



Rhodes Foundation Scholarship Trust

Engaging Extremists What we can learn from Europe

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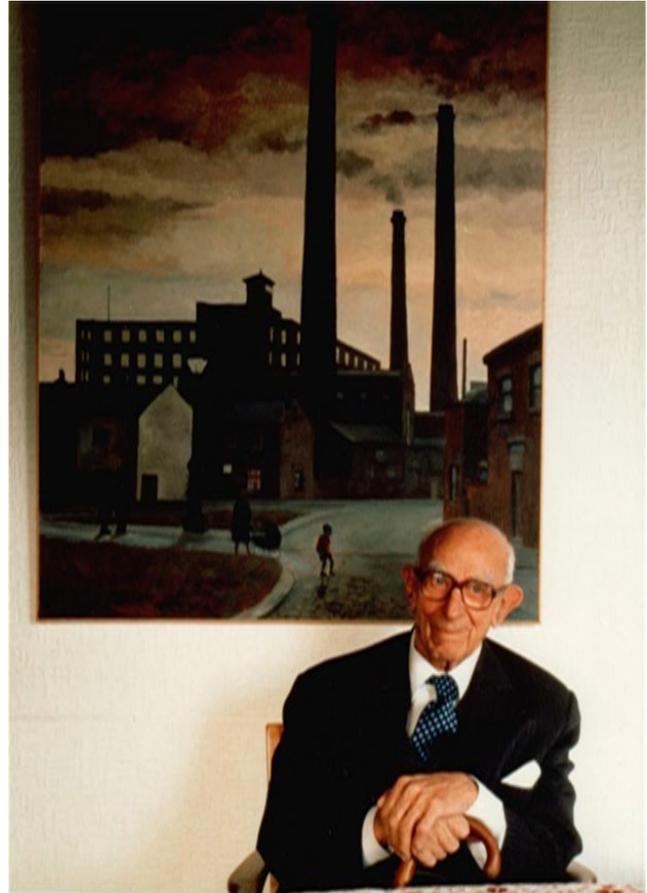
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**Hervey Rhodes, Baron Rhodes of Saddleworth, KG, DFC, PC, DL
(12th August 1895 – 11th September 1987)**



The Rt.Hon. the Lord Rhodes KG DFC PC DL
12 August 1895 - 11 September 1987

Lord Rhodes's life connected the 19th and 20th centuries in many ways: the changing face of work and industry, the political, social and cultural landscapes as well as the contribution of philanthropic and voluntary movements anchored in a tradition of public service to which he was unwaveringly committed.

It was no surprise that when approached by the Lancashire South East Probation Service he unhesitatingly agreed to be the first President of the Selcare Trust when it was founded in 1971. The Selcare Trust developed innovative ways of working with offenders and their families which gained national recognition.

On Lord Rhodes' death in 1987, the then Chief Probation Officer of Greater Manchester, Cedric Fullwood, proposed that the Rhodes Foundation Scholarship Trust should be established in honour of his unstinting support to the work of the Probation Service.

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This trip would have not been possible without Robert Örell from EXIT-Sweden and Fabien Wichmann from EXIT-Germany whose generosity of spirit and willingness to sacrifice their own time allowed me to have access to their work and that of their colleagues and peers.

Finally, I would like to thank my line managers Nisha Bakshi and then Manjit Seale who have been generous in allowing me time away from my duties for the Scholarship trip.

Amy Poulson
September 2019



1. Background and Introduction

This report aims to capture insights from expert practitioners in Europe. By drawing together the experiences and observations of professionals from a range of backgrounds, the intention is to reflect critically on what it takes to engage effectively with extremist offenders and draw some recommendations for our local practice in this respect.

The origins of this study stem from my responsibility as a Senior Probation Officer (SPO) managing a team accountable for the management of all individuals sentenced under Terrorist legislation (TACT offenders) in Greater Manchester.

There has been a significant rise in the number of individuals sentenced under terrorist legislation. The Security, Order and Counter Terrorism (SOCT) Directorate of the Ministry of Justice has predicted that by 2021, there will be a 54% increase in the population of adult TACT offenders. Legislative changes are likely to further increase the scope of individuals being prosecuted under terrorist legislation. The UK has, additionally, seen a rise in the number of far-right extremists being sentenced under terrorist legislation.

In this context of both increasing complexity and number of TACT offenders, it is important that practitioners managing these cases benefit from available learning regarding effective approaches to engaging in the rehabilitation of extremist offenders.

