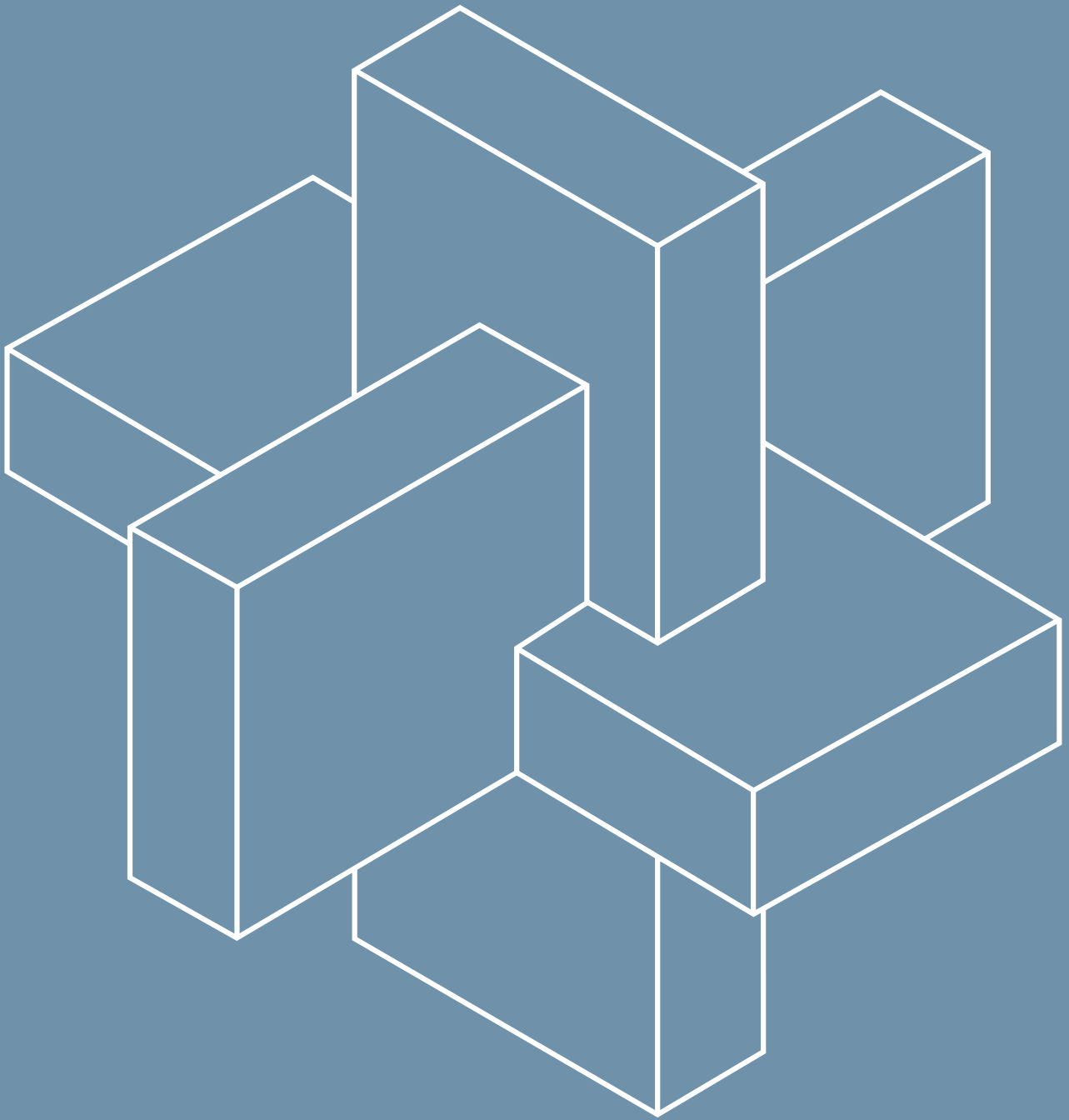


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ON COHESION

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- 03** Greater Manchester: strong and united in turbulent times
Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester
- 04** Youth engagement: can we afford not to invest in what works?
Dr James Laurence
- 08** The pathway to violent extremism: is socio-economic inequality, or our perception of it, to blame?
Professor Hilary Pilkington
- 11** Could religious tradition be the antidote to fundamentalism?
Professor Alexander Samely
- 14** Prevent in schools and colleges: why a new approach is needed
Bob Hindle
- 17** Cohesion again? Learning lessons from the 'between'
Dr Necla Acik and Dr Ajmal Hussain
- 19** Protecting against terror: are we dividing our cities?
Dr Martin Coward
- 22** Why embracing language diversity is a key to community cohesion
Professor Yaron Matras
- 26** Whiteness, class, and cohesion
Dr James Rhodes
- 31** Young people are the solution, not the problem
Dr Jo Deakin
-



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Greater Manchester: strong and united in turbulent times

Andy Burnham

In May 2017, our great city was attacked in an act of cowardice. It was an act that we in Greater Manchester are still recovering from. But in our recovery, we should learn and ask difficult questions.

We must ask what happened on that night, afterwards and how we might improve on our responses. We must also ask what we can all do to tackle extremism of all kinds.

I am proud of how Greater Manchester responded. In the darkest of times we shone through, showing the world how strong and united we are. But we must look at our response, which is why I asked Lord Kerslake to review it in depth and honestly. All the families involved need their questions answering.

We are taking a hard look at ourselves to ask what we can do better. But, in return, we expect the Government to do the same. The words of praise offered for our emergency services at the time of the tragedy rang hollow when they were followed, as they were, by more cuts to the GMP grant. These continual cuts have gone too far and are putting lives at risk.

The truth is that the police and the security services cannot keep all people who may pose a risk under constant surveillance. We need to consider other ways of tackling the growing extremism which is the scourge of our times. That is the task we have given to our [Commission on Tackling Violent Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion](#), headed by Cllr Rishi Shori and Cllr Jean Stretton.

This independent review is looking deeply into communities across Greater Manchester. Difficult questions may need to be asked, but to ensure our city-region is the best place to grow up, get on and grow old, they must be asked.

It is looking at how Prevent works in Greater Manchester – how we can work with people on the positives it brings and how to reassure people that they can safely report behaviour that concerns them. It is looking into developing a community-led Greater Manchester approach to challenging hateful radicalisation of all kinds. We want to establish shared values and commitments that give a good foundation for living in Greater Manchester.

Some like to talk about violent extremism as if it is the sole preserve of one community. The reality is it is on the rise in all communities. We are living through turbulent and polarised times. Extremists of all kinds are seeking to turn people against each other, creating a climate of hate and a cycle of violence. Social media gives them an instant megaphone and we have a President in the Oval Office who is acting as the agitator-in-chief.

This is the grim reality of our febrile world in 2018. In these circumstances, all families and all communities will have to be more vigilant and more prepared to report extreme violent behaviour or views. I hope the Commission – and this publication - will provide us with some new thinking on how we help them to do that and develop our own distinctive approach to this most difficult issue of our times.

Both of these reviews will complete their work in 2018. When they publish their findings, I will make sure they are acted upon. We all want to live in a place where people look out for each other. If anywhere can do it, Greater Manchester can. Our unified response to tragedy made us a beacon of hope to so many around the world.

