Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Uncorrected oral evidence: Citizenship Education

Wednesday 25 October 2017

10.45 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots (The Chairman); Baroness Barker; Lord Blunkett; Lord Harries of Pentregarth; Baroness Lister of Burtersett; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Baroness Newlove; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Redfern; Lord Rowe-Beddoe; Baroness Stedman-Scott; Lord Verjee.

Evidence Session No. 7 Heard in Public Questions 61 - 68

Witnesses

I: Saskia Marsh, Adviser to the Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life (The Missing Muslims); Dr Therese O’Toole, University of Bristol; Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal, West Midlands Regional Prevent Lead for HE and FE.

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Examination of witnesses

Saskia Marsh, Dr Therese O’Toole, Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal.

Q61  **The Chairman:** Welcome and thank you very much for coming to join us this morning. We are looking forward to your contribution to our investigation.

A list of the interests of Members relevant to the inquiry has been sent to you and is available. The session is open to the public and is being recorded for BBC Parliament. A verbatim transcript will be taken of the evidence and put on the Committee’s website. A few days after this session, you will be sent a copy to check for accuracy. It would be helpful if you could advise us of any corrections as quickly as possible. If, after this evidence session, you wish to clarify or amplify any points made during your evidence, or have any additional points you wish to make, you are welcome to submit supplementary evidence to us at that time. First, can I ask you to introduce yourselves? Then we will go to the questions.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** I am the West Midlands regional Prevent lead for further and higher education.

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** I am reader in sociology at the University of Bristol.

**Saskia Marsh:** I am adviser to the commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life.

Q62  **The Chairman:** Thank you very much. Can we begin with an overview question? Could you describe the current state of integration and engagement among minority communities in the UK?

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** I do not think that is a very easy question to answer, to be quite honest, because when we talk about minority communities in this country the fact is that we have many different minority groups. We have groups that have been here for 40 or 50 years, since the 1950s, and we have groups such as the more recent Syrian refugees who have also come in. The level of integration has varied depending on those communities and where in the country we are talking about. It also varies according to which generation they are from, their gender, their religion and their levels of education. This question of integration is not a new phenomenon. I grew up in West Yorkshire and I remember this conversation happening in the black African-Caribbean communities: whether they were integrating and whether there was more we could do around getting them more involved with local communities.

It varies, particularly among the younger generations. Our younger generations are taking more of an interest in improving their communities and using the knowledge and skills that they have acquired in this country in engagement, and in civic engagement in particular. There is a lot more commitment from our younger generations to improve the quality of life for themselves and their older generations.
There are good and bad examples depending on where you look. The integration and the commitment of people in communities up in Manchester, Leicester and Leeds towards their communities is very good, but unfortunately there are also communities in other parts of the country—I could name a few cities, but I might refrain from mentioning which communities I am talking about—where the integration and the level of civic engagement is as good as it could be, and that concerns me.

**The Chairman:** It would be helpful to the Committee if you could name them. It is all very well telling us where things are going very well, but we may wish to try to spread good practice to areas where practice is less good.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** I grew up in inner city Leeds and I have seen the changes that have taken place in Leeds. I have seen fantastic examples of civic engagement. I have seen fantastic examples in parts of Birmingham and Manchester, but we still have communities in places such as Dewsbury and Luton, which unfortunately have pockets where that engagement with wider society is not taking place.

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** There is a mixed picture on integration among minority groups in the UK. On the one hand, in studies looking at the identification of Britishness or attitudes towards democracy and democratic values you tend to see patterns of quite high or positive levels of identification with British identity and democracy. That is also true of Muslim minorities, which are often a focus of a lot of concerns about these sorts of debates on integration and identity. It is also true of young Muslims. I agree with the comments about the appetite of young Muslims for engaging politically and civically.

I was involved in research with a colleague from the University of Bristol, Siobhan McAndrew, in which we looked at levels of political and civic engagement among young Muslims. We found that if you compared them to older groups, their levels of political engagement were a lot lower, but if you compared them to the levels of political and civic engagement among non-Muslim white British young people you found a much more positive picture. Young British-born Muslims are a bit more likely to vote than non-Muslim white British young people. They are more likely to protest, more likely to be “very satisfied” with democracy, and much more likely to volunteer. That fits a profile of what you might call a “critical citizen”: that is, a citizen who is invested in democracy but who has high expectations of it. The mixed picture, of course, is the contrast on the socioeconomic indicators.