Reflecting on the importance of investing in team development led me to seek out learning from outside the UK including researching contemporary articles and journals. The Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is an internationally respected source of research in countering extremism. An article written by a leading ISD academic on the rise of the far right in Europe concluded with recommendations, one of which being that *'Governments need to put in place national "exit programmes" to help individuals to leave far-right movements'*. (Ramalingam 2015)

Researching further, I identified that in Germany and Sweden there are well established and respected EXIT programme's working with far-right extremists. Contact was subsequently established with Robert Örell of EXIT-Sweden. In a telecon with Robert Örell, he explained that he was moving on from his responsibilities to EXIT-Sweden and therefore unable to facilitate a visit but could, as member of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Centre of Excellence, arrange for me to be invited to a forthcoming conference. As the following report sets out, attendance at this conference constitutes the first part of this study.

As well as establishing contact with EXIT-Sweden I additionally contacted Fabien Wichmann of EXIT-Deutschland who agreed to facilitate a visit. Given the confidentiality of the programme, it was not possible to arrange to meet with service users, but I was able to arrange a visit with Fabien Wichmann at their offices in Berlin. We arranged this visit to follow the RAN conference.

The following study sets out the learning gained from attendance at the RAN conferences and then at EXIT-Deutschland.

2. Methodology

In working with TACT offenders, the National Probation Service (NPS) is well resourced in the provision of specialist rehabilitative and restrictive measures in addition to having sound multi-agency infrastructure and support mechanisms to aid effective practice.

What such provision does not allow for, however, is an understanding of how, on an interpersonal human level, probation officers can most effectively engage with TACT offenders. In fact, it could be contended that the status and label of being a TACT offender and the focus on managing risk could detract from the importance of working on a one to one basis.

With these considerations to the fore, I set out to learn from the experience and insights of expert practitioner and professional colleagues in Europe. The aim was to seek out and collate these insights in order to consider what learning can be applied to local practice.

The body of this study presents what I learned from attendance at two RAN conferences in Prague followed by a visit to EXIT-Deutschland in Berlin. The report sets out a summary of what was learnt through the primarily and secondary information obtained, as below.

Primarily information

- Conference Presentations
- Conference Panel Discussion
- Conference Group Exercises
- Semi-Structured interview with Fabien Wichmann

Secondary information

- Literature made available to conference attendees
- Provision of promotional material and research made available at visit to EXIT-Deutschland
- Access to the EU RAN webpage and the EXIT-Deutschland website

The following three sections of the report address learning gained through the course of this two-part visit. Each section begins by providing both a description and context setting. Following this, a summary of relevant primary information is shared, supported by references to literature where relevant and then followed by some personal reflection. The bulk of the content is very much in the form of narrative storytelling, relating the first-hand experiences and understanding of professionals as they have related to me. The format will be written in a first-hand narrative.

3. Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)



The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) is an umbrella network connecting professionals involved in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in Europe. RAN allows its participants to connect with others in their area of expertise to exchange ideas, knowledge and experience.

RAN is funded by the European Union through the Internal Security Fund. The RAN Centre of Excellence provides logistical, technical and administrative support to the work of the network as well as having expertise to guide the work done within the network.

There are more than 3,200 participants from around Europe including front-line practitioners, field experts, social workers, teachers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), victims' groups, local authorities, law enforcement professionals and academic colleagues. Having attended a RAN conference and consented to my contact details being shared, I am now one of those practitioners and can, using a public facing EU RAN Website, contact colleagues based on their expertise as well as being able to access a range of related material including reports, educational videos and research.

RAN is structured around ten thematic working groups, driven by a Steering Committee (SC) chaired by the Commission. These ten working groups are:

- **[Communication and Narratives working group \(RAN C&N\)](#)**: Focuses on the delivery of both *on* and *offline* communication that offers alternatives or that counters extremist propaganda and/or challenges extremist ideas.
- **[Education working group \(RAN EDU\)](#)**: Bringing together first-line education practitioners throughout Europe to empower them to counter radicalisation. Schools have the objective to provide a safe and respectful environment for their students. It is part of their role to teach democratic and social values and to help students form their identity.
- **[EXIT working group \(RAN EXIT\)](#)**: Dealing with the process of moving from a radicalised and violent mindset and/or environment towards mainstream society.

- **Youth, Families and Communities working group (RAN YF&C):** Engaging with and empowering youth, communities and families to support the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism.
- **Local authorities working group (RAN LOCAL):** Involves local authorities who are in charge of coordinating practitioners at their local level and organising their multi-agency work and structures.
- **Prison and Probation working group (RAN P&P):** Supports practitioners in the prison and probation sector who have a role in preventing radicalisation.
- **Police and law enforcement working group (RAN POL):** Supports police and other law enforcement officials who are responsible for community related police work.
- **Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism working group (RAN RVT):** Victims of terrorism (both targets of attacks and those who have lost a relative) are involuntary experts on the harm that violent extremism causes to humankind. Victims will be remembered and their voices broadcast to counter radicalisation.
- **Health and Social Care working group (RAN H&SC):** The key challenge for the health and social care sector is to interpret signs of radicalisation and help those individuals who might be at risk of being radicalised.
- **RAN Young:** Young people can provide a valuable contribution to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism and should be empowered to take an active role in doing so.

