

CREST

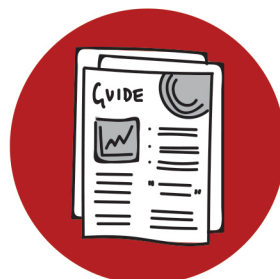
THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE ON SECURITY THREATS

# DIRECTOR'S REPORT



125  
funded staff

43  
academic publications



39  
short briefs written

>£3m  
additional research  
funding



93  
blogs published

56  
presentations given



x2  
bi-weekly roundtables

32  
workshops delivered



2016 - 2017



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This brief document provides an overview of CREST's activities during the Academic Year 2016-2017. I hope it serves as a useful overview.

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR

This past academic year has seen the idea of an independent, national hub for behavioural and social science research on security threats grow from an initial proposition to an active and influential centre.

Our early synthesis work has delivered the evidence needed to give direction on key issues, while our original research has matured, with new contributions coming from programmes, commissioned projects, and PhD students. Our communication agenda now boasts a significant catalogue of generalist guides and specialist reports, as well as two influential websites and a quarterly 'jewel-in-the crown,' *CREST Security Review*. Our efforts to support and build the security community have been extensive, involving at least one event per fortnight and participants from across the world.

These are the visible fruits of our labour. But, much more is happening behind the scenes. A series of efficiency savings made it possible to appoint an additional communications specialist early in the year,



as well as offer over £200k more than planned in the second round of our research commissioning. Our continued efforts to engage stakeholders within the UK and internationally have led to many bilateral projects and contributions, and ultimately a better understanding on both sides about how behavioural and social science can be exploited. Finally, I remain confident of our integrity thanks to the continued supportive but critical eye of the independent Security Research Ethics Committee, the reviewers of our commissioning submissions, who are generous with their

time, and the findings of our first independent review of the Centre's progress.

I am very proud of the progress the Centre has made over this second year. Building on the momentum of initial excitement, and determining how social science can best meet the needs of our stakeholders, has at times been challenging. But we have overcome these challenges thanks to the relentless hard work of the centre staff and CREST community. This is a community from which we can expect much more in the coming years.

Paul J. Taylor

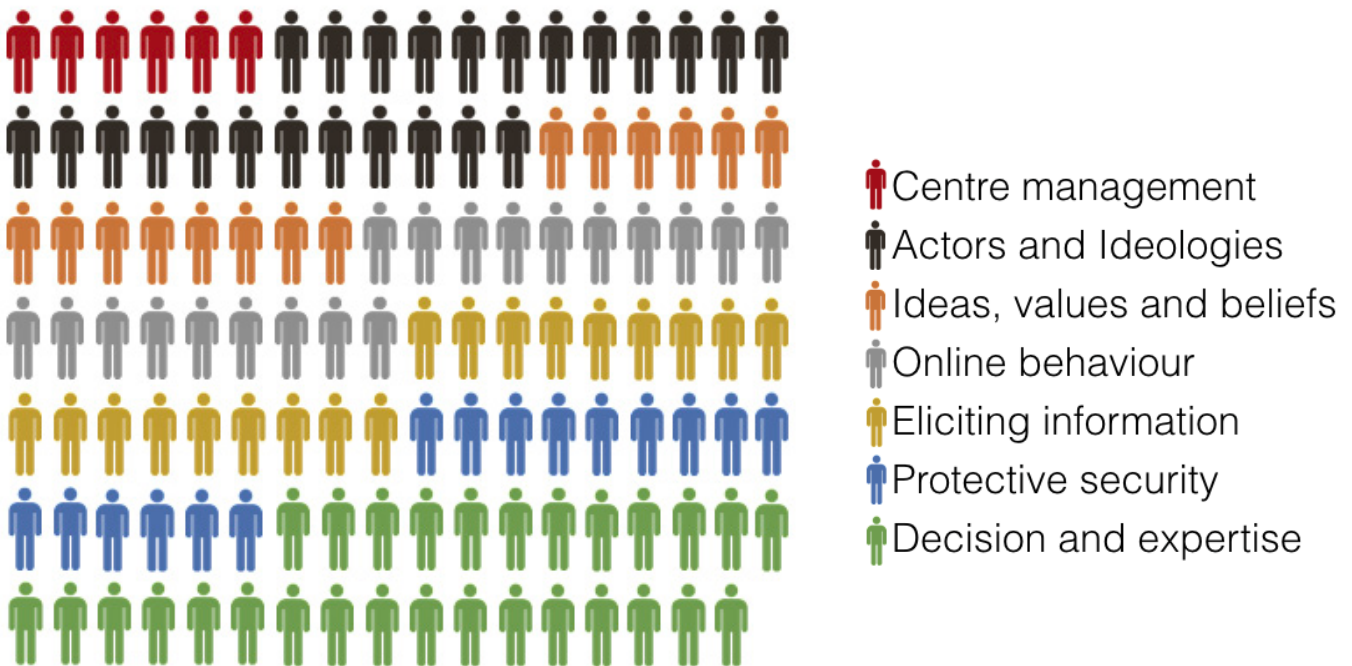
# WHO IS CREST?