Andy Burnham was elected as Mayor of Greater Manchester in May 2017. Following the Manchester Arena attack, he set up two reviews to examine the response of Greater Manchester and to examine the work being undertaken to confront all forms of violent extremism and build cohesion, to ensure residents across Greater Manchester are protected.

Youth engagement: can we afford not to invest in what works?

Dr James Laurence

How do we ‘build a stronger, safer, and more cohesive region’, ‘tackle extremism’, and grow that ‘tangible sense of togetherness’ that brings our communities together in the face of those forces that seek to divide us? These are the questions being posed by [The Manchester Mayor’s Independent Commission](#). One highly [effective](#) means of cultivating and strengthening social cohesion, especially among young people, is through youth social and civic engagement schemes.

Strengthening cohesion between communities requires the involvement of everyone; however, in recent years, concern has steadily grown regarding the susceptibility of young people to radicalisation and extremism. As Professor Hillary Pilkington, a member of the Commission, [notes](#), young people from all backgrounds are often targets for radical messages. They are also more likely to be [perpetrators](#), as well as [victims](#), of race and religious hate crimes.

So what tools do we have to help build resilience and cohesion among young people? One tool that research has consistently [shown](#) to be highly effective is building positive social mixing between different ethnic and religious groups.

Positive Social Mixing – opportunities and obstacles

Positive social mixing means more than casual interactions in shops or on the street (although every little helps). The kind of contact that is most sticky is sustained, co-operative mixing, where young people are working together for a common goal, helping one another, in positive environments where everyone is seen as equal. This kind of contact not only produces positive relations between groups but can actually build a kind of [resilience](#), which can help hold communities together in the face of shocks, such as terrorist attacks or politically charged debates.

The problem is, building and sustaining this kind of contact can be difficult. Firstly, not everyone has opportunities to meet people from different ethnic groups in their daily lives and activities. This obstacle is

especially acute for people in [segregated areas](#), where neighbourhoods and schools tend to be more ethnically homogeneous.

Secondly, even when opportunities are available, mixing doesn’t always take place. This can be seen in some schools where, despite being very mixed on paper, young people can sometimes

Strengthening cohesion between communities requires the involvement of everyone; however, in recent years, concern has steadily grown regarding the susceptibility of young people to radicalisation and extremism.

self-segregate into friendship groups of their own ethnicity.

Thirdly, even when mixing does occur, it is not always of the right type to build cohesion. A lot of contact in society is superficial, or is simply a means to an end (such as buying bread from a shop). Furthermore, although rarer, social contact between groups can also be negative, such as when it involves a confrontation. The

problem is, as [opportunities](#) for positive mixing increase, which help build cohesion, so too do the opportunities for negative encounters, which can further harm relations.

Building positive social mixing therefore faces a number of obstacles. One means of overcoming these is via youth social and civic participation schemes.

Building Bridges: the National Citizen Service

The National Citizen Service ([NCS](#)) is a government-backed youth initiative which brings together young people from different backgrounds, aged 15-17, in small teams of around 12 to 15 people, to engage in a programme of activities encouraging personal, social and civic development. What's critical about NCS is that it explicitly aims to maximise the social mix of teams to

Schemes like the NCS therefore have the capacity to bring young people together to build experiences of positive mixing and long-lasting ties between people from different backgrounds, cultivating social cohesion.

match the wider area where participants live. In a diverse but segregated local authority like Oldham, for example, NCS providers therefore aim to make their teams look like the ethnic mix of Oldham as a whole; not just like young people's neighbourhoods or schools, which tend to be more ethnically homogeneous.

Schemes like the NCS therefore have the capacity

to bring young people together to build experiences of positive mixing and long-lasting ties between people from different backgrounds, cultivating social cohesion. But, do they work? The answer appears to be largely yes – and there is a raft of high-quality evaluations of the scheme which show this (for example, the Ipsos MORI evaluations of the [2013 scheme](#), [2014 scheme](#), [2015 scheme](#), and the '[2013: one year on](#)' evaluation).

Overall, adolescents passing through NCS show crucial positive changes in their attitudes towards ethnic difference in society. After participating, they are more likely to report feeling comfortable with a close friend or relative going out with someone from a different ethnic background and report warmer feelings towards different ethnic groups. A key driver of this appears to

be increases in positive social mixing with these other groups. These improvements appear to spill over into their views of their local area, with participants more likely to feel it is a place where people from different backgrounds get along well.

These are encouraging findings. However, a critical question is whether such schemes simply reinforce cohesion where it already exists? In fact, an independent [report](#) demonstrated that the NCS is especially effective for young people who join the scheme with lower social cohesion to begin with. In particular, participation leads to much bigger improvements in cohesion among young people from more segregated and disadvantaged communities, where social cohesion is often more frayed.

Practical, immediate, and affordable?

To conclude then, civic/social participation schemes like NCS not only appear to improve average levels of

Participation leads to much bigger improvements in cohesion among young people from more segregated and disadvantaged communities, where social cohesion is often more frayed.

cohesion among young people but do this by being particularly effective for those who come on to the scheme with the lowest levels of cohesion to begin with. In doing so, they can help close the gaps in social cohesion found between the most and least integrated.

Clearly, building a 'stronger, safer and more cohesive region' requires more

than this. The reduction of socio-economic inequalities between different groups, tackling deprivation, promoting tolerance within schools, and reducing segregation are all key means of building a more integrated society.

However, youth engagement programs like the NCS offer a practical, immediate, and relatively affordable intervention that does not require significant changes in legislation to implement.

The benefits of investing in such schemes seem vast and far-reaching. The price to society of not doing so may, in the long run, prove far more costly.

Dr James Laurence is a Research Fellow at the Cathie Marsh Institute for Social Research, University of Manchester.



The pathway to violent extremism: is socio-economic inequality, or our perception of it, to blame?

Professor Hilary Pilkington

In December 2017, David Anderson QC published an [independent assessment](#) of MI5 and police internal reviews of operational processes surrounding the four terrorist attacks that took place in the UK between March and June 2017 (Westminster, London Bridge, Finsbury Park Mosque, Manchester Arena). The Manchester attack, in particular, Anderson concluded, ‘might have been averted had the cards fallen differently’. Accurate information about suicide bomber Salman Abedi’s plans, it appears, had been received but its significance was not identified soon enough.

The findings of that report must have been painful reading for the families of those who died and for those injured and traumatised by the attack. The report focused attention on issues around intelligence handling and operational procedure and quite rightly so - the lives of our children should not depend on how the cards fall. While the relevant agencies grapple with the questions raised by the report, however, it falls to communities, including the academic community, to try to understand what led another one of our children - Salman Abedi - on a pathway to violent extremism?

Research into radicalisation

Radicalisation research is a relatively new field of study that seeks to explain why and how people become violent extremists. Research to date shows it is a complex

phenomenon. Multiple factors at individual, group and societal levels are at play, and there is [no single profile](#) of individuals prone to embark on such a path [nor any single route](#) they take. Researchers have devised numerous socio-psychological models which categorise and hierarchise the identified factors (see [Borum](#); [Christmann](#); [Moghaddam](#); and [Doosje, Loseman and van den Bos](#)); but in practice, it is [unlikely that any single model](#) can show what brings individuals to violence.