The RAN Centre of Excellence delivers a programme of conferences each year, promoting the work of these groups. At these conferences, participants are facilitated to share their knowledge and first-hand experience with one another and peer review each other's practices. Such conferences are also a platform for the world of practitioners, researchers and policy makers to pool expertise and experience to tackle radicalisation.

Attendance at RAN conferences is by invitation only and it was on this basis that I was grateful to be invited, through contact with Robert Örell, to attend two back to back conferences in June 2019 in Prague, Czech Republic. I was invited to the following conferences based on my area of employment and having identified that I could contribute to and benefit from learning.

4. Conference One – Meeting adjacent fields: Rehabilitation, Resocialisation and Exit Activities



This first conference brought together two workstreams of RAN Exit and RAN Prison & Probation with the aim of exploring what rehabilitation means in relation to extremist offenders, to consider challenges to resocialisation and to identify principles of good practice. The conference was chaired by Torben Adams, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in the Federal State of Bremen and Robert Örell, co-chair of RAN EXIT.

There were thirty-five attendees at this conference from a range of EU countries, many representing the north of Europe such as Germany, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands and Luxembourg but also with significant attendance from Eastern Europe; Romania, Slovenia, Poland and the Czech Republic. Southern Europe was less represented with only two participants from Italy. In terms of the spread of organisations, there were five of us representing probation services from Latvia, Slovenia, Romania and the UK. Many other criminal justice agencies were represented including Northern Ireland Police, Finish Criminal Sanctions agency and the Florence External Penal office alongside NGOs, local authorities and several academics and researchers.

The conference ran over two days with the agenda based on presentations by fellow participants used to prompt discussion and group exercises. The conference was delivered on the basis of Chatham House Rules - meaning that participants were free to use the information received but not to share the identity of the speaker(s). On that basis, when I reference speakers in this report it will be by assigning a letter of the alphabet, e.g. speaker A, B and then C.

The first presentation was given by a Norwegian participant who began by telling us that 30 years ago she was part of an extremist group involved in criminal activity. She described the journey she went through to leave the extremist group. Speaker A told us that at the point she was convicted and involved in the criminal justice system she started to question her commitment to the group. She describes meeting with a probation officer who was *'a really nice woman, she wanted to help me but she not able to, she didn't understand the dynamics and did not pursue me when I did not attend'*. She explained that it took four more years before she could escape. Building on this experience A has since trained to be a psychologist who specialises in trauma therapy. In working with clients

wanting to leave extremist groups, she stressed the need for us all to take responsibility to care for the client with integrity and personal psychologically informed basis. She recognised that there are many dilemmas in endeavouring to do this. We must be transparent about our own limitations and we have an obligation to reflect. Speaker A explained that she specialises in emotion focused therapy - how to change maladaptive emotions. She argued that having an awareness of emotions is central in the work with clients and that we must be able to handle the 'rage' that they often present with. Setting out that anger is a maladaptive emotion, her aim is to try and help clients access the primary emotion. In concluding her presentation, she reminded the audience that every time you meet the client is an opportunity to create a positive emotional experience which can undermine radicalisation, contending that science tells us that change comes through human relationships.

The second input was given by Speaker B, Director of an NGO in Germany that provides a programme to support people leaving Islamic extremist groups. Speaker B began by acknowledging that *'we are all new to working with Jihadi's'* in that its only in more recent history that Europe has had the challenge of working to de-radicalise Islamic extremists. He argued that from his experience, the main principle is that the practitioner needs time and patience suggesting, in his view, the realistic time for exit work to be at least 1.5 years. In saying this, he recognised the length of time it takes to de-radicalise somebody depends a range of factors including the level of radicalisation, engagement/participation, participation in crime and social marginalisation. Speaker B explained that he works with the client's reality- what they say - not what the court papers say and set out that there are three main objectives in his approach; first using the person's narrative to help explain how they became involved with the extremist group. Secondly promoting perspectives and thirdly building trust, both with the client and the community/society.

Two other participants made presentations but focused mostly on the organisation of their service rather than on the area of my interest in service user engagement. Speaker C, representing the Probation Service in Latvia, spoke about the need to balance control and support but also about the influence of Russia on the media and the difficulties of handling the propaganda of the state. Speaker D representing the equivalent of Probation Services in Finland explained that Finland currently only has 1 terrorist offender currently serving a sentence. In Finland, they use VERA (Violent Extremism Risk Assessment) as their assessment tool as they do in Germany.