CREST now funds 125 staff, including academics (n = 72), researchers (n = 31), PhDs (n = 12), science communicators (n = 3) and support staff (n = 7). Most have a proportion of their time funded by CREST (we fund 48FTE in total), though they typically spend more time undertaking CREST work than is funded. There are also a further 18 non-funded affiliates (8FTE) who work closely with us on projects (e.g., provide PhD supervision) but are not recipients of funding.

The Figure below shows the composition of CREST as a function of Programme focus. As is clear, we've kept the administrative footprint of CREST small to maximise our research capability. This capability is distributed evenly across six programmes; the original five plus a

sixth programme that we developed to address the demand from stakeholders for work on decision making and expertise.

CREST sees its community as larger than the 125 funded staff, and many of our activities involve interacting and working with other cognate researchers and stakeholders. We have co-hosted events, paid for researchers to attend stakeholder meetings, facilitated researcher-stakeholder conversations through our roundtable series, shared data sets with interested researchers, actively publicised the work of others within *CREST Security Review* and via social media, and supported funding applications by offering CREST's outreach resources.



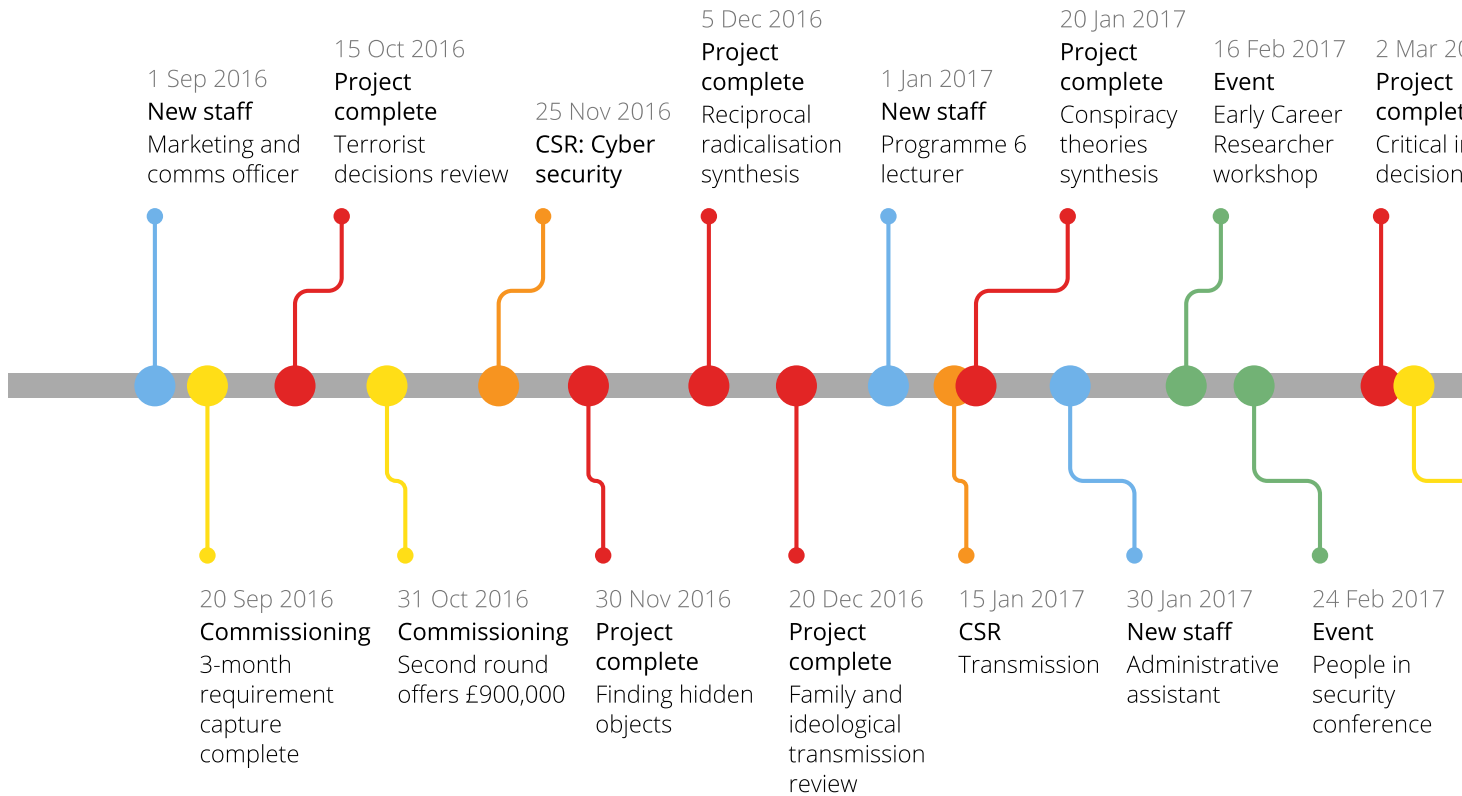