**Saskia Marsh:** Perhaps it would be useful to give a little context to my involvement in the commission. That will help also to give context to my remarks. My background is in international conflict resolution, community engagement and countering extremism, so I come to the commission as an adviser looking at those issues internationally, and I helped to shape some of the recommendations that the commission put together on the specific challenges facing British Muslim communities and their engagement here in the UK.
I concur with what has been said so far: that there is a mixed picture. If you look at historical settlement patterns for British Muslim communities in the UK, you see that in some geographical areas we have a very high concentration particularly of British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities living together without very much interaction with other ethnic groups. In some cases that has led to a de facto system of segregated schooling in specific areas. I would challenge the notion that British Muslims across the board are not integrated or do not wish to be integrated, which is a prevailing discourse that is increasingly apparent in some aspects of the media.

First, the lack of integration is most apparent in areas of high deprivation, and that points to the need to address structural barriers. You can see from the figures in the commission’s report that Britain’s Muslim population has some of the highest rates of deprivation of any community in the UK, so there is a correlation there. Secondly, assumptions about the extent to which British Muslims are integrated or not integrated are often inaccurate. There is plenty of research to show that British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, for example, are just as politically engaged as their white counterparts. There are some statistics on that in the report. As a commission, we also heard in over 500 hours of travelling around the country listening to communities, both Muslim and non-Muslim, many examples of very positive community work that has been done by ethnic minorities outside their ethnic minority groups. Often this is interfaith work and is driven by minority women, who are very good at breaking down boundaries across their communities.

Finally, integration goes both ways. The white British population lives on average in districts where 85% of the population is white, which means that significant numbers of white Britons have very little engagement with ethnic groups. Integration is an effort that goes both ways.

Q63 Baroness Pitkeathley: I am going to ask about Prevent. We will have further questions about Prevent, so can I ask you to be relatively succinct in answer to this one, please? What effect does the Prevent programme have on integration and civic engagement? Hifsa, we will come to you last because of your particular involvement.

Saskia Marsh: The commission’s original remit was not to look at Prevent, but it came up time and time again and a significant amount of evidence was presented about its impact and the general perceptions of it. I should emphasise that not everybody the commission spoke questioned the safeguarding principles behind Prevent, but there were concerns about how it has been communicated and about specific aspects of it, how it is being implemented and its impact on integration.

Dr Therese O'Toole: In some ways it is difficult to audit the effects of Prevent on civic engagement and integration, because it is difficult to research the effects of withdrawal and retreat from public and civic spaces. A few things have happened in recent years since Prevent has been revised. In 2011, Prevent was revised quite significantly, and among those changes were a number of revisions that have some
important implications for civic engagement that included the expansion of the definition of extremism to include non-violent extremism, which brings clear tensions with some aspects of democratic engagement and civil liberties.

There was also a growing emphasis on a more centralised model of implementing it, which stepped away from more locally-driven models of civic engagement. There has been a drop-off in the extent to which local actors have been able to engage in Prevent. That has been accompanied by a general diminution of the mechanisms for engagement by government with Muslim civil society organisations. The mechanisms for critical input and feedback into the ways in which Prevent is formulated and its impact on communities have greatly reduced, which is very problematic.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** Being a Muslim, when I meet Muslims for the first time one of the questions they tend to ask me is what I do, and I tend to say, “I work in Prevent”, simply because I want to see their reaction. On the vast majority of occasions, people will look at me and say, “Prevent what?” This impression that we have of all Muslims knowing what Prevent is and being very anti it is very misleading. In the vast majority of cases, people have no idea what it is about.

At an event last year I spoke to an audience of about 350 people, and those who responded made very negative comments about Prevent. It was what happened after the event that was quite surprising. The people who approached me were approaching me to say, “Well, we agree with Prevent, we understand what it’s about, but we will not speak out because of fear. We do not want to face the type of abuse that you have just faced”. I do not believe that it is Prevent that is stopping integration or civil engagement; it is fear, and the scaremongering by some groups and individuals. Leaflets have been produced saying that Prevent is all about spying and about targeting Muslims. That has a bigger impact on engagement than Prevent itself.