In addition to the above inputs, there was opportunity for more informal discussion in group exercises. A psychologist delivering custodial group interventions to terrorist offenders in Paris told me that they were well resourced but only to deliver to Islamic extremists, that whilst Far Right extremism is a problem, it is not yet recognised in the provision of rehabilitative interventions. Speaking with another participant from Poland, he told me that he was a former member of a far-right extremist group and that he was currently campaigning for his government to fund an EXIT project in Poland which he is passionate about setting up and delivering.

The first day of conference one finished with some reflections and concluding remarks from the conference chairs. Robert Örell reflected that we need to have trust and relationships to have effective interventions. He recognised that needing to develop trust and relationships with some of the most dangerous offenders in our society creates challenges. To do this we must have mutual understanding and trust across the stakeholder groups also.

Drawing on what he heard from speakers, Robert Örell additionally reflected that *'we need to help people be personal about their stories to undo the group identity and make them a person again'*. This struck me as a very powerful statement and one that I will take forward into recommendations and learning from this report.

Day II – 6 June - NH City Prague – Room Zurich 2+3

09:00 **Opening and re-cap**

Moderated by Robert Örell and Torben Adams

9:15 **Probation and Exit Work: Existing practices of cooperation**

Amy Poulson, MAPPA coordinator - Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, Justice Social Service, Lower Saxony

10:25 **Coffee break**

The second half day of this conference saw me being first on the agenda alongside a divisional probation manager from Lower Saxony in Germany. We were asked to provide an input on existing practices in our organisation in working with Extremist offenders from a Probation Service perspective. I gave a 10-minute input on how the National Probation Service in England & Wales manages offenders sentenced under TACT legislation, describing the organisational structures and specialist job roles and the availability of bespoke assessment tools, interventions and other rehabilitative services. I explained the range of control measures and conditions that are also available, such as satellite tracking, curfews and exclusion zones. I spoke also about the well-developed multi-agency arrangements including close relationships with counter-terrorism police and with specialist counter-terrorism probation officers providing support. In giving this presentation and comparing it to what I had learned about provision in other European countries, I was struck by how well-resourced we are in England & Wales. I also spoke about how, in the face of demanding licence conditions including restrictions and controls, it can be challenging for offenders to positively comply and that this in turn creates challenges for the offender manager to positively engage and motivate the offender. I additionally noted that whilst EXIT-programmes work with individuals on a voluntary basis, the National Probation Service work with services users on a mandatory basis, some of whom might be motivated to change and others who are not. The importance of effectively engaging service users remains critical and is perhaps even more so in the face of challenging demands placed on offenders. It is for this reason, I told the audience, that I was so keen to learn from their experience and understanding.

Later in the morning we had a guided discussion about the differences between EXIT work and the work of probation services, based on the fact that one is obligatory and the other voluntary. The group came up with the following key differences;

Probation / Obligatory

Sanctions

Access to information

Expected to Feedback

Professional relationship and some distance

EXIT / Voluntary

No Sanctions

No access to information

Limited Feedback

More personal relationship akin to friendship

Probation work is imposed by a judge and mandated by the law whereas exit work is, and should be, voluntary. For this reason, it might be less challenging in the latter case to build up a trusting relationship with the offender, as the target group is usually apprehensive in working with anything or anyone that represents the Government (*Canters & Van de Donk 2019*)

Whilst this tension creates a challenge to effective engagement for those with statutory responsibility, if anything it makes it even more important that the probation officer invests in building trust and rapport, albeit on more professional footing. More-over, if the offender has *them and us* thinking, which is commonly the case, it is important that the probation officer model's qualities that can foster respect and trust and help counter oppositional thinking.

At the end of the conference the chairs asked us all to identify a summary of we will individually take away from the event. Reflecting on what we had learnt over the course of the day I identified three key points:

- **Building Bridges**
- **Building trusting relationships**
- **Duty versus Choice**

5. Conference Two – Radicalised and Terrorist Offenders released from Prison: Communities & Family Acceptance



This second conference, which ran back to back with the first, brought together the Prison & Probation workstream with the Youth Family and Communities stream of RAN. This conference sought to consider the challenges faced when prisoners convicted of terrorist offences return to communities and their families within those communities.

There were 41 attendees at this conference, approximately half being the same as at the previous event. The spread of countries and organisations in attendance was similar but with the notable addition of police colleagues from Spain. The conference opened with the chair telling us that RAN is now in its eighth year, with over 6000 professionals being involved at some point and 355 RAN meetings organised. The return of this group of offenders to society poses a series of challenges (Pisoiu 2019).

