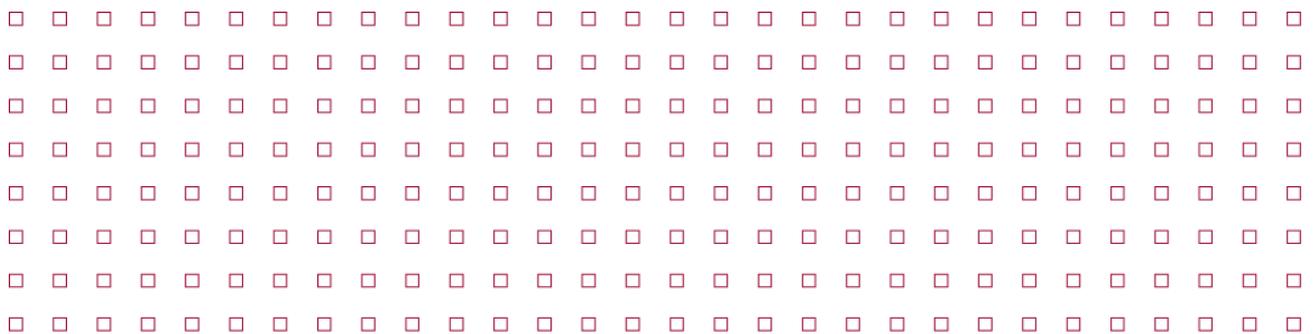




Ministry  
of Justice

# Government response to the review of Islamist extremism in prisons, probation and youth justice

August 2016







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of Justice

## **Government response to the review of Islamist extremism in prisons, probation and youth justice**

This information is also available at [www.gov.uk/moj](http://www.gov.uk/moj)



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## Background

1. This document sets out the Government's action in response to the review led by Ian Acheson into the threat of Islamist extremism in prisons, probation and youth justice.
2. In September 2015, the then Secretary of State for Justice commissioned a review to:
  - assess the growing threat which Islamist extremism – and the radicalisation which sustains it – poses to prisons and probation services; and
  - assess the capability of the National Offender Management Service (**NOMS**) to meet that threat.
3. The review team, led by Ian Acheson, submitted a detailed report of their findings and recommendations on March 17th.
4. Given the nature of its content – and the implications for public safety and security – the review constitutes a classified report. It is therefore not suitable for publication in full. A summary of its main findings and its principal recommendations, however, has been published.

## Overview

5. Prisons exist to keep the public safe. Their purpose is to incarcerate offenders in a safe and secure environment and – through education and rehabilitation – guide them towards lives free from crime. Islamist extremism is a direct threat to the important work carried out in prisons. It endangers prisoners and staff, encourages criminal behaviour and terrorism, and undermines the proper functioning of the justice system. Countering the growing threat of Islamist extremism in prisons is therefore an urgent priority.
6. The Government welcomes the review and its findings and is implementing eight of the 11 principal recommendations, as set out below. With public safety as the overriding concern, we will be partially implementing or continuing to review our response to the further three recommendations.

This action supports the Government's broader counter-terrorism, CONTEST, and Counter-Extremism strategies.

7. In countering this threat, the Government recognises that the interface within prisons between Islamist extremism and other areas of criminal activity, including gang-related crime and serious organised crime, will be critical. Islamist extremism cannot be entirely isolated from efforts to tackle issues such as drugs, violence and discipline in prison. Many of the issues identified in the review, such as the systematic recording of disruptive or violent behaviour, are not limited to extremism but reflect wider safety issues in prisons. Nevertheless, Islamist extremism itself represents one of the most acute risks to the safety of prisoners and prison staff.
8. Tackling Islamist extremism in prison requires dealing with a wide range of offenders, from highly motivated terrorists convicted of extremely serious offences, to prisoners

with mental health issues or other vulnerabilities who may be susceptible to extremist ideology. The review focused on Islamist extremism, but prisons can provide an atmosphere in which individuals are particularly vulnerable to the full spectrum of extremist ideological messages, whether Islamist or neo-Nazi. In implementing the review the Government will give consideration to countering extremism in all its forms.

9. The Government attaches a high priority to tackling Islamist extremism as part of its wider prison safety and reform agenda. Work will be developed in line with the aforementioned existing Government strategies for countering terrorism as well as the wider harms caused by extremism. Work is already under way to implement the principal recommendations of the review, though managing convicted terrorists and other ideologically motivated prisoners will require continuous review and improvement.
10. For the highest risk terrorists and radicalisers, the Government will use all the measures at its disposal, including separation from the mainstream prison population, to contain their risk and prevent the spread of poisonous ideologies. Extremists cannot be allowed to prey on the vulnerable. Through targeted interventions and careful individual case management we will encourage all extremists to disengage, while monitoring and managing the risk presented by those who choose not to.
11. In the everyday prison environment, we will strengthen our communications, staff training, and faith teaching to ensure that extremist ideologies are never allowed to flourish. Preventing the radicalisation of prisoners who are vulnerable to extremist messaging is as important as working with those who are already radicalised.