Recognising complexity, however, should not be an excuse for inaction. The fact that there is no simple solution does not mean identifying relevant factors and intervening to lessen their impact is pointless; it means we must be more precise in understanding the drivers and more targeted in the interventions.

Socio-economic inequality and radicalisation

Take, for example, the question of socio-economic inequality as a key driver of radicalisation. The conclusions of a systematic review of the evidence on this will be published by the [DARE](#) (Dialogue About Radicalisation and Equality) project in August 2018. Without pre-empting

its findings, I would like to make the case here that the very fact that research provides inconclusive evidence on the role of general, structural conditions, points the way to a more nuanced understanding and more contextualised, localised interventions.

The fact that there is no simple solution, does not mean identifying relevant factors and intervening to lessen their impact is pointless

Developing a nuanced understanding

Demonstrating any causal relationship in social science is difficult but a first step towards understanding the role of social and economic factors is to consider findings to date in relation to three distinct measures

- economic development, poverty, and economic inequality.

On the first two measures - overall economic development and individual poverty/deprivation – we do not find any direct or consistent relationship with violent extremism/terrorism.

In the case of (country-level) economic development, findings are inconsistent - reflecting that the relationship differs over time and for types of terrorism. This might also be explained by the relationship between income and terrorism [being nonlinear](#); domestic terrorism increases alongside economic development but declines as the country becomes highly developed. Another important finding is that the relationship is also [affected by the presence of minority discrimination](#).

In the case of poverty, research has [failed to demonstrate a direct link](#). Evidence of individual trajectories suggests violent extremists [are strikingly normal](#) in terms of socioeconomic background, while a [recent study](#) of (currently active) foreign fighters found that none had come from familial situations of poverty or marginality.

On the third measure – inequality – however, there is some [evidence](#) that economic inequality is

Evidence of individual trajectories suggests violent extremists are strikingly normal in terms of socioeconomic background.

a predictor of domestic terrorism, especially where it divides communities based on ethnicity, religion or language. Meanwhile, another study established that in European countries, a larger gap between non-EU immigrant and native population groups in the

labour market and the school system correlates with a higher per capita number of foreign fighters leaving the country to join Islamic State (IS).

Does this lack of a clear link between socio-economic factors and violent extremism mean that it is, in fact, other factors such as ideology, religion or geo-political factors that are the real drivers of radicalisation? The answer is that of course these factors also play a role, but we should not dismiss socio-economic factors.

What the evidence indicates is that socio-economic inequality matters but the relationship is complex and influenced by perceptions and experiences. Indeed, the [research suggests](#) that people's subjective perceptions may be as important as objectively measured inequalities in exacerbating attitudes about injustice and privilege. This brings the human factor back in and opens the way to local, contextualised, community-led intervention.

Community solutions - growing a contextualised intervention

Manchester presents an example of where the door is already open to such an approach. Since 2014,

Manchester City Council has been working with Greater Manchester Police, local councils, the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Peace Foundation and communities to build an understanding of local community concerns relating

to extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. This led to a series of community discussions, a published report on [Rethinking Radicalisation](#) and the implementation of an accredited programme of training in Radical Dialogue for community representatives concerned with countering extremism and building resilient and cohesive communities. This programme, and its participants, have since fed into the development of the [RADEQUAL Campaign](#) and community network.

Radicalisation is a process that is complex (not linear), situational (emerging out of interaction including choice), emotional (as well as ideological) and changing (affected by time and place). While this means there is no single or

Long-term, structural inequalities need to be addressed through serious, targeted government policies.

simple solution to the problem, it also means it is open to intervention and best understood, and tackled, in context rather than globally and through (local) community rather than (national) policy interventions.

The research evidence, in this sense, can be enabling. If perceptions of inequality and injustice are as much the problem as objective measures of actual inequality, then facilitated community engagement and dialogue is an important tool in the effort to counter radicalisation. Long-term, structural inequalities need to be addressed through serious, targeted government policies. In the meantime, communities themselves can begin to tackle the subjective dimension of inequality by creating the space to have uncomfortable but important conversations about the difference and inequity that is felt.

In the process, we may well find that the desire to tackle inequality is something that unites, rather than divides communities.

Professor Hilary Pilkington is Professor of Sociology in School of Social Sciences and one of six commissioners on the Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Cohesion Commission established by Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Manchester.

The DARE project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No 725349. It runs from May 2017-April 2021 and is coordinated by the University of Manchester.

Could religious tradition be the antidote to fundamentalism?

Professor Alexander Samely

It is often felt that mere belief in the authority of sacred scriptures, such as the Bible or the Qur'an, plays a role in the radicalisation of members of religious communities. From the point of view of a historian of (Jewish) theology, things look a lot more complicated.

The diversity of interpretation as tradition

Many scripture-based religious traditions embrace multiple meanings in their sacred texts, so religiously motivated respect for one's tradition can provide a basis for the acceptance of difference. In Judaism, for example, disagreements over interpretations of the Hebrew Bible were preserved within the tradition-forming group itself, the Rabbis of the Talmud. Disagreements were to a considerable extent cherished and transmitted as part of the tradition itself. This is not unusual. In Islam too, major disagreements on interpretation from antiquity and the middle ages are validated in principle as being part of the various traditions themselves. This includes disagreements affecting the practices of Islamic law as described by Andrew Rippin [in his book *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*](#).

This goes hand in hand with a basic respect for learnedness, so that knowledge of the classical tradition is valued. Within many faith groups, awareness of the inherent diversity of tradition carries traditional prestige.

At the same time, where a group values allegiance to their tradition, the religious authority of contemporary faith leaders derives from their perceived continuity with that tradition. So, if religious leaders wish to incite members of their group to religious violence, they must at

least implicitly claim the meaning of sacred scriptures, as interpreted by a tradition of reading.

In traditional scripture-based communities, each current interpretation is seen merely as the tip of the iceberg of the tradition, justified by that tradition. Many members of tradition-based faith groups will not have the time or skill to study the tradition itself, but will rely on others whom they consider learned. Yet they will see their lack of direct knowledge as a personal weakness to some extent, for studying the sacred texts or the classical interpretive tradition is often itself seen as a religious obligation. The ultimate ideal of such tradition is first-hand knowledge of the tradition. This is the reason that in many traditional Jewish and Muslim groups, knowledge of the tradition carries enormous prestige.

Modernity and less inclusive views

Today's community leaders often have less inclusive views than their ancient or medieval predecessors. This is, paradoxically, often a response of sacred scripture traditions to their encounter with modernity. Narrowness can be the result of rejecting Western modernity, while adopting what is perceived to be that modernity's powerful model of truth: a truth that is exclusive and one-dimensional, [and carrying its own propensity for violence](#). Yet students of the classical

religious traditions will still encounter variety and diversity, even if they study them in order to justify less inclusive outlooks that reflect modern fundamentalist ideas of truth.