In an introductory exercise, we were asked to consider how the rehabilitation of extremist offenders is different from that of other offenders as well as what the main barriers to re-integration were. In discussion, delegates recognised that despite the considerable challenges, we must have a belief in change, as we would with other offenders. We discussed the stigma that extremist offenders face in society but also how practice could reflect what has been learnt about other groups of offenders that

experience significant stigma. The risk of stigma is that it can lead to isolation, negative thinking and low self-esteem. As Pisoui has reflected 'Societal acceptance and the creation or reactivation of social networks are vital... research has confirmed that successful rehabilitation is dependent on individuals having a purpose in life' (Pisoui 2019).

As practitioners we discussed the need to provide support in finding positive ways that the offender can engage in that society, be it work, education or through leisure activity, to build up their *social capital* – the network of positive relationships a person requires to function effectively.

A presentation was then given by Speaker E, a researcher from the Austrian institute for International Affairs. She talked about the need to be able to convince people why the rehabilitation of extremists is important. To do this you need, she reflected, a clear argument. What might be popular options are not realistic. We can't keep individuals indefinitely in prison, we can't close our borders and we can't withdraw citizenship, in most cases. We might want to let this issue be somebody else's problem but again, this cannot be the case. We need to address the problem when it occurs and through rehabilitation. Why is the rehabilitation of extremist offenders so much more challenging? Speaker E set out the following reasons;

- Its more than just their deed, it's their world view
- Mainstream society is moving to more polarised views
- The ambiguous role of the family and communities – will they help or hinder?
- Double stigmatisation
- Politically difficult to sell '*we are going to do something for someone who is the worst of the worst*'

Considering the third point relating to the importance of re-engaging with family and communities but the uncertainty in knowing if those groups are protective or risk factors. Pisoiu makes the point that rehabilitation literature recommends capitalising on family support that already exists, whilst at the same time screening for individuals who should rather be protected from family influence (Pisoui 2019) In other words, an assessment of the nature of family influence needs to be made, the offender being protected from negative influence wherever possible and encouraged to benefit from positive family support in their re-integration. Where specialist family programmes exist, these should be accessed.

Before introducing the next speaker, the chair told us that in the EU there are 500 million citizens. In this context he asked delegates to consider how many of those citizens are in prison because of a terrorist act? Taking 2018 Europol figures he confirmed that there were 1219 terrorist offenders in custody across Europe. Looking at how this broke down by country he provided the following examples;

Country	Population	Terrorists in custody
Belgium	11 million	50
Germany	83 million	58
United Kingdom	63 million	418

Considering the significantly higher number of TACT offenders in UK prisons per head of population, we were told that data shows prison numbers are proportionate to the number of terrorist attacks a country has had, the UK having suffered significantly more attacks than their European counterparts of Germany and Belgium.

The next presentation was given by a Professor from a UK University. Speaker F told the audience that he had, many years ago, been a member of an extremist group. He talked about the challenges of re-integration. When a person is a member of an extremist group, F explained that the identity of the group takes over the person. If that person then leaves the group, the feeling of loss is huge and there is a need to help that individual find ways to re-boot their identity. Key challenges he set out are:

- Identity Who am I? where do I fit in?
- Stigma and prejudice Who to tell and when
- So many decisions to make Which were previously made by the group
- Self-care Groups often are negative environments
- Taking responsibility Rather than following direction of the group
- Re-connect with the past Family and friends, issues of shame and guilt.
- Finding a new future How can I become a new person

Speaker F talked about the fact that in leaving a group that the person often moves from a busy to an empty life, a vacuum being left where once the group activities filled up their time and attention. Making the decision to exit the group, there is a *'need to find out how your life can be filled up without the group'*.

The final speaker, speaker G, was from the Police General Directorate in Catalunya, Spain. He explained that he worked in analysis in the counter-terrorist department. He gave a case presentation of a Paraguayan boy called Omar who arrived in Spain with his mum and sister when he was 9 years old. His father had died in Paraguay. At 11, he described to his school how he felt; his mother and sister were happy in the move to Spain, but he felt he was missing something. At 14, he starts abusing substances and becomes violent. His older sister leaves home because of this violence. He meets a Brazilian man who convinces him to convert to Islam. They start to meet in his flat and this is where the radicalisation begins. He is later arrested for being a member of a terrorist cell that was planning terrorist attacks. He receives a sentence of three years in prison, to be supervised by the Probation Service for three years on release. Whilst he was in prison, he maintained his ideology, this being a way to protect himself in this environment. On release he initially maintained his ideology, was angry and didn't want to speak with his family. The Probation Services worked as part of a multi-disciplinary programme called *Prepare* to address the holistic range of risks and needs Omar presented with. Work prioritised focused on strengthening his social ties and disengagement from violence. He was supported in seeking job offers, was provided with a mentor and work was done to build bridges in his relationships with family and friends as well as looking at his use of leisure time. At the same time the necessary controls were in place including surveillance. Over time, this approach started to show positive effects both in his behaviour and in the reduction in his extreme ideologies.