**The Chairman:** What would be the purpose of that? Why would anyone wish to be a scaremonger?

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** There is a belief out there, and Prevent has been portrayed for a very long time as targeting Muslims and spying. Unfortunately there are groups out there that are still using that, and that is scaring communities. Ordinary Muslims on the street who hear this are very fearful of being targeted. People are being told that if you look Muslim, if you are a conservative Muslim, you are going to be targeted as a violent extremist or a potential terrorist, and that scares people.

**Baroness Stedman-Scott:** The Casey review argued that the Government need to be more robust in countering false perceptions about Prevent. Do you agree? How well do you think the Government are doing this? I am conscious that in your written evidence you have given us some perceptions about Prevent, et cetera, so it would be good for you to build on those, too.


**Saskia Marsh:** There are clearly some extremist groups and organisations, including within British Muslim communities, that wish to see Prevent fail for their own ideological reasons. Some of the commission’s respondents also raised concerns that the Government have tended to view any criticism of Prevent as being made in bad faith. There are some legitimate concerns to be raised and areas for improvement.

I come from the perspective of working on countering violent extremism abroad. I run a Prevent-style pilot in Tunisia and have spent a lot of time looking at the evidence on what is more likely to work when it comes to countering violent extremism and what is definitively not going to work. The evidence is quite clear that building trust between communities and government agencies is essential to the success of these types of initiatives, and we are clearly not there in the UK with that.

To draw on the point made earlier about the issue of non-violent extremism, there are some very understandable concerns about tackling non-violent extremism, but the definition as it is currently used is open to being applied—or misapplied—in a way that is perhaps not beneficial for communities. A clearer definition and a review of the boundaries of who is included or excluded within that definition would be very useful. A very pragmatic evidence-based look at the benefits and drawbacks of non-engagement with those who have been labelled as extremists would also be very useful, again looking at the international evidence on what works in this instance.

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** It is not simply a communications problem. Some of the issues boil down to the ways in which Prevent has become, conceptually and operationally, much more expansive in recent years. That brings it into tension with a whole host of other public sector duties and professional values, including equalities duties in higher education, in relation to the duties to uphold freedom of speech, and for health professionals in relation to patient confidentiality. There are tensions for some teachers about whether the conception of safeguarding that is promoted by Prevent is compatible with the conception of safeguarding that is prevalent among teachers. That is a consequence of the way in which it has been expanded out across public sector institutions with this much broader definition of extremism, which becomes part of the remit of Prevent. We need to look at the proper definition of extremism that ought to form the remit of the Prevent agenda.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** The British Government are clearly trying to counter some of the misconceptions that are out there. The one that I heard most recently was that they are trying to rewrite Islam. A lot of work has been done on that, with face-to-face engagement and Ministers going to local communities and having that dialogue. For me, the answer is dialogue, which is taking place, but, as somebody said, there is always room for improvement, and I know that is currently being looked at.

**The Chairman:** Do the leaders of the Muslim community, the Muslim council, provide appropriate leadership to say, “Come on, let’s get this
into perspective”?

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** In some parts of the country, yes, but it very much depends on who we are talking about when we talk about leaders. We have Muslim leaders and we have gatekeepers, and for me it is very important that we go past those gatekeepers to get that message out into the communities where it needs to be heard.

Q65 **Lord Harries of Pentregarth:** Critics of Prevent have suggested that it should do more to involve local stakeholders. Are the Government doing enough to ensure that local stakeholders are consulted and supportive of Prevent in their area? Should more be done?

I would like to widen that out a little beyond local stakeholders. Could you say a little more about the Government’s policy towards non-violent extremist groups? Is it on public record which groups they are not willing to relate to? Presumably we know what those groups stand for. I was thinking this morning of a parallel. A classical Marxist does not, of course, believe in social democracy, and they might very well speak against it. I am trying to draw a parallel between that and a Muslim organisation that perhaps does not believe in social democracy. Could you unpack that a little if it is on the public record?

**Dr Therese O'Toole:** The levels of local engagement have tailed off significantly in recent years. There is a contrast with the quite locally-driven model of Prevent that was in place prior to 2011, which, although it was a very criticised model because local authorities had a certain amount of leeway to shape its implementation and to adapt it to local contacts, offered a variety of ways in which to implement it. That resulted in variety in the quality of the implementation, but you also got models of quite effective, and sometimes innovative, engagement in Prevent in some places. That has fallen off, partly because the mechanisms of civic engagement have reduced and partly because Prevent has become much more centralised; it is much more directed by the Home Office.

