

Institution: Lancaster University		
Unit of Assessment: 31, Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: CREST: informing security policy and practice, advancing knowledge and confidence		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 to 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Kim Knott	Professor; CREST Deputy Director	February 2012 to September 2020
Sarah Marsden	Lecturer	September 2015 to August 2020
Matthew Francis	Senior Research Associate; Research Fellow	February 2013 to June 2018; July 2018 to June 2019
Benjamin Lee	Senior Research Associate	January 2016 to September 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2014 to December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>The unique model of engaging with the security and intelligence communities developed by the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) has informed counter-terrorism (CT) policy and practice and fostered a greater commitment to evidence-based approaches to security threats. Long-term engagement with policymakers and practitioners on ideological transmission, diaspora religions, extremist reintegration, and best practice in countering violent extremism enabled the team at Lancaster to inform national and international policymaking through collaboration and consultation, and enhance security practice, professional knowledge and confidence through training, tools, and resources. Clear communication and open access helped a global audience of security professionals, as well as the wider public, to access and use its products and outputs.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Commissioned and managed by ESRC and funded since 2015 by the UK Intelligence Community (UKIC) and Home Office (HO), CREST (http://crestresearch.ac.uk) is distinctive internationally in being an interdisciplinary 'research-to-practice' centre focused on the translation of original and synthetic research to help security professionals understand, counter, and mitigate security threats. The impact described below arose from research undertaken within the CREST programme, 'Actors and Ideologies in Social Context' [G1], directed by Knott and including Marsden, Francis and Lee, which built on groundwork established in an earlier RCUK Global Uncertainties project [G2].</p> <p>The team worked in partnership with UKIC (MI5, SIS, GCHQ), government departments (e.g., Home Office, FCO), and other security bodies (e.g., police, probation) to answer research questions, respond to user requirements, and to provide practitioners and policymakers with information and resources to support their training and day-to-day work in investigation and analysis [R1]. Projects were co-produced, with research design, questions and methodology devised in discussion with practitioners, and with regular reporting and feedback to ensure effective research exchange and practical outcomes [S1, S2].</p> <p>The principal underpinning research themes were as follows:</p> <p>Theme 1 [T1]. Role and transmission of political and religious ideologies in security threats [R1, R3, G1, G2] <i>Core insights and outcomes:</i> research on the process of ideological transmission within families, between peers and in religious and political networks led to the development of an alternative approach to addressing radicalisation (applied to case studies of minority religions and far right networks) and to a new framework for understanding extremist recruitment and learning online and offline, and thus to more informed interventions and training.</p> <p>Theme 2 [T2]. The cultural and ideological location of extremism [R1, R2, R4, G1, G2] <i>Core insights and outcomes:</i> research on religious and political minorities (including new religious movements, far right groups and British Muslim communities) identified diverse interpretations of</p>		

belief and practice between generations, genders and sectarian groups, distinguished normative from lived expressions, and situated 'extremist' stances in their geo-political and ideological contexts. Individual and collective responses to uncertainty and goal frustration were seen to generate different outcomes (violent/nonviolent; resolution/failure).

Theme 3 [T3]. The reintegration of extremists [R5, R6, G1] *Core insights and outcomes:*

Research with those at risk of radicalisation, convicted terrorists, and foreign fighters, established the need to focus on social reintegration rather than deradicalisation, to work towards individual and social resilience to violent extremism, and to redirect the motivation to become involved in extremism in positive ways.

Theme 4 [T4]. Countering violent extremism (CVE) [R3, R4, R6, G1] *Core insights and outcomes:* research on countering extremist messaging online and the delivery of CVE programmes identified the importance of independence and agency, robust capacity building processes, community engagement and buy-in, informed risk assessment and management, and the value of a theory of change in the development and evaluation of CVE programmes.

3. References to the research

[R1] Knott, K., 'Applying the Study of Religions in the Security Domain: Knowledge, Skills and Collaboration', *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, 4:3, 2018.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/20566093.2018.1525901>. *International peer-reviewed journal*.

[R2] Knott, K. and Francis, M. D. (eds) *Minority Religions and Uncertainty*. Inform Book Series. London and New York: Routledge (2020). Held at HEI. International editorial board; peer reviewed.

[R3] Knott, K. and Lee, B. 'Ideological Transmission in Extremist Contexts: Towards a Framework of How Ideas Are Shared', *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 2:1, 2020: 1-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2020.1732938>. *International peer-reviewed journal*.