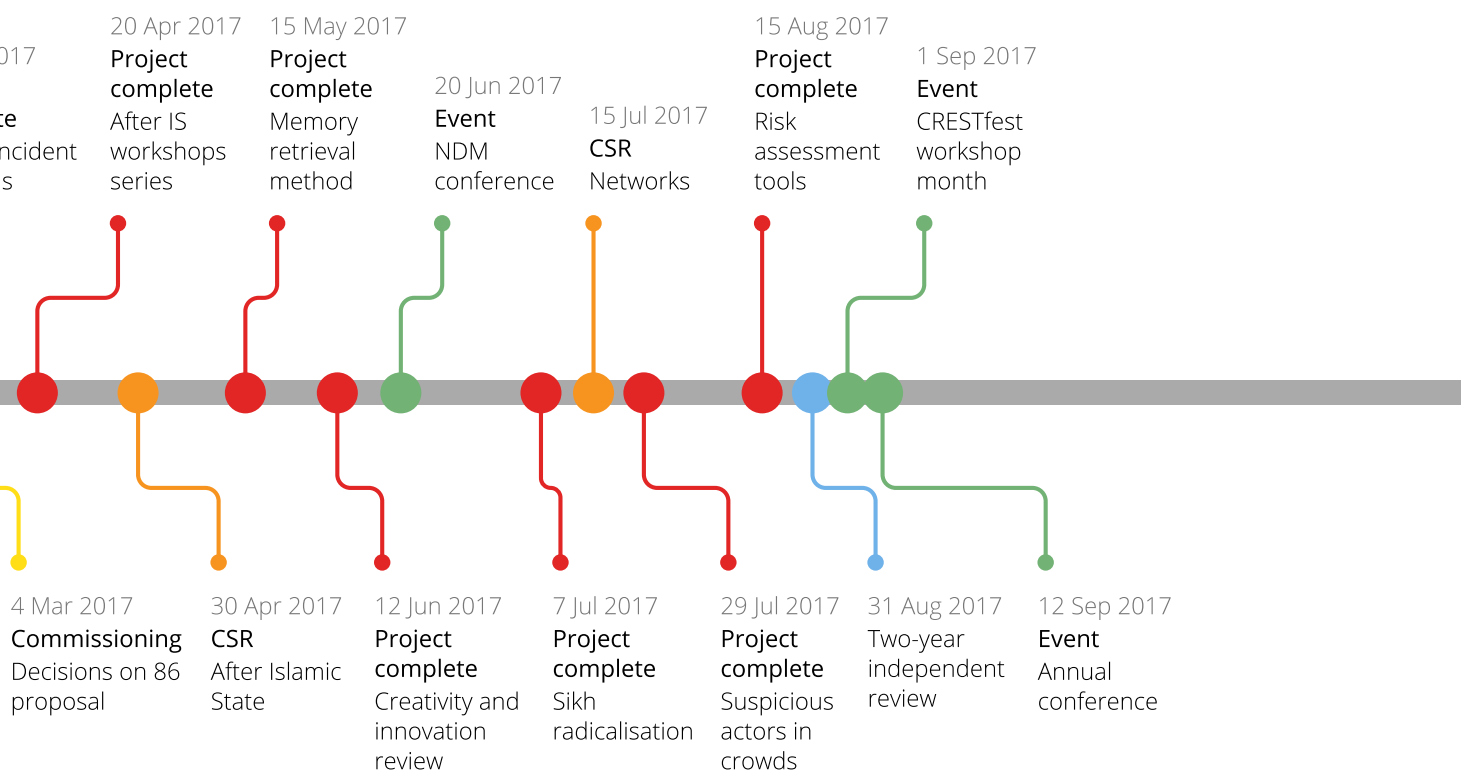
One investment we made early in the year was for a Marketing and Communication Officer. An unanticipated bonus of appointing Rebecca Stevens is that she is an excellent illustrator and graphical artist (see above). This has helped the communications team bring CREST products to life. Her work is now made available to others free-of charge (under Creative Commons) at Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/crestresearch/>

# ACHIEVEMENTS

Combine the publication of 11 guides, 16 reports, 59 short reads, and 11 journal articles with the organisation of 19 workshops and fortnightly roundtables, and there's lots to report. Here are some highlights.





# CURRENT PROJECTS

This year's research has been delivered by initial three-year core Programmes (P1 - P5) and 10 first-round commissioned projects. In March this year we commissioned a further 8 projects.

## Core Programme Highlights (Year 2)

### **Innovation and entrepreneurship within extremist social movements (P1)**

Uses multiple case studies to better understand the nature and catalysts for innovation in social movement of interest. This will enhance our understanding of how and when terrorists innovate and provide the basis for developing frameworks for assessing future concerns.

### **The emotional narratives in extremist leadership communiques (P1)**

Examines a dataset of leadership communiques to understand the changing face of the motivational narratives in key overseas conflicts. This will enhance our understanding of how narratives evolve with lessons for inferring the likely trajectory of current security threats and how their narratives may be addressed.

### **Indexing of extremist images and symbols (P1)**

Is cataloguing the images and symbols used by extremists in their offline and online propaganda. Doing so will enhance our understanding of the meaning and evolution of such symbolism, while also providing a reference point for investigative cases.

### **The style and content of grassroots counter-messaging (P2)**

Developing existing work on Islamic extremism counter-messaging, this project will deliver a content analysis of counter-messaging in the far-right arena. This will provide a framework for understanding future examples of counter-messaging and the role of reciprocal radicalisation, while also providing an evidence base on which to design counter-messaging campaigns.

### **The development of an Islam curriculum for stakeholder training (P2)**

Although there exist many resources for understanding the nature of Islam, none squarely address the issues that are relevant to officers in the funding organisations. This project synthesises these resources into a series of short guides that, collectively, will help increase religious literacy about Islam.