The more a modern Jew knows of their religious

In traditional scripture-based communities, each current interpretation is seen merely as the tip of the iceberg of the tradition, justified by that tradition.



tradition, the more they see that there is not only one, but several answers to a question; not only one, but several interpretations of the same scriptural passage – and often this is positively valued.

Acceptance of difference is a pervasive feature of many sacred scripture religions, in particular those with an allegiance to traditional authority, and then this acceptance can be found on every page of scripture commentary, theological discourse or legal debate.

As a consequence, tradition-loyal communities can more [comfortably embrace variety](#) than is often realised. They can see disagreements within certain boundaries as positive, and can accept divine texts as resisting one-dimensional interpretations. In the context of such religious traditions, the human is often seen as one-dimensional, and the divine as multi-dimensional, as the source of not one, but many truths.

Tradition as an ally to cohesion

The important upshot of this is that the prestige of traditional learnedness is a potential ally to those who wish to promote mutual respect and tolerance in contemporary multi-cultural and multi-faith societies. Even the most ultra-orthodox Jew studying the Torah and Talmud today will

Acceptance of difference is a pervasive feature of many sacred scripture religions, in particular those with an allegiance to traditional authority.

necessarily encounter the value of plurality as part of their heritage. That is a potential basis for understanding and appreciating its value more widely. In other words, among the antidotes to fundamentalisms of a tradition, one needs to consider a person's opportunity

of acquiring first-hand knowledge of that very tradition.

There appear to be a number of practical consequences of this for those who wish to foster social cohesion:

- Education of faith group members in their own classical tradition can create an awareness of a traditional approval of the diversity of inner-religious views
- Inner-traditional education within a faith group can have the effect of undermining the selective use of the tradition for fundamentalist or radicalising purposes
- A person's claim to speak for a whole community ("the" Jews, "the" Muslims) can be evaluated by their awareness and appreciation of the diversity of the tradition they claim to represent
- The ability of faith-based schools to support values of social cohesion is likely to be enhanced, rather than undermined, by a curriculum that includes a broad historical view of the tradition within which they locate themselves

Professor Alexander Samely is Professor of Jewish Thought at the University of Manchester and takes a special interest in how we read texts.

Prevent in schools and colleges: why a new approach is needed

Bob Hindle

Greater Manchester's diversity is its strength and its evolution. Schools and colleges provide environments for debate and meeting points and [a rising proportion of young people from mixed race backgrounds](#) suggests we have more in common than what makes us different. This requires a Manchester strategy alone to celebrate this, while acknowledging the threat that difference poses to some. In the words of Tony Walsh's poem written after the Arena attack: "...if you're looking for history then yes, we've a wealth. But the Manchester way is to make it yourself".

Firstly, I'd like to argue here that, while acknowledging there are many forms of extremism, training around the Government's counter terrorism initiative Prevent must focus on a more robust understanding of the cultural and religious issues affecting Muslim young people. These are an important part of a preparedness and willingness to respond to students and to create the 'safe space' that Prevent requires.

Secondly, there is a need for [schools and colleges to respond to wider Islamophobia and race hatred](#) to develop the confidence of students. This is a new generation of Mancunians born into a post 9/11 world. There is also the wider discrimination by perception of BAME (British Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) young people of all faiths and none, who are targeted with suspicion and have lived through a [rising number of racially and religiously motivated attacks](#) in Greater Manchester. The government is yet to publish figures on the religion and ethnicity of those referred to Prevent. Might these reveal the extent of possible discrimination by perception?

Mind the (training) gap

Prevent training is generally delivered through online modules, via Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent [WRAP] events run by Prevent Co-ordinators and possible follow up by institutional safeguarding staff. Whilst the counter-terror focus of WRAP allows the sharing of cases and events to support a localised response, training in colleges has been identified as ['superficial' and 'inconsistent' by Ofsted](#) with policy interpretation resulting the [Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on Human Rights](#) finding it had become a 'search for religious conservatism'. [Busher et al \[2017\]](#) also argue that though schools and colleges identify broader forms of extremism, their policy response to Prevent has focused on Islamist extremism.

Is there a real understanding of the 'causes' of radicalisation beyond a vulnerability? It is hard to predict who will engage in terrorism, with no causal connection between this and theological persuasion ([Horgan and Braddock, 2012](#)). Having a job that provides satisfaction, as well as a network of family and friends, may reduce the risk of radicalisation ([Bhui et al, 2012](#)) and this means both supporting young people to do their best and supporting them with their identity.

[A 2016 survey of British Muslims by Channel 4](#) suggested many see their identity primarily in Islam, yet regard violence as inappropriate. Are all our teachers aware of concepts such as Muslim concern for the

wider Islamic community (the Ummah), and the diversity of practice within the faith? We must help teachers understand this prioritisation of faith and also that it might be problematic. We can perhaps follow the German model

Having a job that provides satisfaction, as well as a network of family and friends, may reduce the risk of radicalisation.

where teachers are trained in an understanding of Islam [[Bryan, 2017](#)]. Yet such initiatives and the teaching young people about different faiths is highly sensitive and may mean [brokering and explaining such activity with parents who see this as a threat](#).

The rise of support for far-right groups such as National Action and Britain First is the result of a similarly perceived threat to identity.

Whither Ajegbo?

The [Ajegbo report](#) [2007] was written in response to rising diversity in schools in the UK post 7/7. It outlined the need for schools to teach controversial topics such as immigration, as well as what author Keith Ajegbo called ‘dealing with difference’, identifying the need to engage white working-class pupils in this debate especially. As well as sowing the seeds of the British values that form part of Prevent, it identified the issue of inconsistency in the promotion of diversity in schools and acknowledged that some teachers feel unprepared and uncomfortable in dealing with this in class.

Recent research supports this. Can teachers confidently discuss IS and right-wing narratives in class? How do they acknowledge bravado? Teachers are uncomfortable in discussing such conversations with students [[Acik-Toprak, Deakin and Hindle, 2018](#)] and feel [unprepared to identify extremism](#) and to challenge ideas.

Teachers are asked to safeguard young people and to consider safeguarding themselves in the first instance.

Ultimately, schools and colleges have a wider duty to promote good relations amongst pupils.

In the context of inquisitive and sensitive questioning by students, how ‘safe’ is the space that has been created? Are Muslim pupils ‘self censoring’ contributions? And how are schools ‘harnessing local context’ in the curriculum as Ajegbo

suggested? Ajegbo’s findings support the challenging of extremist narratives quickly as they emerge; significant when [Home Office data](#) suggest the vast majority of those referred to Prevent are under the age of 20, yet only 5% receive specialist support.

We need to focus more closely on the objectives of a new round of training for teachers. We must blow the dust off the Ajegbo report to begin a localised response to supporting schools to challenge intolerance and build the confidence of Muslim and white working-class pupils especially.

The Home Office can lead by example and identify the religion and ethnicity of those referred to Prevent as a starting point. This helps ensure that our response to extremism is inclusive in of all of its forms and helps dispel fears there is some discrimination by perception of those from BME backgrounds in Prevent referrals.

Ultimately, schools and colleges have a wider duty to promote good relations amongst pupils. It is this that presents our long-term hope of schools being better equipped to encourage greater inclusivity and tolerance.

