

Press release

Government sets out new measures to tackle extremism in prisons

From: Ministry of Justice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice>)

First published: 22 August 2016

Extremists to be held in 'specialist units', a crackdown on extremist literature and tightened vetting of prison chaplains.



Governors and prison officers will be given the training, skills and authority needed to prevent influential extremist prisoners exerting control and radicalising others. This follows a landmark review, published today, looking at the risks posed by Islamist extremists in prisons.

Prison officers, on the front line, will be equipped to crack down on extremist behaviour. They will be supported by a new directorate for Security, Order and Counter-Terrorism, responsible for monitoring and dealing with this evolving threat.

Governors have also been instructed to ban extremist literature and to remove anyone from Friday prayers who is promoting anti-British beliefs or other dangerous views.

The most dangerous Islamist extremists will be removed from the general prison population and held in 'specialist units' in the high security estate. The creation of the units is one of the recommendations in the review, ordered by the government last year and led by Ian Acheson.

Secretary of State for Justice Elizabeth Truss said:

“Islamist extremism is a danger to society and a threat to public safety – it must be defeated wherever it is found. I am committed to confronting and countering the spread of this poisonous ideology behind bars.

Preventing the most dangerous extremists from radicalising other prisoners is essential to the safe running of our prisons and fundamental to public protection.”

Lack of confidence in challenging unacceptable extremist behaviour and views was highlighted as a key concern across the prison estate, resulting in reluctance to confront extremist views.

Key measures to be implemented include:

- creating a new directorate for Security, Order and Counter-Terrorism, which will deliver a plan for countering extremism in prisons and probation services
- instructing governors to remove extremist literature and putting in place a thorough process to assess materials of concern
- boosting plans for rapid responses by intervention teams to terrorist-related incidents
- improving extremism prevention training for all prison officers
- strengthening vetting of prison chaplains and a range of positions to make sure the right people are in place in prisons to counter extremist beliefs

The government is committed to defeating all forms of extremist ideology through its Counter Extremism Strategy, which includes a focus on by supporting mainstream voices and building stronger and more cohesive communities. We are also strengthening institutions and supporting individuals at particular risk of radicalisation through the Prevent programme part of our counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST). Through targeted interventions we will encourage Islamist extremists to disengage, while closely monitoring and managing the risk presented by those who choose not to.

Notes to editors

1. In September 2015 the then Secretary of State for Justice commissioned a small review team led by Ian Acheson. The team made over 60 prison visits in the UK and overseas, and interviewed more than 300 prison staff and policymakers in the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and NOMS.
2. The review was announced on 24 July 2015 by Lord Faulks and the full text of his comments (<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2015-07-21/HL1769>) is available online.
3. A summary of the review, which was announced by MOJ in July last year and forms part of the government's Counter-Extremism strategy, has been published today.
4. Given the nature of its content, and implications for public safety and security, the review is in the form of a classified report to the then Secretary of State. The subject matter is complex, with significant policy implications. The main findings of the review (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/islamist-extremism-in-prisons-probation-and-youth-justice>) have been summarised and will be published alongside the government's review.
5. More details on CONTEST (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/contest-uk-strategy-for-counterterrorism-annual-report-for-2015>) are available on GOV.UK.