

Schools



Terrorism threat to schools

- It is likely that terrorist actors would have the intent to conduct attacks against schools in the UK due to the large number of children and young adults that gather at such sites across the UK and the shock value and significant media coverage an attack at a school would receive.
- It is highly likely that any terrorist attack conducted against a school in the UK would be conducted by an individual or small cell using a low sophistication methodology. E.g., Bladed or Blunt Force Weapons, Vehicle as a Weapon, Fire as a Weapon.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could have the capability to conduct a high-sophistication attack at a school in the UK. E.g., Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), Person Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (PBIED) or a marauding attack with Firearms. The complicated nature of plotting a high-sophistication terrorist attack makes it highly likely that there will be greater opportunity for UK police and security services to disrupt potential attacks.
- The assessments in this report were made using the PHIA Probability Yardstick, for further information please see the Assessment Methodology [section below](#).

Location based threats to schools in the UK

- It is highly likely that there would be an increased terrorism threat to schools in major cities and those in proximity to iconic sites and/or major transport hubs. There is a realistic possibility that a school located in proximity to iconic sites and/or busy public spaces could be impacted by a Marauding Terrorist Attack in proximity to their site.
- Whilst it is highly likely that there would be an increased terrorism threat to schools located within large urban locations, there is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could seek to conduct an attack against schools that are located in smaller towns or rural areas in the UK due to the lack of other suitable targets in the nearby area.

Previous terrorist incidents related to schools in the UK

- Individuals with malicious intent have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against schools in the UK, including:
 - **2024 Wales:** Although not designated as terrorism, a student was charged with three counts of attempted murder after injuring three people during a school stabbing. The individual conducted a Bladed Weapons attack and two teachers and a teenage pupil were taken to hospital with non-life threatening stab wounds. The motivation for the attack remains unclear.¹
 - **1996 Scotland:** Although not designated as terrorism, an individual conducted a firearms attack against Dunblane primary school in Scotland. There were 17 fatalities, of which 16 were students, and one was a teacher. The motive for the attack remains unclear.²
- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against schools globally, including:
 - **2023 France:** An Islamist terrorist conducted a Bladed Weapons attack against a teacher at a school in Arras, France. There was one fatality and two others were injured. The perpetrator was reportedly a former pupil at the school and was known to security services for his involvement in Islamist extremism.³
 - **2023 Uganda:** Reporting suggests that five Islamic State-linked militants conducted a Bladed Weapons and Fire as a Weapon attack against a school in western Uganda. There were 41 fatalities.⁴
 - **2020 France:** An Islamist terrorist murdered a teacher outside of his school in Paris after he had showed cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad during a class on freedom of expression. Depictions of the Prophet Muhammad are widely regarded as taboo in Islam, and are considered highly offensive by Muslims. The perpetrator was shot dead by police at the scene.⁵
 - **2012 France:** An Islamist terrorist conducted a Firearms attack at a Jewish school in the French city of Toulouse. There were four fatalities, including three Jewish children and a teacher. The attack was conducted by the same perpetrator as two separate attacks against soldiers of North African descent prior to the school shooting.⁶
 - **2004 Russia:** Militants reportedly linked to a separatist insurgency in Chechnya conducted a siege of School Number One in the North Ossetian town of Beslan. Over 1,200 individuals were taken hostage and there were 331 fatalities.⁷

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Other potential threats to schools in the UK

