

Why I am best placed to deliver this project.

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I work as an arts producer within the context of campaigning for artistic freedom of expression, predominantly in the UK. To do this, I take a broad definition of what production means in order to best support the artist in the role so eloquently articulated by Xenophon Kavadias. And as artists are reliant on producers, curators, venue managers, our work extends to support those who work alongside the artist to bring complex and challenging work into the world.

Sometimes it means producing events - symposia, roundtable discussions, conferences - to address constraints on artistic freedoms, for instance, the 2013 conference '[Taking the Offensive](#)' looking at courses of institutional self-censorship in arts organisations. Sometimes it means producing guidance - such as the 2015 [Art&Law](#) packs, a series of bespoke guides, designed for artists and arts organisations on the legal and rights framework impacting on what is sayable in the arts, which are now used in training at the College of Policing. Sometimes it is designing and delivering training - as in the 2019 programme '[Risks, Rights, Reputations](#)' for senior management and boards on how to support risk taking work.

Throughout, it has meant producing case studies of work that has been censored 'on the advice of' police, programmers reneging on work, or as a result of public pressure. In order to write the case study, I work closely with the protagonists involved in producing work that was censored and the antagonists who led to its removal or cancellation, to extract learning that can be used to avoid foreclosure of arts events in the future. On occasion it means working closely with artists or producers as they develop new work that is particularly challenging, to reinforce the framework in which the work is being produced to ensure its survival if the waters get stormy around it. In all cases I aim to be pragmatic, to produce 'things' that are useful to artists, producers and curators who want to rattle the cage, call power to account, unmask taboos.

This intervention represents both a continuation of this work and a departure from it. It carries all the conviction of my practice that artists have a vitally important contribution to make in our understanding of the relationship between the citizen and the state, to address injustice, misrepresentation, discrimination through their work in all media. In this regard the premise of this essay - that artists, given the best possible conditions in which to make work, should be invited into the process of review of Prevent strategy - is consistent with my practice to date. It is a departure from my practice, in that I have responded creatively and imaginatively to the issue of the government's failure thus far, to deliver an independent review.

An Independent Review is an important event in the theatre of politics. It is a piece of staged dialogue, reflection, when the government offers up itself to scrutiny. It's an acknowledgement that their policies might be flawed, failing, or as in the case of Prevent Strategy that is recognised in its [own recruitment pack](#) for a new Independent Reviewer as "a controversial aspect of government policy". Civil society has been calling for a review of Prevent Strategy for many years because it is considered, among other things, to violate

fundamental rights to privacy, free speech and association, to have created a surveillance society which disproportionately targets and stigmatises Muslim communities; because it is being used to criminalise thought and opinion and is an assault on civil rights of dissent and peaceful protest. Further, through the auspices of Prevent Duty the strategy has warped the relationship between teacher and pupil, social worker and client, health professional and patient, by requiring them by law, to report on what are widely taken to be ill-defined, ill-informed indicators of radicalisation. (See Appendix 2 for a more detailed description of the Prevent Strategy and the 'Prevent Duty').

To my ears the announcement of an independent review sounds like the government is saying – “the stage is yours people, come and speak to us, we are listening”. At its best, it is a green light for those behind-doors conversations, those endured injustices to come out into the open, for accepted narratives to be challenged, disrupted and disturbed in order to produce better, more effective policy. To me it sounds like the enactment of freedom of expression, one of the pillars of democracy and, to tamper with George Orwell’s famous quote: “If ~~liberty~~ an independent review means anything at all, it means the right of the people to tell people the government what it does not want to hear.”

Imagine my naive sense of anticipation then, when the Independent Review of Prevent legislation was announced in January 2019. For four years I had been working on the fallout of Prevent on artistic freedom of expression. I started out by writing a case study on ‘Homegrown’ by the creative duo Omar EL-Khairy and Nadia Latif, that explored the motivation behind radicalisation of young Muslims in schools, commissioned then cancelled by the National Youth Theatre in 2015. The cancellation sent shock waves through the theatre community, fuelled by a wall of silence that surrounded the theatre. English Pen wrote an [open letter to The Times](#) signed by theatre professionals, expressing these concerns: “The play seeks to examine radicalisation and disaffection among British youth. Its cancellation serves only to shut down conversation on these important issues. We fear that government policy in response to extremism may be creating a culture of caution in the arts”. I also worked on [the launch of script of the play](#) – a part scripted, part devised with 115 young performers - that Latif and El-Khairy self-published when the publisher Oberon Books withdrew.