Ajegbo’s recommendations provide good starting point to do so.

Bob Hindle is a lecturer in Education at Manchester Institute of Education.



Cohesion again? Learning lessons from the ‘between’

Dr Necla Acik and Dr Ajmal Hussain

The renewed focus on social cohesion represented in [Manchester’s Commission to tackle violent extremism and promote social cohesion](#) comes with both challenges and opportunities. One of the challenges that we identify is in its timing. It seems to have been prompted in a similar way to the last public effort toward this ideal - the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC). This was a response to the UK’s first home grown terror attack on the London transport system in 2005, commonly known as 7/7. The Manchester Mayor’s announcement to form a Commission has followed a similar public tragedy; that of the attack at the Manchester Arena in 2017.

The decade between

These two tragic events are not only separated by over a decade in time but also by a hugely contested and controversial set of anti-terror policies and policing focus on the nation’s Muslim population. One notable consequence of these is the wedge that has been driven between different ethnic and religious groups, which serves to make the job of promoting social cohesion more challenging. This is despite the fact that one of the [CIC’s recommendations](#) in 2007 was to guard against debate and policy interventions on social cohesion being solely about Muslims and contemporary Islam.

Many commentators and activists, however, have not been deterred from arguing that the government’s preoccupation with healing a fractured nation (7/7 has often been referred to as ‘Our 9/11’) has been to target a particular part of the population

(Muslims) largely through the counter-terrorism [Prevent strategy](#). So, it is our contention that what has gone on between these two commissions on social cohesion should receive some attention.

Prevent and the splintering of national consensus

Since its inception over a decade ago, Prevent has attracted much criticism for its divisive effects within and between communities. This is evident in the [public concerns aroused in relation to the erosion of civil liberties](#), as well as the need these have revealed for a recognition of [hate crimes directed at Muslims](#). Also, not to mention the splintering of national consensus (if there is such a thing) on the place of Muslims and Islam in the secular body politic, currently being witnessed across Europe and USA, and of which Brexit could be considered a clandestine expression. All of this has drawn new fault lines that make the Manchester Mayor’s ambitions even harder to realise.

Opportunity for a local response

Yet there may be some promise too, in this new attempt to resuscitate the good old values represented in the quest for social cohesion.

The Manchester Commission represents a unique opportunity to deal with the issue at a regional and

localised level, free from various national constraints and hysteria that might have mirrored the earlier attempt of the [CIC](#). Our recent and on-going Horizon 2020 [PROMISE](#) and [DARE](#) research, conducted with young people in Manchester, illuminates how

Since its inception over a decade ago, Prevent has attracted much criticism for its divisive effects within and between communities.

real the challenge is but also how attention to the effects of what has gone on since the CIC, might yield something positive for our region.

The burden of representing the ‘good’ Muslim

The case study: [Youth mobilisations of ‘suspect communities’](#), is part of a wider European collaboration within the PROMISE project. It investigates the salient challenges young Muslims face in being constructed both as vulnerable to terrorist grooming and potential security threats and how this affects their sense of belonging, as well as their preferences for political and social engagement.

Among the young Muslims interviewed for this study, there was an enhanced consciousness that they are the public face of Islam and that this brought with it the burden and responsibility of representing the ‘good Muslim’ and living by example. For some this reinforced their identity positively, for others there was a desire to be accepted for who they are as individuals as expressed by a young man in our study: “I just want to go about my life, doing my things, achieve things I want to achieve in life, without having to be, you know, questioned, or you know, suspected for something that I’ve not done and maybe be made to feel guilty if I’ve not done something wrong.”

While some young Muslims declared confidently that they have nothing to fear and are not intimidated by the Prevent agenda, others felt it was a safer bet to keep away from anything that might resemble political activism. When organising events and inviting prominent public speakers, Muslim student activists described how

Among the young Muslims interviewed for this study, there was an enhanced consciousness that they are the public face of Islam.

their events were subject to more stringent safety and risk assessments than other student societies’ events and how they felt that they are monitored more closely. In such instances, Prevent was perceived less as a safeguarding and as a

protective policy but rather as a policy that reinforces and legitimises the differential treatment of Muslims and their construction as a suspect community.

Broadening the conversation

Muslims are a growing and increasingly visible sector of the region’s population. This fact is reflected in the [statistics](#) that policy makers utilise in their planning. Increasingly, this demographic feature has also come to affect cultural and political sentiments among cohorts of disenchanted citizens (see [Pilkington 2016](#)) who also have a stake in a better society envisioned in attempts to bolster social cohesion. Therefore, the conversation on social cohesion needs to be broadened to include all marginalised groups.

The first hand and local expressions of animosity toward Prevent - found amongst young Muslims in our research - re-affirm the challenge of engaging an important cohort who are perceived to be at the heart of concerns about social cohesion. The desire not to be marginalised and criminalised that is embodied in their activism against Prevent reflects a force to be co-opted. It is these values that underpin social cohesion and will help bring attempts to deliver it back on track.

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Protecting against terror: are we dividing our cities?

Dr Martin Coward

The bombing of an Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena on 22 May, 2017 has been seen as part of a [new wave of terrorist violence](#) in Europe that started with attacks in Paris in 2015. The hallmarks of this violence have been attacks on the public spaces of cities using low-tech, simple weapons (home-made explosives, guns, knives and vehicles). European cities seem to face a future of unpredictable, low-cost and hard to detect attacks. This trend towards targeting crowded places filled with families [has alarmed city residents](#). Responses have typically focused on [protection, detection and prevention](#). But are the countermeasures aimed at protecting us generating [physical and social barriers to community and cohesion](#)?

Protecting our cities

The vulnerability of crowded public spaces is not a new concern, especially in the UK. Following unsuccessful attacks on London and Glasgow airport in 2007, a government review led by Lord West proposed a series of [measures to increase the protection for infrastructure and crowded spaces](#). This was driven by the concern that terrorism is turning to so-called soft targets - defenceless urban residents often in transport hubs (e.g. train stations, airports) symbolic buildings (e.g. Houses of Parliament) or places of leisure (e.g. concert venues, cafes).

The response has been a mixture of [physical](#) and [less visible](#) countermeasures as well as visibly armed policing. Examples include the concrete barriers installed [around Westminster](#) and around Christmas markets across the UK, intended to prevent

vehicle attacks. Designed initially to prevent car and truck bombs from reaching their target, they have now become a way of protecting public spaces from attackers who try to drive vans and cars at pedestrians. Similarly, the [increase in armed police officers](#) (and the use of military forces to supplement these when high levels of terrorist alert are reached) are designed to deter attacks in crowded places and at symbolic buildings.

What price are we paying?

There are, however, significant questions to be asked not only about the effectiveness of physical measures, but also about their impact on communities. Broadly speaking, these questions fall into three areas: the practical ability of physical countermeasures to achieve their goals; the psychology of such countermeasures; and their potential negative impact on communities.

Firstly, there are doubts about the ability of countermeasures to prevent attacks. Countermeasures are a very visible way of protecting symbolic spaces. However, governments are limited in the amount of such protection they can implement (cost and practicality being limiting factors). It is impossible to protect every public space in the city. Physical [countermeasures can displace attacks](#) into less well-defended areas.