## **Action in Response to Review Findings**

12. The review shows the challenges faced by dedicated staff every day, and highlights areas of concern which we are taking the following actions to address:

- **A) The creation of a new Security, Order and Counter Terrorism Directorate.**

We have created a new directorate which will analyse incidents and will include an Islamist extremism review implementation team. The Director is responsible for ensuring the appropriate balance of operational and other skills within the Directorate and will be accountable to Ministers in delivering this work. The Government's starting position is that the new directorate should draw closely on existing cross-Government expertise, rather than relying on the appointment of a further independent adviser, though we will continue to monitor the need for this role. The Directorate will lead on the development and delivery of a plan for countering Islamist extremism in prisons and probation as part of the Government's wider counter-terrorism and counter-extremism agendas, as well as prison safety and reform plans.

- **B) Specialist units to allow greater separation and specialised management of the highest risk individuals.**

Planning is under way to create specialist units within the high security estate to allow greater separation and specialised management of extremists who pose the highest risk to other prisoners.

We are also reviewing options for improving the identification and management of extremist prisoners. Prisoners are categorised and managed according to their risk, and this principle will be maintained.

- **C) Improved capacity for responding swiftly to serious violent incidents.**

Rapid response to serious violent incidents will be an important part of our prison safety and reform plans. There are well developed systems for managing serious incidents in prisons, such as gang or drug related violence. These are continuously reviewed to improve our response capability and will be updated.

Trained intervention teams have full plans and equipment for rapid responses in the event of a terrorist related incident. This has been incorporated into national incident response command structures. We continue to work with the police to further strengthen our joint response capability for serious incidents which require specialist police resources to resolve.

- **D) Recording disruptive or violent behaviour.**

We have piloted Body Worn Video Cameras in prisons with positive results. Body Worn Video Cameras help deter prisoners from disruptive or violent behaviour and help the implementation of sanctions when such behaviour occurs. We are empowering Governors to use this technology across the prison estate and will be rolling it out nationally starting in October 2016, with an expected completion date of the end of March 2017.

- **E) Improved staff training.**

We are reviewing extremism prevention training for all new prison staff as well as prison based training for existing staff. These courses will be combined into a single, improved course before the end of this year. In addition, prison PREVENT leads are rolling out Recognising Extremist Activity in Prisons briefings for all prisoner-facing staff, to be included in existing staff security briefings in their induction programs.

- **F) Tightened vetting.**

We will strengthen our due diligence process for the recruitment of prison chaplains and a range of key prisoner-facing positions to ensure we have the right people in place to counter extremist beliefs.

There are established pre-appointment checks in place for all prison chaplaincy positions, including Counter Terrorist Check (CTC) security clearance and the scrutiny of professional credentials.

- **G) Removal of extremist literature.**

We will take steps to remove extremist and offensive literature from prisons. Governors have already been instructed to remove five specific texts identified by the review team from their prisons. Decisions must always be proportionate and defensible. A thorough and objective process is in place to assess the extremist nature of concerning materials against existing criteria for inappropriate material.

- **H) Greater focus on the safe management of corporate worship.**

Governors are accountable and responsible for peaceful acts of faith and worship, including Friday prayers, in their prisons. We will ensure that Governors use their existing powers to remove prisoners from corporate worship where they are behaving subversively or promoting beliefs that run counter to fundamental British values. We do not, however, believe it is the right course of action at present to alter the provision of worship more generally or, for example, to pursue in-cell alternatives.

- **I) Reviewing procedures under 'Rule 39', to ensure confidential privilege in legal correspondence is not being abused.**

In response to this recommendation we have conducted a comprehensive examination of abuses of 'Rule 39', including analysis of all intelligence gathered by prison staff on this issue over the past year. Based on this analysis the Government does not believe the current process currently requires amending. Protecting the relationship between lawyers and their clients is of the utmost importance to upholding the rule of law.

Where abuse of 'Rule 39' is attempted, this is almost always by prisoners and their criminal associates rather than lawyers, suggesting that our focus should be on enforcing current powers rather than reviewing the nature of 'Rule 39' itself. We will continue to take an intelligence-led approach to identify and resolve abuses of the system, without undue interference with legitimate legally privileged correspondence.







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