[R4] Knott, K. *Muslims and Islam in the UK*. CREST Report, 87pp, 2018.

<https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/british-muslims-full-report/> *Peer reviewed by 10 academic experts: "you do a brilliant job of covering the security angle but within a framework which is thoroughly grounded in the wider literatures"; "required reading"*.

[R5] Marsden, S.V. *Reintegrating Extremists: 'Deradicalisation' and Desistance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. "Thoroughly researched and analysed... a significant contribution to ongoing debates amongst policy makers, practitioners, and academics" (Warren). Held at HEI.

[R6] Marsden, S.V. 'Conceptualising "Success" with those Convicted of Terrorism Offences: Aims, Methods and Barriers to Reintegration.' *Behavioral Studies of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 7, 2015:143-65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2014.1001421> *International, peer reviewed*.

Peer-reviewed research grants

[G1] Taylor (PI, at Lancaster), Knott (Co-I), Marsden (Co-I) and eight other Co-Is (other HEIs), *Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats* (funded by UKIC, commissioned and managed by ESRC): Phase 1 (2015-18) GBP7,568,841; phase 2 (2018-20) GBP4,609,620. Lee: SRA. Francis: Research Fellow.

[G2] Knott (PI), *The Role of Ideology, Belief and Commitment in Motivations, Justifications and Catalysts for Violence*, RCUK Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellowship, ESRC: (2012-15) GBP376,916. SRA: Francis.

4. Details of the impact

Beneficiaries, pathways and good practice: Under the auspices of CREST, the team's principal partner was the UK's security and intelligence community (UKIC). Research, consultation and knowledge exchange were also conducted with the Home Office (HO), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Cabinet Office, DFID, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, UK Police Forces, and National Offender Management Service. Internationally, key stakeholders included Public Safety Canada, the FBI and international NGOs. Established pathways and mechanisms for impact with UKIC included quarterly research meetings, briefings, roundtables, masterclasses, training, roadshows and annual users' conferences. Stakeholder workshops, policy consultations and presentations served the needs of the security sector more generally, with wider public engagement focused on CREST resources, debates, and media outreach.

As noted by the HO Chief Scientific Adviser at a Commons Select Committee in 2017, a major impact of CREST's policy-facing work was the embedding of *a model of good practice* for social and behavioural scientific evidence on security threats [S3]. Prior to its formation there had been few opportunities for social science researchers to engage with security and intelligence practitioners [R1]. CREST created *a research-to-practice structure* to support such collaboration [S1, S2]. This led the way by "*setting high standards and demonstrating the possible*" [Manager, Public Safety Canada, e-mail 2018]. In a letter from the Chief Scientific Adviser for National Security in Sept 2020, Knott was thanked for her service to the country, and the 'enormous impact' of her team on the knowledge and understanding of UKIC and its partners [S5].

A review of CREST's impact in 2019 found there was "*strong evidence that CREST research is delivering impact for end-users, enabling them to achieve changes in practice, advances in understanding and development of skills and knowledge*" [S2,p4]. CREST was praised for its capacity to raise questions about security threats that UKIC and other stakeholders had not yet seen as relevant, and to undertake work that had unanticipated benefits or utility [S1, p22; S2, p14]. One US stakeholder saw CREST as "*a model for engagement with very hard to reach organisations*" [S2, p14]. Case studies of projects by Knott, Lee and Marsden [S2, pp.27,33,34] showed them to have had instrumental and conceptual impacts, and to have contributed to capacity building. Three types of impact are described below.

1. Informing counter-terrorism and disengagement policy

Research and collaboration led to changes in the delivery of the Prevent strand of UK counter-terrorism strategy on the desistance and disengagement of extremists

- As a result of Marsden's research and leadership [T3, R5, R6], the Prevent Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP) now has a more robust, evidence-based evaluation strategy, and for the first time has introduced independent evaluation [S4]. Her organising role in HO-commissioned stakeholder conferences between 2017 and 2019 led the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) to set up the DDP Academic Advisory Group [S4]. As Chair, she led consultations on programme evaluation and data sharing, innovative intervention methods, delivery of professional development sessions and enhanced inter-agency coordination [S4].