I unfortunately had to leave before the end of this second conference as had to catch the last train from Prague to take me to Berlin for the next part of my visit, as set out in the next section. I left feeling enthused and considering how I could apply learning to practice when I return to the UK.

6. Visit to EXIT-Deutschland



EXIT work is assisting people to deradicalise from an extremist ideology, to disengage from extremist groups and violence and to re-integrate into society (*Canter & Van de Donk 2019*). EXIT-Germany is an initiative that has been in place since 2000, assisting individuals who want to leave the extreme right-wing movement and start a new life. EXIT-Germany was founded by criminologist and former police detective Bernd Wagner and former neo-Nazi leader Ingo Hasselbach.

EXIT-Germany is the longest established of such programmes in Germany and as such constitutes one of the most experienced programs in de-radicalisation. The programme works with individuals from all backgrounds, but mainly from the most highly radicalized (group leaders, terrorists, party leaders) The programme promotes the fact that since its inception in 2000 over 500 individual cases have successfully finished their associations with far-right groups with a recidivism rate of approximately 3%, as quoted in their promotional literature.

The success of EXIT-Germany has been acknowledged by several institutions and authorities, most recently the German government and the European Commission/European Social Fund. In recognition of EXIT-Germany's work, the initiative has been decorated with several awards, such as the Erich Maria Remarque Peace Award 2013 and the Politik Award 2012.

My visit to EXIT-Deutschland was at their administrative offices in an anonymous apartment block near the centre of Berlin. Fabien Wichmann met with me for a 3-hour semi-structured interview during which he talked, in some depth, about the work the organisation does, what he has learnt from his experiences, and the advice he would give to others working in this field.

Fabien explained to me that given the nature of their role, most workers in EXIT-Germany take measures to protect their private life, some having fictional identities. Just three of the workers, including Fabien himself, take an outward facing public role.

Fabien told me that the first EXIT project was set-up in Norway in the 1990's followed by a Project in Sweden and then Germany. He explained that the last 4 years has seen a proliferation of EXIT

projects across Europe and wider. He mentioned that more recently this has included a project in the UK, called *Small Steps* based in London and set-up by former members of the UK far-right groups.

EXIT-Deutschland is a non-governmental organisation part funded by the State and part funded by voluntary donations. They employ six core counsellors in addition to two half-time counsellors. Whilst their mission is to provide services to support clients to leave far-right groups, the organisation additionally invests in campaigning and public relations, to garner support, to access clients and to attract funding.

Fabien provided some context setting in telling me that there are 18 Far-Right groups nationally in Germany that are illegal. There are then 75 banned groups as criminal organisations. The first banned group was in 1951 at a federal level. There are also some banned political parties such as the Free German Workers Party (FAP) a neo-Nazi political party that was banned by the Constitutional Court in 1995. He spoke about the fact that neo-Nazi symbols, flags and other imagery is also banned but that the far-right find ways round this. For example, the numbers 1 and 8 together is code for Adolf Hitler, A being the first letter of the alphabet and H the eighth and as such should not be displayed. However, examples can be seen of a neo-Nazi couple both wearing t-shirts in each other's company, one with the number 1 and the other the number 8 in a way to challenge the state and demonstrate visibly their allegiance.

As a means of countering the illegality of so many Far-Right groups, Fabien spoke about the way that the Far-Right has adapted to develop structures that can appear legitimate. Many operate through Mixed Marshall Arts (MMA) clubs and with security management companies that are professional and sophisticated. These structures also provide a means of connecting with youth and recruiting / promoting their aims.

Fabien explained how some Far-Right groups operate within Organised Crime Groups, often Biker gang, whilst others operate more directly as terrorist cells with a focus on developing plans to commit terrorist activity. He spoke about the use of the internet to recruit new and often young members. Recruiters will groom potential new members on open forums, finding mutual interests as a means of grooming and testing out potential susceptibility to influence. Once vulnerability is established, the person can be invited to join a closed forum at which point more explicit recruitment can progress.

Reflecting developments in society, the Neo-Nazi scene has adapted and changed in profile. Fabien talked about the growth in German society of modern professionals with gentrification and the creative economy contributing to the rise of a new profile of Neo-Nazi's called Neo-Nazi Hipsters, or '*Nipsters*', as a stylised expression of a new Far-Right generation. This new type of identity which is more integrated into modern German society sits alongside the continued existence of traditional 'old-school' Far Right groups and communities.