**Lord Blunkett:** Why do you think there was such enormous antagonism to the earlier Prevent programme? I sat in meetings where politicians in the Palace of Westminster were almost apoplectic about it, as though somehow it had completely failed. Where do you think that came from?

**Dr Therese O'Toole:** It is very difficult to disentangle Prevent from other parts of the counterterrorism agenda, such as Pursue. In 2009, for instance, there were lots of allegations circulating that front-line Prevent personnel were being used as surveillance agents as part of the Pursue agenda. It has been quite difficult for Prevent to shake off that association with surveillance. There is also the difficulty that engagement that occurred through Prevent, while it was helpful in some places, and useful and needed, and created new spaces for civic engagement, those initiatives found it very difficult to shake off the difficulties of engagement through a counterterrorism rubric. It was always dogged by concern that when Muslims are approached it is as suspects rather than as citizens. That is a perennial problem for most kinds of engagement under Prevent.
Helpful things got done, but the efficacy of those initiatives would have been enhanced had they not been implemented under the Prevent agenda. They would have been helpful to the Prevent agenda, but they would have been improved by being run autonomously from it.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** One of the things that we cannot ignore is that, prior to its review in 2010, Prevent was seen very much as being about targeting Muslims. In 2011, when the new strategy came out it made it very clear that while the biggest threat to national security was coming from groups and individuals who associated themselves with the religion of Islam, there were other forms of violent extremism and potential terrorism in this country that we cannot ignore. I do not believe that message is getting out to our Muslim communities and the wider population loudly enough. We have had recent instances, such as the murder of Jo Cox last year and the proscribing of National Action last December, and there are other issues that are going on in the country that are not related to Islamist ideologies, but I do not think that has been made very clear. Whether that is down to the Government or to our media is a question that we also need to consider.

**Lord Harries of Pentregarth:** We have not had answers to my question about non-violent extremism. It is a very important question, and we need to tease it out a little. We have the experts here, so let us hear from them.

**Saskia Marsh:** I am not aware of the current blacklist. I know that a list was circulated a couple of years ago on institutions that would not be engaged by the Government. The commission’s, and my own view, is that even with individuals you vehemently disagree with there is a need to engage if there is any hope of changing or moderating their viewpoint. The general principle of broad engagement is important, and that has been lost over time. That goes back to the question of whether enough has been done to involve local stakeholders, and to the point raised earlier about who is engaged, because there is certainly a widespread perception that it is the gatekeepers, who are not necessarily representative of British Muslim communities, who engage, and that there is a general lack of willingness to engage more broadly in the communities, because that requires a broader geographical scope and requires engaging across the theological spectrum. Unfairly or not, a perception emerged very clearly in the commission’s evidence sessions of quite deliberately selective communication—that it was not a genuine exchange but a rubber-stamping process; you engage with certain self-appointed spokespeople within British Muslim communities to rubber-stamp a process rather than have a two-way exchange.

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** It is very difficult to know where the bar should be set for who should and should not be engaged with. The difficulty about that kind of stance is that it seems to exclude lots of organisations that are otherwise strong advocates of Muslim democratic participation and engagement with British society. It feels as though their definition of extremists has become very wide. It is catching a lot of organisations and
actors within its remit who then become part of a group of people who cannot be engaged with. That is very problematic for democratic and civic engagement, and it is not very transparent either.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** I have never been told that there are organisations that I should not be engaging with. We have seen a number of campaigns, such as the Prevent lobby last year. Certain campaigns have been run by various groups trying to prevent engagement with Prevent, but otherwise I have never been told that there are groups or individuals that I should not be engaging with.

**The Chairman:** You have used the word “gatekeeper”. What sort of people are we talking about when we talk about gatekeepers?

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** As a Muslim, I have lived and worked in Muslim communities for many years, and I know that we have gatekeepers in our communities. They are the individuals who are seen as the go-to person, whether they are involved with the local mosque, are the local councillor, or are the oldest person within the community, and they are seen to know about Muslims. We have a number of what I would call gatekeepers across the country.

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett:** We will probably hear more about that in the next session, because I think the gatekeepers tend to be men.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** I was trying to avoid using that word, but you are right, yes.