Timely provision of research and evidence on extremist ideological transmission and cumulative extremism fed into government security briefings at the highest levels

- With ideology a key focus of policy approaches to radicalisation, Knott and Lee's research [T1, R3] was deployed by UKIC in briefings to government ministers, in 2017 making a significant contribution to a report to the Prime Minister [S2, p11].
- During national security alerts in June 2020, Knott and Lee fed into the response by Police Scotland [S6a] and RICU (HO) and were thanked for their 'timely evidence' and 'most useful synthesis' on violent escalation and ideological risk factors [S6b,email, Head of RICU Analysis].

The inclusion of evidence and recommendations in official reports signifies the impact on policymaking of research on ideological threats and risks from extremism

- The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) is the highest UK interagency committee charged with intelligence matters. Lee's research on far-right extremism [T2] informed a JIC assessment in 2017. In 2019 his research was drawn on extensively in a report by the HO Commission for Countering Extremism, *Challenging Hateful Extremism* [S7].
- Marsden's [T3, T4, R5] written and oral contributions to government enquiries in 2016/17 were incorporated into final reports of the House of Lords Communications Committee Inquiry into Children and the Internet [S8a] and the HO Committee on Counter Extremism [S8b]. The formal government response to the latter announced the launch of the DDP, which Marsden advises.
- The team's research on CVE and reintegration [T3, T4] was included in guidance for policymakers and practitioners in SE Europe by the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental body, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [S9].

Throughout the period, the team helped to develop capacity and sustain the current and future landscape of international government-funded security research

- The team's success in meeting user requirements and delivering evidence-based research products on radicalisation and reintegration [T4, R3] led the Home Office to commission research via CREST in 2019: total GBP585,000 [S4]. This included GBP47,187 directly to the team for CONTEST Evidence Reviews. Marsden also won a HO commission to deliver DDP professional development workshops (GBP18,749 in 2019) [S4].
- On the basis of earlier success, in 2020 a third phase of CREST was approved by ESRC (initial team share: GBP386,000). Marsden was commissioned to carry out a Campbell Review on the fitness of intervention tools for countering radicalisation to violence (Canada Centre for Community Engagement and the Prevention of Violence, GBP123,000).
- FCO-commissioned research [T4, GBP17,904] funded two widely used CREST guides on *Countering Violent Extremism* [by Marsden, Lewis and Knott; 3,757 page views/3,801 downloads by 27/10/20]. These were adopted in the training of FCO diplomats, police and other security personnel, and cited in international prevention initiatives (as evidenced by presentations made to Public Safety Canada in 2017 and the EU Presidency Conference, Helsinki 2019, and in advice to the United Nations Development Programme in Jordan).

2. Improving training, tools and resources for security practitioners, and developing capacity, knowledge and confidence

Research on ideological learning led to the adoption of a new analytical framework

- The importance of extremist transmission and learning for understanding radicalisation gained initial traction after Knott's 2015 article, 'The Dewsbury case reminds us that we have much to learn about how extremism spreads' (*The Conversation*, 15/6/15; 41,439 reads), followed by Lee and Knott's CREST publications on ideological transmission [T1, R3].
- Knott and Lee worked closely with the UKIC Behavioural Science Unit in 2019 to develop an ideological learning framework and to integrate this with existing operational tools on radicalisation. UKIC users said it was relevant, time-saving, and "*enabled deeper understanding of what radicalisation is and isn't*" [S2 p27]. The framework, which was discussed and demonstrated with diverse groups of security practitioners, was assessed by a key UKIC contact to have benefits for understanding extremist motivations and influences; enabling the measurement of change over time; tailoring interventions, and the development of open statements (e.g., for use in court).

Research led to advances in understanding, informed decision-making, and time-saving

- In consultation with UKIC training leads, interdisciplinary research [T2, R4] was tailored to development needs: "*Lee's guide to understanding the far-right landscape, [and] Knott's guides on British Muslims... were cited by end-users as CREST research that had directly contributed to advancing understanding within their organisations*" [S2 pp13,5, S5]. CREST's most consulted introductory guide, by Knott, had received 62,678 page views by 31/12/20.
- Targeting research to security requirements enabled quantifiable savings in professional staff time, and informed and supported evidence-based decision making [S2 pp11-14, 27].
- Users stressed the value of the team's work [T2] in developing their understanding of 'normative behaviours and actions within groups, cultures or societies'. This was seen as 'essential' for practitioners "*in their primary role to assess and evaluate risk, as they can use this... to better evaluate whether behaviour should be considered extreme*" [S2 p12, S6a].