Fabien spoke with real clarity and insight about what it takes for a person to make the decision to leave a Far-Right organisation. As an analogy he asked me to imagine being the following person; You have undertaken a PHD based on the small physique of Napoleon. You are well-known and respected expert on the subject, have enjoyed status and success in academic and personal circles as well as having made a lot of money for selling books on the topic. Your identity is very much based on this field of academic success. Imagine if a professional peer approaches you and disputes your theories, telling you that in fact Napoleon was not short, that he was of average size and that the evidence you have rested your theories is fundamentally flawed. How would you respond?

When a person's fundamental beliefs are challenged and where their life is built around those beliefs, Fabien's experience is that the person is not going to readily give-up those beliefs, even if presented with very strong evidence to the contrary. Too much is invested in them. Instead that person, presented with such evidence, is likely to enter a protracted period of questioning and doubt. They might start looking for or noticing inconsistencies whilst not admitting any doubt. Fabien talked about the process of there being slow seeds of doubt over time in how they feel about their ideology. There then might be a key moment, something that happens, that can lead to a turning point towards change.

Fabien related that *seeds of doubt* can be ignited from various experiences. The importance of *comradeship* within a Neo-Nazi group is something which he described as bonding members in shared beliefs and allegiance. Conversely, if your comrade behaves in a way that is not consistent with your understanding of shared beliefs, then this can create dissonance that can result in seeds of doubt and potentially a progression towards deciding to leave a group. Examples of this, as cited, were a group member entered an illicit relationship with his comrade's partner, a group member saw their comradeship leader selling drugs and that a group member experienced violence at the hands of their comrade following an argument.

Once seeds of doubt have been sown, Fabien explained his role is to '*empower doubts*' through motivational work, counselling and planning for a different future.

Fabien provided a case example of a woman with five children who decided she needed to leave an "*old school Neo-Nazi*" group - this necessitating her also leaving her husband who was part of this community. The family had operated in a closed community which had extreme beliefs surrounding their identity and acceptable behaviours, for example being forbidden to wear jeans and having belief in their own German Gods. The group was well connected with the National Democratic Party (NPD) this party being a far-right ultranationalist party, a successor to the German Reich Party. The power and influence of the group meant the women knew she and her children were at huge risk by deciding to leave. The woman may never have the 'seeds of doubt' translated into courage to leave the group had it not been for one of her children, who had vulnerabilities, being badly treated because of those vulnerabilities within the group. Having left the community, the father as predicted took active steps to try and find and return his wife and children. EXIT-Germany provided significant practical support and expertise in allowing them to change their identity and moving to a different federal state, a demanding and complex task.

EXIT-Germany recognises the importance of finding safe ways to make their presence known so when those seeds of doubt start to rankle, an individual knows where to seek support to exit Far-Right groups. Given that they can't promote their services in a more overt way within such groups, EXIT-Germany have come up with a range of creative ways of making themselves known both in the wider community and within far-right scene.



The above image is used by EXIT-Germany as a promotional post card passed out at Far-Right rallies and marches. What do you see when you look at this image? I imagine your instinct is to see it as an offensive reference to *Mine Fuhrer*, referencing Adolf Hitler. The reality is that the above is a play on words. In translation it says *My Former*, - *former* being a word in regular usage to describe individuals who have left extremists groups. When these post cards are picked up in Far-Right rallies, the same mistake will be made by members who might then take the post card home. Having done so they would, on the reverse side of the card, be able to read details regarding the services of EXIT-Germany.

Fabien provided a further example of a project used to target the Neo-Nazi scene directly to increase awareness of EXIT-Germany, called Operation Trojan t-shirt. This Operation was delivered in conjunction with an advertising agency, T-shirts being produced showing a skull with the text 'Hardcore Rebels' and a flag of the Free Forces (militant Neo-Nazi groups) These t-shirts were distributed for free at a right-wing rock festival ('Rock for Germany') which was organised by the nationalist party, NPD. On taking the t-shirt home and on washing it, a surprise effect becomes evident as the initial image is washed-off and a message appears:

'What your T-shirt can do, you also can do – We help you to free yourself from right-wing extremism. EXIT-Germany'.



EXIT-Germany has initiated a wide range of projects such as this one to spread their work and aims across society and extremist groups, but more importantly to provide help to anyone who has questions about, problems with, or interest in right-wing extremism and leaving the scene.