- It is almost certain that the terrorism threat posed to schools in the UK would be dependent on the time of year and/or term times of the school. It is almost certain that school term time would attract the highest footfall to schools across the UK and therefore be prioritised by any terrorist actor seeking to conduct an attack at any such site. Alternatively, it is highly likely that the threat posed to schools would be reduced during holidays and half-terms.
- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat posed to faith schools and/or institutions with formal links to a religious and/or faith-based organisation in the UK. For example, it is highly likely that individuals adhering to Islamist and Extreme Right-Wing ideologies would have the intent to conduct attacks against individuals attending a school with formal links to the Jewish faith.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could have the intent to target specific high-profile individuals hosted by schools in the UK. E.g., The presence of a politician visiting a secondary school in the UK could lead to an increased threat from individuals with terrorist intent.
- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to any school in the UK hosting an event and/or community party on their site. E.g., Schools hosting fêtes, Christmas services, and/or community fundraising events would likely attract large crowds to their sites. Terrorist actors could have the intent to target large crowds hosted during major school events.
- There is a realistic possibility that the terrorism threat posed to schools in the UK could be subject to change based upon the current socio-economic and political climate of the country as well as community relations within any given city and/or town in which a school is based. E.g., In 2021, a teacher from Batley Grammar School in West Yorkshire was forced into hiding after a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad was shown in a religious class. The teacher later received death threats from parents and remains in hiding at this time.⁸
- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to any school in the UK that educates the children and/or relatives of a high-profile individual. E.g., Terrorist actors could have the intent to target the children of politicians in response to the UK political climate.
- It is highly likely that teenagers and young adults will remain overly represented in both Prevent and Channel cases in the short term and there is a realistic possibility that a small minority of such cases could pose a threat to schools in the UK.
 - E.g., In the year ending 31 March 2023, those aged 15 to 20 accounted for the largest proportion of referrals to the government's Prevent programme, and those aged 14 and under accounted for the second largest proportion. Additionally, 2023 saw the highest ever number of under-18-year-olds arrested for terrorism-related offences including sharing terrorist propaganda and encouraging attacks.⁹
 - E.g., Although it is unclear if any such attack would be designated as terrorism, in February 2023, Head of Counterterrorism Policing Matt Jukes revealed that police have witnessed a "real threat" of teenagers plotting US-style attacks on schools in the UK.¹⁰
- Although there have been no cases of a successful terrorist attack conducted by a child or teenager in the UK to date, children and teenagers have previously demonstrated the intent to conduct terrorist attacks and terrorism-related activity in the UK, including:
 - **2024 Leeds:** A teenager was convicted of preparation of terrorist acts after plotting to kill at least 50 people by attacking government buildings and politicians' houses. The individual had reportedly bought a number of chemicals on the internet and conducted experiments with explosives in his back garden. He also possessed computer files outlining how to make a 3D-printed assault rifle and a printer on which to make it.¹¹
 - **2023 Keyleigh:** A 17-year-old who adhered to an Extreme Right-Wing ideology was sentenced to 10 years in prison for offences including plotting a terrorist attack against a mosque. The perpetrator had conducted hostile reconnaissance at a mosque in Keighley, contacted a UK-based individual in order to buy a weapon, and written a "detailed plan for carrying out a terrorist attack".¹²
 - **2023 Essex:** A teenager was sentenced to life imprisonment for plotting a terrorist attack against British soldiers and police officers. The individual had previously wanted to travel to Syria to join Islamic State and conducted hostile reconnaissance at an army barracks, a magistrate's court, and railway station. His mother alerted the Prevent programme to concerns over his behaviour.¹³
 - **2023 Derbyshire:** A teenager who adhered to an Extreme Right-Wing ideology was sentenced to 11-and-a-half years in a young offender's institution for encouraging terrorism and possession of material for terrorist purposes. The individual published a significant amount of far-right terrorist material online. One of the individual's followers later conducted a racially motivated mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, and had reportedly given the UK-based individual a shoutout before conducting the attack.¹⁴

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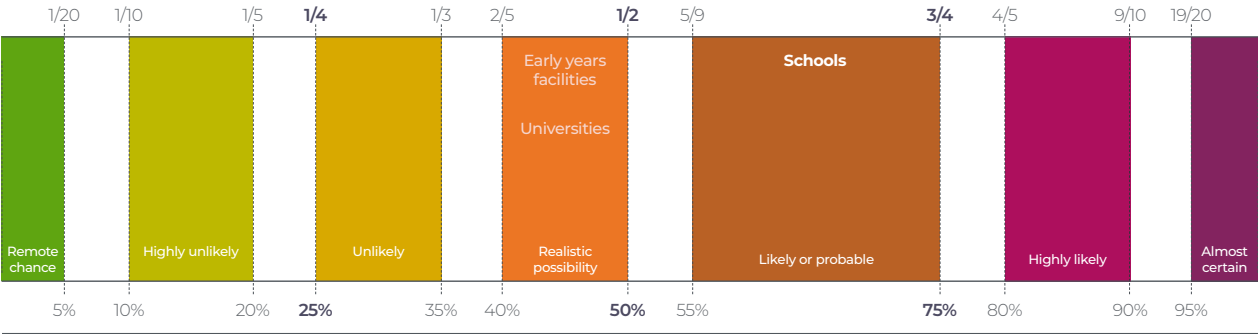
Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against schools within the education sector.

Terrorist intent can be defined as the desire and/or determination of an individual to conduct an attack against any given site.

The intent of terrorist actors to conduct an attack against the education sector in the UK is subject to change based on the assessments outlined in this report.

Note: The terrorism threat to any given site is not based solely on intent, but also the capability of terrorist actors in the UK as outlined in this report. Terrorism threat is also mitigated by the UK’s countrywide terrorism risk mitigation infrastructure including both public and private security and safety capabilities.



Assessment Methodology

The assessments made in this report have been made using the Professional Head of Intelligence’s “Probability Yardstick” (above). The Probability Yardstick is a standardised instrument used to provide a professional standard for intelligence assessment.

- **Almost certain:** An event has a greater than 90% chance of occurring.
- **Highly likely:** An event has a 76% to 90% chance of occurring.
- **Likely:** An event has a 55% to 75% chance of occurring.
- **Realistic possibility:** An event has a 40% to 54% chance of occurring.
- **Unlikely:** An event has a 25% to 39% chance of occurring.
- **Highly unlikely:** An event has an 10% to 24% chance of occurring.
- **Remote chance:** An event has a less than 10% chance of occurring.

Time spans

- **Short Term:** 0–6 Months.
- **In the next 12 months.**
- **Medium Term:** 12 months–5 Years.
- **Long Term:** 5+ Years.

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Intelligence cut-off date: 29 April 2024

For more information please contact solutions@poolre.co.uk

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