.</li><li>• Reintegration plan implemented.</li><li>• Review of plan and mentoring takes place at appropriate time.</li><li>• Engagement continues at lower level with increasing levels of autonomy for beneficiary as risk assessment dictates.</li><li>• Formal engagement end when authentic disengagement with violent extremism ideology is apparent and/or licence expires.</li></ul>
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**ENDS**



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