Before the interview finished, I thanked Fabien for his time and reflected how difficult and admirable the job is that he and his colleagues undertake. I asked him to accept the small gift of a number of Manchester Bee enamel broaches. I explained that the emblem of the worker bee has a long history in Manchester, representing the industry of Manchester people. I also explained that since the terrorist attack at the Manchester Arena, the image had taken on a renewed importance in uniting Manchester in the shared identify brought about by this emblem. We spoke about the work I do in the National Probation Service, having statutory responsibility for managing extremist offenders. Fabien in turn gave me an EXIT-Deutschland enamel broach. We talked about how our children would love these gifts. In this moment we had a sense of commonality in our values and humanity that will stay with me.

7. Learning Outcomes and Future Opportunities

Attendance at the RAN conferences, then EXIT-Deutschland provided an invaluable opportunity to learn from the experience and understanding of professional peers across Europe.

The learning I sought was not based on theories or data primarily but personal experiences of engaging with extremists. At least two of the speakers' stories used in this study are former members themselves so have unique insights in being able to speak from personal and professional perspective. Through the process of drawing these narratives together I have identified below two learning themes as relate to effective engagement with extremist offenders:

The importance of understanding the challenges faced Extremists re-entering society after prison

- Extremist offender can face double stigmatisation
- Stigmatisation creates an obstacle to social integration and hinder the change process
- We need to support positive ways to engage in mainstream society
- There is a need to re-connect with family, but shame and guilt can make that difficult
- Feeling of loss can be huge when leaving an extremist group
- There can be a feeling of missing something and a loss of self
- Where group activities once filled up time and attention there can be a large vacuum on leaving an extremist group
- The importance of focusing on strengthening social ties and building social capital
- Where specialist family programmes exist, these should be accessed – do we do this?

The need to recognise qualities important in engaging effectively with extremist offenders.

- Awareness of emotions is central to effective engagement.
- Every interview is an opportunity to create a positive emotional experience which can undermine radicalisation.
- The change process takes time and you need patience
- *Seeds of doubt* can be ignited from various experiences
- *Seeds of doubt* over time, lead to internal questioning of inconsistencies in beliefs
- Our role is to empower doubts, through motivational work and supporting a different future
- We need to work with the client's reality
- We need to help people be personal about their story to undermine the group identity
- The need to balance control and support effectively
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In addition to the above, the following key principles have been identified as important:

- We must be transparent about our limitations
- We have an obligation to reflect
- To develop trust and relationships with dangerous offenders there must be understanding and trust across the stakeholder groups also

Further to this, through the process of research, I have been able to identify two key resources which I will encourage practitioners in my team and more widely across the NPS to access in developing their specialist knowledge and commitment to understanding Extremism.

Radicalisation awareness Network: With a European focus, via their public facing website, practitioners can elect to become members of this network and in doing so benefit from a range of learning opportunities including access to:

- Research reports.
- Educational videos.
- Networking opportunities.
- News and developments.

Institute for Strategic Dialogues: - With an International footing, their vision is to empower solutions to extremism and polarisation. Their work includes policy and advisory function to governments but also, as relevant to practitioners;

- Wide range of publications
- Research and analysis
- Educational resources
- Latest media news

My intention in completing this study is to use it to stimulate debate, reflection, awareness raising and learning. Most immediately this will be with practitioners in the team I manage but more widely, my intention is to share learning across the North-West NPS division and on a national organisational footing. From this it is my aim to promote practice improvement in our responsibility for engaging with this most concerning and hard to reach group of offenders.

8. Conclusion

What I have learned is that the United Kingdom, across Europe, is admired for being at the forefront of having specialist resources and utilising multi-agency approaches in the management of extremists. Whilst this is something to be proud of it is also critical, as I have also learned, not to be complacent in our reliance on these resources. The TACT offender, on release from custody, find themselves facing a battery of rehabilitative and control measures. Our responsibility is to protect the public and as such its right that these measures exist. As practitioners, we need to utilise expertise in engaging with this hard to reach group in motivating them to comply with such stringent requirements. Resources do not make up for the personal skill and understanding of the Probation Officer and it's this that we must locally invest.

“we need to help people be personal about their stories, to undue the group identity and make them a person again”

References & Resources

Ramalingham, V. (2015) The European far right is on the rise, again. Here's how to tackle it, *The Guardian*, 13/02/15.

CanTERS, F. & Van De Donk, M. (2019) EXIT work and Probation – learning from adjacent fields, *Ex Ante Paper* 29/05/2019.

Pisoiu, D. (2019) Rehabilitating radicalised and terrorist offenders; the role of families and communities, *Ex Ante Paper* 06/06/2019.

Website Resources

EXIT-Deutschland

<https://www.exit-deutschland.de/english/>

Institute of Strategic Dialogues

www.isdglobal.org

Radicalisation Awareness Network

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en

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