### **Case studies of gender and family involvement in terrorism (P2)**

Builds on the Programme's earlier contributions to our understanding of 'transmission' by examining the role of gender and family involvement in people's journeys to violence. This will explicate the social drivers of involvement, which will contribute to risk assessment and awareness.

### **Predicting demographic and personality factors from online behaviour (P3)**

Synthesises the burgeoning literature on what can be inferred about an individual from his or her online behaviour. This will inform efforts to implement this technologies, guarding against atheoretical data mining that may lack generalisability.

### **Empirical studies of online influence (P3)**

Examines how best to influence another's behaviour online, focusing both on what makes people susceptible and how such susceptibility can be harnessed. This will contribute, in particular, to the development of markers to evaluate the impact of online interventions.



### **A framework for understanding radicalisation online (P3)**

Following the completion of an in-depth review of radicalisation and the Internet, this project seeks to identify patterns of increasing radicalisation through language and behaviour. This will support the development of techniques designed to assess radicalisation amongst current threats.

### **Development of the model statement technique to include checkable details and resistance to counter-measures (P4)**

Examines the robustness and practicality of a new interview technique that can be easily deployed in the field. This will enhance the value of the technique for stakeholders while also identifying its limitations, particularly with respect to counter-measures.

### **Identification of suspicious behaviour in public arenas (P4)**

Experimental simulations to determine the extent to which nonverbal behaviours can identify adversaries undertaking a secret mission within a confined public space. This will inform the development of new methods for protecting public places, as well as surveillance countermeasures.

### **Development of context-priming encoding-retrieval strategy, including culture (P4)**

Develops new ways of enhancing the accurate retrieval of information from a witness or collaborator whose memory is subject to decay (e.g., because they've been away for an extended period). This will contribute to

operational contexts where it is necessary to establish an accurate-as-possible account, and where current techniques may be insensitive to cultural norms.

### **Assessment of the factors that promote security relationships (P5)**

Examines how organisations have successfully persuaded employees to adopt security behaviours, with a focus on the value of autonomous work groups. This will provide best practice recommendations for organisations wishing to invest in the human element of enhancing personnel and digital security.

### **Investigation of how computer users respond to suspicious technical behaviour (P5)**

Utilises an innovative experimental design to better understand when computer users will or will not report the suspicious actions of their device. This will refine the focus of efforts to encourage the reporting of suspicious events, and it will contribute to offensive efforts by identifying where the reporting threshold typically sits.

### **Managers' perspectives on how to encourage security behaviour from the workforce (P5)**

Using a unique workshop approach, this project will engage established security managers to understand the perspectives of senior managers, employees and others on small and large-scale breaches of security. The focus here is to identify the barriers to effective communication about security across the organisation, drawing out lessons for engagement with the CNI.

## **Forthcoming Commissioned Projects (second round)**

- The internal brakes on violent escalation
- Quantifying the effectiveness of evidence-based rapport-building training programmes
- Soft facts and digital behavioural influence
- Taking decision about information value
- Keeping secrets online: A knowledge synthesis
- Cybersecurity risks of digital hoarding
- Imaginative scenario planning for law enforcement organisations
- Assessing and mitigating the impact of organisational change on counterproductive work behaviour

## Commissioned Projects (Years 1-2)

### **Expertise and decision inertia in a counter-terrorism live exercise**

Examines decision data from a CBRNE attack simulation and assesses methods for debriefing captured 'terrorists'. This project will uncover the ways decision making is undermined in fast-moving crises, providing lessons for investigators. It also provides a more efficient debriefing method.

### **How does ISIS online propaganda demonstrate mechanisms of radicalisation**

Involves a large-scale, computer-assisted analysis of ISIS' video and text online content to explore how this might affect individuals at a cognitive level. Alongside enhancing understanding of what can be inferred from online behaviour, the project will deliver a series of computational techniques that may have wider application.