The more I found out about Prevent, the worse it got. I was struck by the State’s imperviousness to [high-level criticism of the legislation coming from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), and the [UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Association](#), and on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. I was concerned to see the Prevent Duty [was being rolled out to include the corporate sector](#) to harness it into the Prevent Duty methodology on a voluntary, as opposed to mandatory basis, turning us into what has been widely described as a ‘nation of spies’.

In my role as Associate Arts Producer for Index on Censorship, in 2017 I organised a roundtable discussion entitled ‘Prevent, Free Speech and the Arts’ with 24 senior arts managers, the head of arts at the Arts Council and the police lead on Prevent. We discussed the concerns of many artists and arts organisations, deeply troubled by the discrimination against Muslim communities, and the impact on expression by artists from a Muslim background. At that meeting one manager of a major UK cultural institution asked – if this

was this generation's Section 28 moment? - [referring to the mobilisation of opposition to the homophobic legislation](#). I believe it to be and continued to work away on these issues, gathering evidence of artistic voices being silenced, collecting examples of work that treated Prevent as subject matter. In 2019 I called another roundtable, this time with artists and academics mainly from a Muslim background, asking how best to respond to the opportunities offered by the review.

In preparation for a submission to the review by *Index on Censorship*, I collated all the evidence into two sections, each showing the unique insight artists give us into understanding of the impact of Prevent:

- Where artists have themselves been silenced or marginalised, or have self-censored because of Prevent;
- Where artists have produced work that gives a platform to those who have been silenced or marginalised or have self-censored, because of Prevent.

What emerges from the submission is evidence of how the fear, paranoia and discrimination generated by the Prevent strategy in general and the Prevent Duty in particular, has created a risk averse environment in which artists and producers who engage with this topic are branded as 'extremist' or warned that they are "being too political" by funders, leading to suppression of debate and discussion and self-censorship. One artist points to the way Channel and Prevent had created an environment "in which certain forms of questioning, let alone subversion, of the given narrative pertaining to radicalisation or extremism, can be closed down." Another said that in the context of Prevent her "imagination is dangerous". In some councils, funding for community arts programmes is being yoked to the surveillance machine, requiring artists, as a condition of the grant, to monitor the expression of the people they are working for these loosely defined "signs of radicalisation" and fill in reports that are sent to the Home Office.

There is evidence of the Prevent Duty normalising the censorship of work in secondary arts education that explores expression pertaining to terrorism, extremism, so shutting down debate about some of the most urgent issues facing young people. We also included examples of work that takes Prevent and associated themes of radicalisation as artistic content and subject matter, that has been successfully produced, to illustrate the salience of insights and experiences this work brings to light: a film-maker describes her work was created to "deconstruct the imagery that's used around Prevent, and around safeguarding and who needs to be protected and from who"; a theatre maker uses online radicalisation as a lens through which to focus in on what he sees as a wider contemporary crisis of masculinity. See 'Supporting Documents' at the end of this essay to read the full submission I submitted on behalf of Index on Censorship.

In September 2019, I joined a coalition of civil liberties organisations which had campaigned for the Independent Review and were now coordinating their response to increase their weight and influence. Here I encountered deep concerns about the slow pace of progress of the review: the highly problematic Home Office appointment of a staunch supporter of Prevent, Lord Carlile, as reviewer, who until his appointment to the review was a member of the Home Office Prevent Oversight Board; and the strictures and limitations of Lord

Carlile's long-awaited Terms & Conditions, published in September 2019, nine months after the announcement of the review.

The coalition group debated how it was possible to submit evidence to the review, without legitimising a process that was seen as both lacking independence and a willingness to review the strategy in its entirety. Some decided not to engage with the review process as a matter of principle, some felt it would make no difference to the review whether we submitted or not, others decided to submit, but on their own terms, without regard for the Terms and Conditions as put forward by Lord Carlile. *Index on Censorship* fitted into the final category. We submitted a report to the review in December 2019, but with the following disclaimer:

"Index responds to this inquiry with some reluctance. While we have been calling for some time for an independent review of the Prevent strategy, we are concerned that the inquiry as currently constituted, lacks the independence that would give its conclusions credibility. Nevertheless, we are also conscious that – given Security Minister Ben Wallace's outspoken call for evidence¹ and insinuation that critics of Prevent resort to "distortions and spin" – any failure to provide information to this inquiry might be interpreted, or indeed spun, by those in government as an indication that there is no issue with Prevent.

We assert that lack of evidence of a problem is not, in itself, evidence that there is not a problem. We have encountered significant self-censorship and mistrust connected with Prevent affecting peoples' willingness to contribute to a report which is "inherently tied to my dehumanisation and the dehumanisation of my community." Rather than respond to the questions in the inquiry, which failed to address our areas of concern, we present case studies, statements and interviews about the damaging consequences of Prevent specifically on the arts."
