

Working in counter terrorism

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Spotlight on a role: counter terrorism security advisor

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I have been a Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA) for the past 16 years. I work under the 'Protect' strand of the government's CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy (Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare). My role involves providing up-to-date support and advice to local businesses on how they can protect themselves against a terrorist attack.

Every force across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland has a CTSA team who are representatives of the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO). Being part of this national network is great for sharing ideas, collaborative working, and most importantly, increasing security.

Guidance and advice

As a CTSA, one area I offer advice on is physical measures. In the public realm, this can involve advising on hostile vehicle mitigation. For privately owned sites, advice can be provided around appropriate access control and glazing for the local authority and architects wishing to build in the City of London.

One example is the bollards at St Paul's Churchyard. They provide protection of public areas, while still allowing legitimate access required for St Paul's Cathedral – such as royal visits, large-scale events or business as usual activities such as the Christmas Eve carol service.

The work involves collaborating with the City of London Corporation to plan public realm protection that is not just an oppressive row of bollards, but where street furniture, such as seating, works together to protect the area, like in nearby Aldgate Square.

Training

I have trained thousands of people on national products, from the historic Project Griffin and Project ARGUS to current packages, including Action Counters Terrorism (ACT) and See, Check and Notify (SCaN).

The aim of these products is to increase attendees' awareness of the current terrorist threat and methodology, before focusing on what individuals and businesses can do to help mitigate these threats. This then helps them plan how to respond if a threat arises. We constantly review these projects to ensure they are up-to-date, and advice is current and relevant.

These packages are best delivered in person to groups, whether single-site attendees or representatives from local businesses, to encourage participation and engagement. Online packages were developed in 2020 to ensure training could continue during the COVID pandemic. We still use these at times for specific packages, however, face-to-face is best.

Collaborative working

Like many roles in policing, effective communication is essential to build trust in the relationships with our community. Often we need them to make changes to their security policy – sometimes at huge costs. By engaging with local businesses, other police departments and my CTSA counterparts, we can ensure good practice is shared to create a wider security culture that crosses borders.

One example of where cross-border collaborative CTSA work was beneficial to all was a visit from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to St Paul's Cathedral in October 2024. A CTSA from the Metropolitan Police Service and I arranged for security representatives from the mosque to visit St Paul's.

The purpose of the visit was to meet with the security team and understand how the cathedral approaches and implements 'compassionate security' that fits the environment while fulfilling security requirements. This was reciprocated with a visit to their mosque and international headquarters in Surrey.

While there are clear differences between the two sites, what was clear from the visits was how many similarities they had. Both are:

- pivotal focal points for their respective religions
- places where people come to worship
- places that experience high visitor footfall
- facing several threats that range from low-level crime, to protests through to CT threats

Contacting CTAs

The CTSA role is always evolving in line with the terrorist threats we face, to enable us to be most effective in the advice and guidance we offer. We specifically engage with crowded public and iconic sites, and those that have a high footfall. We also provide guidance and advice to locations where there is intelligence of threats or hostile intent.

In the City of London, we engage with local businesses who often reach out to us for support on their security practices, training and policies. Using an email/mobile messaging system, local security forums and sector policing, we promote and highlight the vast guidance available online from ProtectUK and the National Protective Security Authority.

Where possible, we engage directly to help businesses increase their security profile by inviting them to training sessions. We encourage them to join a security forum, work with their neighbours and receive any communications we send out.

There are not often any vacancies. But having knowledge of recent terrorism ideologies and methodologies, and completing some of the free and available ACT and SCaN training products, would give you a good basis.

After 16 years, it is clear I enjoy being a CTSA. The role is often challenging, both professionally and personally. But providing support to individuals and businesses in protecting the public makes it a worthwhile career choice.

- This article has been peer reviewed by Detective Constable Mara Phipps, CTPHQ Research and Development, Metropolitan Police Service. It is shared with the permission of St Paul's Cathedral and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

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