### **Differences in the ability to spot rare, non-salient or hidden targets**

Synthesises what research knows about individual differences in one's ability to detect rare, hidden, or non-salient targets. This will enhance understanding of who is most effective at detecting threats, and help identify how and under what circumstances objects can be kept hidden.

### **A review of the who, what and why of conspiracy theories**

Examines from the perspective of multiple disciplines the emergence, transmission, spread, and countering of conspiracy theories. This will enhance understanding of the nature and severity of risks posed by different conspiracies, and may inform techniques to modify or stop their spread among populations of interest.

### **The transition from civilian life into paramilitarism and back again**

Re-analyses interviews of Northern Irish paramilitaries, ex-prisoners and former Loyalist and Republican combatants, to understand the factors that help or hinder the transition from civilian life. This will enhance understanding of paramilitary career paths, and the pressures on those seeking to quit.

### **Minimal social exclusion tactic to increase information gain in intelligence interviews**

Tests the impact of a short pre-interview period of feeling ostracised to the quantity of information shared at interview. If proven to be effective, this is a low-cost, minimal effort way of enhancing interviewee cooperation.

### **Terrorist decision making about security and risk**

Using a systematic coding of autobiographies and FTAC case files, this project seeks to better understand how terrorists manage their own security and whether individuals vary in such behaviours. This will provide an evidence base that supports both the enhancement of protective security measures and investigator/analyst ability to interpret observed behaviours.

### **When does extremism give way to moderate politics in diaspora**

Examines why, despite expectations, the LTTE has not returned to fighting. It explores this question by focusing on the role and significance of politics among diaspora. This will enhance understanding of how diaspora may shape efforts to have effects in key regions (e.g., by providing spaces for moderate voices, by disrupting financing and propaganda).

### **Motivations of Sikh radicalisation in Britain**

Explores the current state of Sikh radicalisation in the UK, and its relationship to far-right and anti-Muslim movements. This will provide a timely evidence base from which to understand the development and trajectory of Sikh radicalisation.

### **Community reporting thresholds**

Explores the dynamics of, and barriers to, bystander reporting to authorities. Looks specifically at when and how close family members, friends, and community members might report on someone close to them. This will enhance understanding of what barriers need to be overcome to persuade reporting, and provides an evidence base for the development of bystander intervention campaigns.

# Key Performance Indicators

As per ESRC funding rules, we monitor our progress against a set of KPIs for the funding period (Oct 2015 - Sept 2018). This is what we have achieved against those KPIs, as of September 2017.

What	State of Play			2015-2018 KPIs	
	Complete	Underway Delayed	Underway Future	Target	Complete
<b>Synthesis/Original</b>	43	29	17	50	86%
Book chapter	2	3	1	-	-
Journal article	41	26	16	-	-
Software	3	2	0	-	-
<b>Communications</b>	138	32	5	112	123%
Blog	93	2	0	18	517%
Guide	39	15	2	30	130%
Non-refereed articles	5	15	3	14	36%
News article	1	0	0	50	2%
<b>Network</b>	138	11	17	159	87%
Conference	0	0	2	3	0%
Presentation	56	1	0	50	112%
Outreach	12	0	3	10	120%
Roundtable	18	0	1	72	25%
Workshop	32	3	5	12	267%
Report	20	7	6	12	167%

On the whole, we are on course to surpass our proposed KPIs. This is great news in relation to the original research, and we will continue to support and promote dissemination of internationally leading research, capturing where possible the contribution of CREST on REF2021 submissions.

In relation to the Communication activities, the Communication Director, Research-to-Practice Fellow and myself have been discussing the merits of rebalancing our activity to reduce quantity and further improve quality of output.



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CREST was commissioned and is administered by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) with a focus on conducting independent research and knowledge synthesis about security threats (ESRC Award: ES/N009614/1).

It is funded with £4.35 million from the UK security and intelligence agencies and a further £2.2m invested by its founding institutions – the universities of Lancaster, Bath, Birmingham, Cranfield, Portsmouth and the West of England.

More information about CREST can be found at  
[www.crestresearch.ac.uk](http://www.crestresearch.ac.uk)