**Lord Verjee:** Can I ask for some more clarification? Can you give us an idea of the types of gatekeepers you would refer to in the host community, the non-Muslim community? There seem to be people who do not understand this concept of gatekeepers in the Muslim community. What is the equivalent in the non-Muslim community?

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** That is a really difficult question for me to answer, because I personally have not experienced in the non-Muslim community. I am thinking about the small community that I live in. I know that when issues come up, there are two individuals who people will instinctively want to make sure are okay with what is going on. It is very difficult for me to make that comparison with non-Muslim communities.

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** It is a very common feature of civic engagement that there are people who are nodal points in local governance networks and consultative forums. There is something very asymmetric about the idea that there is a Muslim leadership to which government can go should it require an answer on what Muslims think. You could see over the 2000s a move towards a much more differentiated model of consultation and representation, and a greater recognition on the part of government that there might not be Muslim leaders whom government could use as interlocutors, and that you might need a much more diverse array of Muslim organisations. Helpfully, some of that, through Prevent, did
prioritise or emphasise the inclusion of women in those representative structures. That has also fallen off in recent times.

**Saskia Marsh:** One very basic point to make is that there is not just one British Muslim community. There are many different communities, and it is not a monolithic structure or community. Your starting point is to think of it as many different communities.

**Lord Rowe-Beddoe:** I am getting mixed signals. Is it a positive development, or have there always been gatekeepers in these societies?

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** I use the term “gatekeeper”. Previously we used the term “Muslim leaders”, and, exactly as you said, those Muslim leaders have tended to be the men in the communities.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** I have a little question to help me with my thinking. That was my experience. Years ago—I am going back to the 1970s—I used to teach in an inner city school, and you are absolutely right; there were people we went to, and we did not talk to the Muslim community unless we spoke through those gatekeepers. It was clearly not helpful. It disappoints me that it is still as strong as it is, but I absolutely understand that.

One of your earlier comments was about the engagement of people from a Muslim background in wider civic life. I sometimes worry that there is a danger that when somebody from a Muslim background stands for the local authority to represent a ward and gets elected, we assume that they are the voice of the Muslim community. Because you are Muslim does not mean that you always have to speak for Muslims, just as, if you are a woman, sometimes you do not speak for women; you are speaking because you are in that position. Is there a danger that as more people who want to be part of mainstream society take on mainstream posts, the people who choose not to do that become the gatekeepers by default, so they are the ones who are less likely to want to integrate? Does that make sense? It is a period of transition. People who would be more progressive voices for the Muslim community might not do that. They might say, “I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to be associated with my ethnic community all the time. I just want to be me and do what I want and speak for lots of groups. I want to speak for white groups, for men, for women, for disabled people”, or whatever.

**Saskia Marsh:** I guess that is a fair point, but a solution to this—there is never a total solution—is encouraging more diverse voices into the fray in the first place. That is work in progress, but we are starting to see that happening in certain areas.

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett:** Going back to Prevent, some of your answers have already touched on this, but I specifically want to ask whether you think it has had, as was feared earlier, a negative effect on democratic debate, particularly in schools, universities and colleges.

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** In universities it is difficult, I guess, to gauge the impact of Prevent on student engagement and democratic debate in
universities, partly because, as I said before, it is difficult to plot the effects of withdrawal and retreat and so on. People talk about a chill factor of Prevent in universities. I guess people are primarily concerned about what they feel are the discriminatory aspects of Prevent and its impact on freedom of speech. If you look at the picture across higher education, you get a lot of variation in the ways in which universities have implemented their Prevent duty. Some universities have taken their duty to uphold freedom of speech as a primary duty, and taken the need to have due regard to the need to prevent drawing people into terrorism as a lesser duty, and organised their external speaker policies on that kind of basis.

It is not helped by the fact that there is a difference in what the statutory Prevent duty for universities stipulates, which is the need to have due regard for people being drawn into terrorism, and the guidance to universities that asks universities to perform risk assessments that include non-violent as well as violent extremism. That goes beyond the statutory duty and is where you start to get concerns that universities are now putting very difficult processes in place for external speakers. That is having a deleterious effect on debate. People either cannot clear the administrative hurdles for the external speakers processes or the university is taking a very risk-averse approach and blocking people from speaking on contested issues. I do not think that those sorts of things will be applied consistently across the sector, because different institutions interpret what are not very consistent messages from government about the extent of their duties under Prevent.