Secondly, the implementation of protective measures may be aimed at reassuring citizens. However, this can have contradictory results. While concrete barriers will prevent car or truck attacks, they will not protect against knife, gun, or suicide bomb attacks. On the one hand, then, physical countermeasures may give

It is impossible to protect every public space in the city. Physical countermeasures can displace attacks into less well-defended areas.



communities a false sense of safety. On the other hand, they may actually [increase levels of fear](#), acting as a visible cue to the public that they are under threat. For some this may reinforce the sense that a particular minority is to blame for this threat and reinforce negative stereotypes. Concrete barriers might be a visual prompt for negative sentiments such as Islamophobia.

Finally, physical countermeasures can segregate public space and have the potential to become exclusionary. Physical countermeasures around symbolic buildings such as the Houses of Parliament [make them less accessible](#). This runs contrary to the public function of such buildings. Fencing off commercial spaces such as Christmas markets has the effect of segregating urban populations into those that have the means to be inside a particular space and those that don't. And there have been accusations that physical countermeasures can [be used to discriminate](#). For example, at any point where checks on pedestrians or road traffic are introduced, there is a risk that they can be used to target suspect communities. Such discrimination negatively affects community cohesion.

What can we do?

Responding to terrorist attacks raises important questions about the cohesion of urban communities. How can we implement measures that can help protect citizens without the potential to raise anxiety, segregate

We need to think beyond the short term of physical protection in the immediate aftermath of attacks.

Firstly, could [invisible measures](#) have more protective - if less symbolic - value than hard countermeasures? For example, city planners [can change road layouts](#) to prevent cars and vans from accelerating to the speed needed to carry out attacks on public spaces. Similarly, planters, benches and retracting bollards can be used instead of concrete barriers. Can urban planning design-in such prevention without the need for overtly defensive architecture? This requires imaginative thinking about the threats faced and the ways in which they can be mitigated in public spaces. Secondly, we must remember that prevention rests on community initiatives to prevent violent extremism. How can we have community trust unless everyone feels welcome in public spaces?

We need to think beyond the short term of physical protection in the immediate aftermath of attacks. City planners should create pedestrian spaces beyond the reach of vehicles (not simply separated by temporary, highly visible barriers). Surrounding public spaces with parks and water features, for example, creates inclusive spaces inaccessible to vehicle attacks.

Our cities will then be more open and plural in their look and feel and funds that would have been spent on harder visible security can be spent on community cohesion projects that tackle extremism at its root.

and/or lead to discrimination?

Two suggestions come to mind for Greater Manchester's Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Cohesion Commission to consider.

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Why embracing language diversity is a key to community cohesion

Professor Yaron Matras

Around 200 different languages are spoken in the Greater Manchester area, making it the UK's most [linguistically diverse city-region](#) for its population size. In the city of Manchester, some 40% of schoolchildren speak at least one, sometimes two other languages, in addition to English at home. The region's urban landscape features commercial, cultural, and private [signage](#) in more than fifty different languages.

Language is an emblem of who we are. It is the carrier of our heritage and one of the ways of identifying what we mean by 'communities'. It is the means to communicate with those around us and to reach out to those farther afield. Greater Manchester - and other cities around the world - must embrace language diversity. For this, a formulated language strategy is needed. Here I'd like to share some thoughts on what that strategy should entail.

Language as heritage

Valuing a region's community languages can help raise the self-confidence of residents and build bridges among population groups of different backgrounds. We've seen this in Manchester when young people come together around activities that help them develop their curiosity toward other languages and their appreciation of other people's language heritage – for example at the bi-annual [Levenshulme Language Day](#) organised by the [Multilingual Manchester research unit](#) in collaboration with Manchester City Council and community groups, or through the multilingual poetry competition run by [Mother Tongue Other Tongue](#).

Several dozen community-run weekend supplementary schools operate in Greater Manchester, teaching children heritage languages including Chinese, Arabic, Polish, Greek, Tamil and many others. They offer a valuable service to around eight thousand pupils in the Greater Manchester area and their families. Currently they receive very little support with logistics, accreditation, or teacher training; occasionally they are even the target of suspicion from those who regard them as unregulated enterprises that distract students' attention from the mainstream school curriculum. That attitude needs to change. We need to celebrate these initiatives as important contributors to the regional mosaic of cultures, which play an important role in giving young people confidence that there is no dissent between maintaining their cultural heritage and being proud and active local residents.

Language as skills

Community initiatives to cultivate heritage languages also help ensure that the city-region's next generation workforce is equipped with a valuable resource of skills. Greater Manchester's investment agency [MIDAS](#) believes that language skills in the local labour pool are among the top five factors that attract foreign investors and help expand the region's international trade outreach. Many of Manchester's community languages, such as Chinese, French, Polish, Arabic and Urdu are a valuable asset that can help build cultural and commercial relations with communities around the world. Language skills, and sensitivity toward the use of language, also give direct access to cultural narratives and discourses. They

Greater Manchester - and other cities around the world - must embrace language diversity.



enable insights that can help counteract mutual suspicion, fear, and resentment among population groups and tackle extremism of all kinds.

We need to take more measures to support language skills. More state schools could work together with supplementary schools to facilitate GCSE and A-level qualifications in our community languages. The region's universities and further education providers might consider aligning their teaching provisions in languages to allow more members of the public to benefit from them. More should be done to introduce young people to the joy and excitement of learning foreign languages and to build confidence in their ability to acquire foreign language skills.

Language as access

Greater Manchester continues to attract migrants of all backgrounds, and the region still regards itself, despite the rise of post-Brexit isolationism and the tensions that it has created, as a place that welcomes new arrivals and stands firmly against xenophobia.

Provisions for translation and interpreting must be in place to ensure that recent arrivals who do not yet have a firm command of English have equal access to services such as health care and emergency support. Greater Manchester has some excellent models of good practice: Central Manchester University Hospitals operate an exemplary and world-leading model of language provisions, responding annually to up to fifty thousand requests for interpreting in over one hundred different languages. Manchester City Council is one

of the few local authorities that maintains a successful in-house translation and interpreting service of the highest quality. We need to ensure that good practice prevails and is a model for others to replicate.

These provisions help build trust and confidence in public services among new arrivals and are important motivating and facilitating factors that help people integrate. They also help increase the motivation, as well as the opportunities, to learn English. It is therefore incorrect to juxtapose interpreting and translation provisions, and provisions for learning English; the two must be part of an integrated strategy. Initiatives like [Talk English](#) and the Gateway project run by the North West Strategic Migration Partnership are investing much effort in removing language barriers. They and other providers report that resources and sometimes expertise are missing, and that the past four years have seen an increase in articulated demand for English classes while funding has decreased. [Brexit threatens further disruption](#) as more funds are likely to be withdrawn.

The occasional government statement that links English language provisions to combating extremism unnecessarily stigmatises learners and does more to dismantle trust than to build bridges across cultures. That rhetoric must change, and support for language learning must increase.

More should be done to introduce young people to the joy and excitement of learning foreign languages.