Skills, capacity and confidence were further developed through training and resources

- Research products by Lee and Knott [T1, T2, R3, R4] were incorporated into UKIC induction, foundational training and Learning at Work Week [S2 pp27, 33] and were noted as "*very useful in information training to support wider capacity development*" [S2 p27]. End-users claimed to be "*more effective and scientific as a result of CREST*" [S1 p26].
- Other security agencies drew on the team's research expertise [T1, T2] and resources for training: e.g., FCO CT training (on extremism); CT Negotiation Course in partnership with Scottish Organised Crime and CT Unit (on UK far right); OSCT Prevent Providers Network (on ideological learning). "Police colleagues in my team speak highly about CREST and we recommend it as a key information resource on our training courses, CPD events and in contact with other professionals." [CT Negotiation Team member, Met Police]

3. Developing literacy on security threats through youth engagement and media outreach**Young people's literacy and confidence on security issues was enhanced**

- Young people's understanding of security issues, personal safety, privacy and rights were the subject of a collaboration with Battle of Ideas *Debating Matters*, a schools' debating competition which aims to foster intellectual curiosity and rigour amongst the next generation of leaders. Drawing on research on extremism and uncertainty [T2, R2], in 2014 Knott and Francis worked with 120 pupils in Bradford Schools to develop informed arguments for debate [S10a]. They sponsored a new debate guide, 'We should be willing to compromise our privacy in the interests of national and international security', which was used in the International *Debating Matters* Final between Indian and UK schools (judged by Knott; broadcast in India and the UK via Facebook and YouTube; live audience, 200) [S10b].
- Based on her research with those at risk of radicalisation [T3, R5], Marsden was invited to run workshops between 2016 and 2018 in collaboration with 'New Choices for Youth' in London to develop knowledge and confidence on de/radicalisation among disadvantaged young people.

Leading the debate on extremism and deradicalisation

- The team's research had global reach via *The Times*, *The Scotsman*, *The Independent*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Toronto Star*, *Agence France-Presse*, *O Globo* (Brazil), *Middle East Eye*, *Forskning.no*, DR2 (Denmark), BBC, STV and TV3. It was made openly accessible via <http://crestresearch.ac.uk> and <https://www.radicalisationresearch.org/>.
- Marsden led the public debate on the reintegration of extremists [T3, R5], writing on both radicalisation and deradicalisation for *The Conversation* (4/2/16, 41,157 reads; 26/6/17, 30,448 reads) and for RTE (25/9/17). Her 2016 article was posted by EduKit on <https://schoolsImprovement.net/> (a daily media round-up of schools-related stories) for discussion in schools. In a widely circulated *BBC News* article, 'The Shamima Begum case: How do you deradicalise someone?' (21/2/19), Marsden built on empirical research and consultative work for the DDP [S4] to explain the controversy around ISIS returnees.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1] Independent Evaluation of CREST (undertaken by Firetail Ltd, 2017).

[S2] *CREST Impact Review* (an independent review by Jo Edwards, Lucidity Solutions, 2019).

[S3] Commons Select Committee evidence session with Chief Scientific Advisors (October 2017). <https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/02d1fc96-c271-43d8-aeab-b6bf353fb4de>.

(Reference to CREST as a model of good practice is evidenced at (timing) 11:12:10) This evidence is an audio recording and is available to panellists on request.

[S4] Letter from Head of DDP Prevent, Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, Home Office confirming impact of CREST on understanding and policy (2019).

[S5] Letter from Chief Scientific Adviser for National Security, Government Office for Science confirming impact on the understanding and knowledge of CREST funders, staff and partners (2020).

[S6a] Letter from Assistant Chief Constable, Local Policing West, Police Scotland confirming impact on major security event in Glasgow, 2020; [S6b] Email, Head of RICU Analysis (2020)

[S7] Commission for Countering Extremism, *Challenging Hateful Extremism* (2019, pp35-37, 54) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/challenging-hateful-extremism>

[S8a] House of Lords Committee on Communication, *Inquiry into Children and the Internet, Growing up with the Internet* (2016-17, p68, 81); [S8b] Home Affairs Committee on Counter Extremism Report: [Radicalisation: The counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point](#) (2016, pp20, 29)

[S9] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Non-custodial Rehabilitation and Reintegration in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism A Guidebook for Policymakers and Practitioners in South-Eastern Europe* (2020). <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/444838?download=true>

[S10] *Debating Matters*, events corroboration: a) Beckley School, Bingley, UK; and b) Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan School, Chennai, India (2014).