**Saskia Marsh:** I can only report on the evidence that was presented to the commission, a substantial amount of which came from young British Muslims. Their very strong perception was that the room for debate on contentious issues is shrinking, and that is linked partly to the lack of clarity over the inconsistently applied principle of what extremism is and how that relates to Prevent. That is of concern, because the ability to constructively debate difficult issues is a cornerstone of democratic society, and it is that debate and engagement that is part of the process that helps to moderate different opinions. Again, that came out quite strongly in the evidence.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** A report was produced by three universities earlier this year in July that found no evidence that Prevent is stifling debate in our schools and universities. There was some evidence in that report that since the Prevent duty was introduced there has been more open discussion about extremism and radicalisation. It also found that 73% of respondents who were teachers understood that ultimately when we are talking about Prevent we are talking about safeguarding and a form of grooming. They found no evidence that this is contributing to more racism, Islamophobia, hatred or intolerance.

The Salman Butt judicial review not long ago found that there was no evidence to suggest that this was infringing academic freedoms or free speech. We know that there have been isolated incidents, and we have
anecdotal evidence about conversations that have taken place, but, again, one of the things that I have found in my work is that a lot of that has to do with individual teachers’ and lecturers’ fear of having this conversation with young people.

My background is equality and diversity, and I can remember having conversations about racism and intolerance. Staff used to feel very nervous about having these conversations. I think we are at that same point now with lecturers and teachers, who do not always know how to have those conversations and what terminology they should using when talking about radicalisation and extremism. This goes back to what I was saying earlier; that, for me, the issues are the lack of understanding and the scaremongering that has gone on, and some of the some false media reporting on this.

**The Chairman:** There is anecdotal evidence, and this may be media false news, of Muslim societies in universities trying to have separate meetings for men and women. Would you like to comment on that as a part of civic engagement in our inquiry?

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** Again, as a Muslim, I do not think there is any need for that. I have heard examples of it. Clearly, praying facilities are a completely separate issue, but certainly in some of the universities where what you describe has taken place, universities and student unions have taken that on board. It should not be happening on our campuses.

**Lord Blunkett:** Should we open up these issues in schools and colleges as part of the citizenship curriculum?

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** It is really important that these conversations take place. For me, if you try to stifle a conversation, if you try to prevent something being discussed, it goes underground, and as soon those conversations go underground they will take place without challenge. What Prevent should be doing, if you look at the strategy, is trying to encourage these debates so that we can encourage our young people in our schools and colleges to have these conversations in open and safe environments where they can have that alternative view.

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** The open and safe environment also depends, of course, on whether there is an obligation on lecturers or teachers to report people to the police. I think that is a key issue, whether Prevent is compatible with free speech, either on campus or in schools.

**Baroness Redfern:** Following from the previous question, do you see Prevent and fundamental British values as inextricably linked? Do you think this is a good or a bad thing? Saskia mentioned the implementation of Prevent and Therese mentioned its centralisation. Could you comment on that question, please?

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** Like many things, if we were to debate British values under the rubric of the Prevent agenda, it would be likely to have quite harmful and toxic implications for that debate. You can see that replicated across a range of different domains, whether cohesion or
integration. There is a risk that the very valid debates about gender equality will become contaminated by concerns about securitisation in those debates, because they are being tied or hitched to the counterextremism or Prevent agenda. We could have a debate about British values—it would be good if it was a debate and not simply a prescription handed to us from the Home Office—and to have it in a way that is autonomous from the security agenda.

**Saskia Marsh:** Among respondents to the commission this discussion on British values has been perceived as divisive, again because the term is being perceived as focusing on very exclusive values rather than on universal values that individuals of different cultures hold. That effect is obviously counterproductive to the safeguarding aims of Prevent, and I suppose also to the original aims of wanting to define British values, which for me are about defining acceptable standards of engagement towards one another in a multicultural, multifaith society. Again, it comes down to the definitions employed and thinking about what we want to achieve. Imposing a definition of British values is likely to be an exclusive process. What you want to do is encourage a modicum of debate and discussion about these issues.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** Can you just say a bit more about that? One of the criticisms that we heard in the past is that the values are not just British values but values that would be subscribed to by huge sections of the world. You have not said that. Could you give a few examples of some of the values that you think are not inclusive, or some of the ones that are missing?