Languages in the Smart City

The cities of the future will rely more and more on digital solutions to monitor data and adapt provisions and policies to changing needs. The delivery of language provisions of all

kinds - whether interpreting in the health care sector, English classes for beginners, or skills in foreign and heritage languages - relies on networking between organisations in different sectors.

To make effective use of resources and to harness skills and talent, we must encourage public services to maintain the highest standards of data collection and to share data on language needs and language skills. To that end, we should invest in tools that allow us to pool data, of the kind that is currently being [piloted](#) by the Multilingual Manchester team. Universities have a role to play by offering their expertise to a network of local stakeholders, by becoming a hub for discussion on provisions, policy drafting, and public engagement and by offering a long-term vision that capitalises on Manchester's rich history of embracing cultural diversity and breaking down barriers.

A vision for a city of languages

I believe that we are taking a risk if we ignore our language diversity and the opportunities that it offers us: We lose out on skills if we fail to cultivate them; we neglect an opportunity to tackle prejudice and build more confidence in cross-cultural encounters; we risk depriving new arrivals of access to public services if we fail to provide high standards of interpreting; and if we fail to provide opportunities to acquire English quickly

Many of the city's leaders have already spoken out in support of a platform that recognises that Manchester's language diversity brings a wide range of benefits to the city.

and efficiently we contribute to more isolation, frustration and resentment and on all sides.

Many of the city's leaders have already spoken out in support of a [platform](#) that recognises that Manchester's language diversity brings a wide range of benefits to the city, its people and its economy. Such vision should be included

in the new Greater Manchester Charter, along with a commitment to actively counteract public narratives that fuel [Linguaphobia](#).

The Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Cohesion Commission offers a perfect opportunity to formulate a practical agenda that will draw on the city-region's language diversity to build bridges between cultures and alleviate the fear of 'others'. It's time to develop a plan that celebrates language diversity, encourages language learning, and commits to maintaining the highest standards of interpreting and translation, and adequate provisions for learning English. Lastly, we need an operational pool for sharing data and good practice with the involvement of experts, community representatives and the region's key public services.

Greater Manchester has an opportunity to show the world how to embrace language diversity in a way that truly supports social cohesion. That would be something worth celebrating and sharing.

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Whiteness, class, and cohesion

Dr James Rhodes

For a number of years there has been growing interest in the disadvantage experienced by ‘poor white British’ communities. Over a decade since the Runnymede Trust produced its report [‘Who Cares About the White Working Class?’](#), it’s a question that preoccupies politicians, journalists, and academics. There is also an increasing focus on what these communities themselves want, as at national and local levels, politicians consider ways to build more ‘cohesive’ communities.

An increasingly marginalised group?

This interest has been stimulated by key social and political developments; firstly, the Leave vote in the UK Brexit referendum, coupled with support for far-right organisations such as UKIP, the BNP and the EDL. Secondly, growing concerns that poor, white British communities are becoming increasingly marginalised, failing within the education system compared to their black and minority ethnic counterparts, lacking aspiration, and struggling to compete in a new economy. These themes of a community being ‘left behind’, were prominent in the [2016 Casey review](#) into ‘opportunity’ and ‘integration’.

However, there are problems with such assertions. The Runnymede Trust warned that focusing on the ‘whiteness’ of the ‘white working class’ could detract from the inequalities experienced by black and minority ethnic groups, who continue to face disproportionate disadvantage. Indeed, the marginalised position of white communities vis-à-vis mainstream white

society has been used by some to critique multicultural and race equality policies. Similarly, this emphasis might create a political climate in which white residents increasingly identify by race, over potentially less divisive forms of alignment such as place and class.

Framing cohesion

The Manchester Mayor’s [Independent Commission for Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Cohesion](#) is part of a wider move to improve cohesion. This, however, is not a straightforward task. The absence of extremism is not automatically evidence of ‘cohesive’ communities. A regional strategy document - ‘Our People Our Place’ - called for the creation of an area where ‘all voices are heard....’ Here, ‘every neighbourhood should be a place where people want to live: clean, safe, cohesive neighbourhoods where people belong and are active.’

We must therefore do more than address manifestations of political extremism, urban unrest and crime. Indeed, despite its obvious importance, the quest for ‘cohesion’ might indicate a lack of political ambition suggesting absence of conflict as the political end goal, rather than, say, the elimination of poverty or greater educational attainment.

There are also problems with how identity is framed. Policies tend to define communities in racial, ethnic, or

Policies tend to define communities in racial, ethnic, or religious terms, with Muslim and marginalized white communities predominant.

religious terms, with Muslim and marginalised white communities predominant. There is also a disproportionate emphasis on the need for cohesion amongst ‘young people’, particularly males, with a tendency to impose homogeneity, denying their diversity.

This often leads to simplistic correlations between young working-class whites and racism (as well as between young Muslims and terrorism). A failure to dig down into the complex biographies and trajectories that lead people to political extremism often results in approaches which can alienate and denigrate as much as they solve or explain. Related to this, localised patterns of interaction, contact and culture are often addressed, rather than wider inequities in resource and opportunity.

Critiquing how poor, white communities are seen in policy narratives, is not to deny they face significant challenges. A [series of studies](#) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found communities that felt isolated, fearful, stigmatised, and remote from political decision-making. Closer to home, a [report](#) by the [Open Society Foundations, which focused on Higher Blackley](#), identified a population suffering from unemployment, low-paid, insecure work, housing insecurity and competition and poor health. Compounding this were concerns about crime and safety, declining political participation, political neglect from a newly professionalised but distant political class, and cultural representation that demonised poor white residents and areas.

However, these challenges are not uniquely the preserve of poor white communities or one UK region. Indeed, they are very evident within Greater Manchester. Here, the boom apparent in the city centre and amongst more affluent areas of the city, seemingly bypasses many other places altogether. Older industrial towns such as Oldham and Rochdale represent some

A series of studies by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found communities that felt isolated, fearful, stigmatized, and remote from political decision-making.

of the poorest districts in the country, confronted by [long-term patterns of urban decline](#) and deepening inequality. These challenges are likely to increase in the coming years with one [report](#) listing Oldham, Rochdale, Manchester, Bolton, and

Salford within the top 50 districts of England, Scotland and Wales predicted to be hardest hit by proposed welfare reforms.

The opportunity for change

Recent research identifies possibilities for intervention and political change which involves both reframing the problem of ‘cohesion’ and expanding its scope.

Firstly, accepting the grievances of poorer white communities is not the same as agreeing with the way these social problems are articulated and understood. Framing these challenges as a question of ‘race’ rather than of class inequality encourages division and hostility. Politicians and policy makers must offer more inclusive narratives about the people and the places that matter as has been attempted [in Detroit](#), for instance, recognizing shared feelings if not degrees of marginalisation.

We must not simply lapse into urban boosterism. There must be more local communication and consultation through community forums which enlists a wide range of voices and experiences. Post Brexit, politicians must be more proactive, not pander to concerns rooted in [tendencies to racism and xenophobia](#) where they exist, but develop a wider sense of community and place. The prospects for cohesion rest on improving the conditions for all marginalised groups.



Secondly, addressing economic and housing insecurity is central. Poverty, low wages, and poor, insecure housing facilitate environments in which hostility can thrive.