**Saskia Marsh:** I would have to think about that in a little more detail. Give me time and I will try to come up with some examples.

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett:** What I and quite a lot of our evidence is saying is that universal values of democratic citizenship are being presented as uniquely British, which then has an excluding effect. Is that what you were trying to say?

**Saskia Marsh:** You said it more elegantly than I can.

**Lord Blunkett:** It is like a “Today” interview on Radio 4.

**Lord Verjee:** Can we get an idea of numbers? How many people are being referred under the Prevent programme, and how many people are under active surveillance under it? Does anyone know the rough numbers?

**Saskia Marsh:** I am afraid I do not know the universal numbers on that. It is quite hard data to have access to. I have been given access to it in very localised cases with individual committees, but I do not have the bigger picture, I am afraid.

**Dr Therese O’Toole:** There are figures for Channel referrals that I can send to the Committee if you would like to see them and how they break down. The numbers have been going up. I guess what they do not tell
you is the number of people who are reported to the police but who are not then referred to Channel. From discussions with Prevent police officers, it sounds as though a lot of people are contacting the police but that perhaps only a small proportion of them will end up as a Channel referral. They often end up being a front-line service uncovering a lot of social issues that are emerging from the communities, and they are acting as a referral agency to other agencies such as mental health services or directing people to help with family breakdown or substance abuse and so on. It will be difficult to find out what the workload of Prevent police officers is, but you can see how much of that gets sent in the way of Channel referrals.

Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal: I do not have access to any figures. We know—and, again, I do not remember the exact numbers—that of the Prevent referrals that are made nationally, 30% are from far-right extremism as opposed to Islamist ideologies, but there are parts of the country where it is a 50:50 split, but, again, I do not have access to specific numbers.

Lord Verjee: It would be very useful to try to get those numbers if we can. We have covered a lot of this, but should Prevent be reviewed or reassessed? If so, what elements should change and what should be retained?

Saskia Marsh: Our view as the commission is, yes, Prevent could benefit from independent review. That could comprise an independent panel of experts with the relevant range of expertise and include individuals at the front line of service delivery and representatives from the local community.

Lord Blunkett: But not the gatekeepers.

Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal: Definitely not.

Saskia Marsh: Exactly, and such a review could consider the growing body of policy and practice from overseas initiatives to counter violent extremism and therefore provide constructive suggestions on how Prevent could be refined to better achieve its goals. You may be aware that David Anderson QC, who also gave evidence to our commission, has recommended a more limited review, i.e. just looking at the most sensitive and high-profile aspect of it, which is the operation of Prevent in schools. We have also suggested that each local community could have its own review board made up of carefully selected local stakeholders to provide an ongoing assessment of how Prevent is working in practice.

Dr Therese O’Toole: I agree that there should be a review of Prevent, and that it should look in particular at a proper and correct definition of extremism that should legitimately form part of the Prevent agenda, and that it should say whether that should include non-violent extremism and, if so, how that should be defined, with a particular eye on its implications for equality, civil liberties and democratic engagement. A Prevent review should also look at the scope for local actors to develop more locally-sensitive and contextually-specific models and responses to
tackling extremism and the ways in which that might engage with local communities; not local leaders but what we call democratic constellations of Muslim civil society organisations, of which there are many.

There has been a growth and maturation of Muslim civil society organisations that could be part of this process of looking at what locally-specific and sensitive models might look like. There also needs to be a more general conversation or debate about the appropriate mechanisms for civic engagement with Muslim civil society organisations more generally, both to look at the implications of Prevent on Muslim communities and to deal with a whole host of issues that affect Muslim communities. I suggest that should be run autonomously from Prevent.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal:** Very briefly, a review is always a good thing, and I cannot see that a review or assessment of any strategy would do any harm. I think Prevent is a good strategy, but there are some areas that we need to work on, particularly community engagement. I would like to see our Muslim communities almost taking ownership of Prevent. They are the biggest community that this is affecting and they need to be a key stakeholder in this and in any of the changes that take place.

**The Chairman:** Thank you very much indeed. You have been most helpful. It has been a really interesting session and yet more food for thought.