Manchester could introduce a district-wide minimum wage, and lead discussions about the possibilities for a universal basic income. The expansion of affordable housing, secure tenancies, greater regulation of the private rented sector, property ownership and rent controls are policy initiatives to consider.

Finally, there must be a greater emphasis on creating and sustaining more inclusive forms of development. Key here is to build institutions anchored in communities that serve the needs of a diverse constituency and bring people together in pursuit of shared aims and aspirations. Community centres, local jobs, schools, training, leisure and health facilities, community-led organisations, local cooperatives and

Poverty, low wages, and poor, insecure housing facilitate environments in which hostility can thrive.

financial institutions, could be supported and developed through investment in the social economy. [Montreal for instance](#) has taken steps in this direction and Greater

Manchester could encourage or require city investors, through economic incentives and procurement, to make such commitments.

The need for policymakers to meet the challenge of ‘cohesion’ is increasingly recognised as urgent and necessary. However, focusing on communities in ways that promote ideas of division and difference, and that rely on assumptions about the links between extremism and race, class and/or age, risk fermenting tension.

‘Cohesion’ itself might be better viewed as the by-product of a wider suite of policies to reduce inequality, insecurity and increase inclusion and opportunity, rather than a goal in itself.

Dr James Rhodes is a lecturer in sociology at the University of Manchester.



Young people are the solution, not the problem

Dr Jo Deakin

In the aftermath of the horrific Manchester Arena bombing, Andy Burnham, Mayor of Manchester, talked about the “[tangible sense of togetherness](#)” that we felt in the city. But as the ‘together’ moment passes, and time moves on, how can we keep hold of that visible community cohesion and ensure that we continue conversations about unity, resilience and strength? The short answer is: involve our young people, and in particular, involve those young people who are disengaged and not usually heard.

The Manchester Mayor’s [Independent Commission for Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Cohesion](#) brings together public and voluntary sector organisations with community members. Its main focus is clearly to tackle extremism, as the title suggests. This is certainly a key area of concern and is pertinent in the light of the Manchester attack. But the Commission also aims to promote community cohesion more generally and has provided the people of Manchester with an opportunity to address a wider issue here.

In order for communities to be strong enough to tackle extremism, the idea of community cohesion needs to extend beyond the current narrow boundaries and confront a wider, and equally pertinent, issue: our connections with some of our young people. This is an ideal opportunity to develop community cohesion

The labelling of youth as ‘risky’ typically creates conflict between young people and authorities and generates intergenerational tension as the young person kicks out against the label.

by bringing in those young people who are typically marginalised and frequently seen as a social problem. They offer an essential insight into the experiences of the marginalised at the heart of disengagement within our society and offer possibilities for the future of cohesion. At risk of sounding over-sentimental, as the Whitney Houston song lyric says, the children really are our future.

‘Risky’ young people?

My focus as a researcher has been on the experiences of [young people who are stigmatised, challenged and marginalised](#) by a system that sees them as ‘risky’ due to their backgrounds. This includes young people seen to be at risk of criminal behaviour because they come from neighbourhoods labelled as ‘deprived’ or have grown up in the care system, and those identified as vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism because they belong to groups constructed as suspect through government, media and public discourse.

The labelling of youth as ‘risky’ typically creates conflict between young people and authorities ([particularly the police](#)) and generates intergenerational tension as the young person kicks out against the label. Sometimes this can manifest as anti-social and criminal behaviour reinforcing the ‘problem’ label and perpetuating the myth of the ‘risky youth’. In times of austerity, the problem

magnifies, criminal and anti-social behaviour increases and tensions rise. The concept of [troubled youth in troubled times](#) is well documented in sociological and criminological literature and with reports by the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) and the [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) projecting a rise in relative poverty and relative child poverty, it seems that troubled times are set to continue.

Criminalising risk

The response to troubled youth has often been negative and punitive: to [increase controls](#) through informal, formal and legal structures rather than by addressing the [contextual causes](#) of anti-social behaviour and early on-set criminal activity. The disproportionate criminalisation of these groups of young people for relatively minor offences has been widely reported. The [Howard League](#), for example, evidences the excessive criminalisation of looked-after children. This is corroborated by research from the [National Association for Youth Justice](#) (NAYJ) alongside other key characteristics of children in conflict with the law, including relative deprivation.

It's easy to see how the labelling and pre-emptive criminalisation of groups of youngsters could result in a criminal conviction for many young people, and lead to a cycle of poverty-of-opportunity and criminal

It's easy to see how the labelling and pre-emptive criminalisation of groups of youngsters could result in a criminal conviction for many young people.

behaviour. As the [Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions](#) demonstrates, the youth justice system itself is a cyclical trap. Meanwhile the populist press have a field day reporting on the out-of-control, anti-social behaviour of Britain's young people which, in turn, feeds into their marginalisation and stigmatisation.

So, what is to be done?

The good news is that things have moved forward significantly in recent years to reduce stigma and curb the previously heavy-handed policing of young people. Greater Manchester Police, for instance, in line with the pro-diversionary recommendations of the [Taylor review](#), are taking action by encouraging more amicable conversations between officers and young people on the streets, dealing informally with minor incidents and avoiding adversarial initial contacts. These lighter-touch policing approaches are important for community cohesion and help to build up trusting relationships between otherwise marginalised young people and the police. See the examples demonstrated in an evaluation of community and youth engagement policing in [Canada](#) and in 'Empowerment Conversations' between young people, their parents, and the police, trialled in [Norway](#).

Similarly, relationships with staff (voluntary and paid) at local youth clubs and voluntary sector support groups also play a key role in the softening of

intergenerational tensions. As part of a large European research study ([PROMISE](#)), I've been speaking with young people across Greater Manchester about the impact of these groups on marginalised young people's lives. They discussed the 'life saving', 'life

changing' opportunities that these groups present, the solid relationships that have been formed with peers and staff, and a sense of belonging and acceptance that many hadn't experienced before. Sadly, as austerity hits, these organisations are becoming squeezed and many face losing their funding. The impact of their work is lessened through reductions in staff and opening hours, presenting fewer of these positive opportunities for young people.

Young people have a lot to teach us

What is clear from the research to date is that positive relationships and open conversations are central factors in encouraging young people to engage with their communities, particularly those who are the

Positive relationships and open conversations are central factors in encouraging young people to engage with their communities.

most vulnerable to exclusion, marginalisation or exploitation. Marginalised and stigmatised young people have a lot to teach us about how society accepts and rejects, includes and excludes. As part of [my research](#) I aim to understand how and why stigmatised young people

can become disengaged from society, and uncover some of the ways they demonstrate alternatives to engagement through resistance, resilience and resourcefulness.

Manchester's new Commission provides an opportunity for us to draw on our burgeoning knowledge about youth belonging and social engagement as part of the wider goal of promoting community cohesion and that 'tangible sense of togetherness'. A more cohesive society must be inclusive and try to give a voice to everyone, including the most marginalised. It may be the most marginalised that have the most pertinent things to say about exclusion.

We should be listening.

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Analysis and ideas on community cohesion, curated by Policy@Manchester

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