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# **Innovative thinking**

**Project Evaluation Report:  
The Get SMART project**

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# Evaluation Report

## Executive Summary

The Association for Real Change was awarded funding from the ISD Innovation Fund and Google.org. The funded project was to administer the Get SMART (social media awareness and resilience training) project in the SW of England.

The Get SMART project was an 11 month training programme carried out within a supported learning environment at a college and at a school for young people with special educational needs. The training aimed to give students the ability to develop resources to train others around online radicalisation. The students developed a one-off training event given to fellow students (at the college) or to the teachers (at the school).

Before the Get SMART project started, data was collected from parents and students around the online lives of the students and about their perceptions of the need for the project. The data showed that the students were active internet and social media users; they enjoyed their online lives and were largely confident about online safety. All of the college students and most of the school students owned their own mobile phones. All used the internet and social media daily. At both project sites, students expressed a preference for privacy when accessing the internet. The students generally stated that they felt confident in knowing how to stay safe online and were able to recite numerous online safety rules. Despite this confidence, the students had some concerns about internet use: viruses, surveillance, and concerns about interactions with other people online (both people they knew and strangers) ranging from encountering swearing online to sexual harassment. Students at both project sites were asked what they knew about the words 'extremism' and 'radicalisation'. At each site, there was only one student who had some understanding about the meaning of the words, but neither had enough knowledge to discuss the concepts in terms of links with social media and grooming. Despite this, following a simple introduction to the project, the students felt it was important to learn about radicalisation and extremism and were enthusiastic about the Get SMART project.

Parents explained why internet use is important for young people with learning disabilities and /or autism, stating that they enjoy the social aspects and ability to connect with friends that are not local. However, parents also raised concerns that online social aspects can still be complex and their children may lack the scepticism to query online identities. Parents explained that they could not always keep up to date with the technology that their children are using, so sometimes feel unable to adequately supervise and support. The students regularly learn about online risks and grooming at both school and at home. However, prior to the Get SMART project, this was not in relation to terrorism and parents did not think the children would make a connection between grooming, extremism and radicalisation. Teachers indicated that they had not had any experience of having to intervene in a situation involving extremism or online radicalisation but they felt that the Get SMART project was likely to be valuable because internet safety for the students was a significant problem.

Following completion of the Get SMART project, data was collected from school and college staff and from students at both sites. Students enjoyed taking part in the project and were confidently

able to explain the project goals, summarise the weekly activities and explain the process of developing the training workshops. The students were all able to join in focus group discussions about the possible links between grooming, extremism, radicalisation and terrorism and had an increased awareness of potential dangers. Students had limited suggestions for areas for improvement for the project except expressing a desire to see it continue.

School and college staff had already undergone compulsory Prevent training as well as local training around risk and social media. However, the Get SMART project increased their understanding and awareness of the importance of digital engagement for the students, reinforced the importance of online lives and their potential vulnerabilities. Teachers explained that the students had enjoyed taking part in the project and that it had increased students awareness and knowledge of online risks. Additionally teachers emphasised the profound impact the project had on the confidence and self-esteem of the participants.

Overall, the project exceeded the expectations of participants in terms of both knowledge and awareness gained but also the wider benefits of self-awareness, confidence and giving young people a voice. The delivery of the programme and training workshops were described by a teacher as “ground-breaking”. Both students and staff discussed the importance of making more young people with learning disabilities and /or autism aware of online radicalisation as this is not an area commonly explored in special education settings.

## Introduction to the Project

Between 2014 and 2016 smartphone use amongst people with learning disabilities increased from 57% to 70% (Ofcom, 2017). Academic research also supports this and has shown that people with learning disabilities are increasingly using their own devices, primarily mobile phones and tablets (e.g. Chiner et al., 2017; Lough & Fisher, 2016) and making more social and recreational use (rather than educational), uploading photos, watching videos, playing games and chats for online dating (Jenaro, 2017, Chadwick & Fullwood, 2017).

However, there are more recent concerns regarding people with learning disabilities and autism being groomed for a range of criminal activities, including terrorism, via social media. Faccini and Allely (2017), for example, have presented several cases where people with learning disabilities and/or autism have been involved in making either naïve or serious and serial terroristic threats.

A number of local and national organisations have produced guides to internet safety aimed at people with learning disabilities and/or carers. However, existing resources do not address a broad range of risks, such as grooming for serious offences.

The Get SMART (Social Media Awareness and Resilience Training) was an 11-month, user-led awareness and training project for people with learning disabilities, which focused on building resilience to hate and extremism by awareness raising. This project was delivered at two sites in SW England in areas that are socially deprived with a mixture of both urban and rural demographics. Site One was a supported learning department within a mainstream college aimed at providing courses for students age 16+ with a range of additional needs. Site Two was a school for students ages 11-16 who have learning, social and emotional difficulties.

The project aimed to invite students to play an active role in the project management in order to develop their skills, self-confidence leading potentially to improved employability. Additionally, the project aimed to produce far-reaching benefits for people with links to the project and beyond (to health, social care, housing and education providers).

## Objectives of the Evaluation

The objective of this evaluation is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the project, the impact of its deliverables, and to consider the potential for sustaining the activities and creating wider impact.

The evaluation aimed to address the following questions:

- 1. What is the pre and post project knowledge of online grooming for terrorism amongst people with learning disabilities, college staff and family carers?**
- 2. To what extent do people with learning disabilities, college staff and family carers have experience of online grooming for terrorism?**
- 3. How has being involved in the project work made an impact on participants?**
- 4. To what extent do participants feel the project was beneficial?**

## Methodology

The evaluation utilised a multi-method approach using focus groups in Phase One, and semi-structured interviews, focus groups and an online survey in Phase Two.

### Phase One - Initial Exploration

Phase One focus groups were employed to explore pre-project knowledge of internet safety, online radicalisation and grooming for terrorism.

Four focus groups took place at the two project sites:

- 1) Students at the school.
- 2) Parents and teachers at the school.
- 3) Students at the college.
- 4) Informal meeting with staff at the college (not audio recorded)

Following consent being taken from participants (and additional consent from parents for participants who were under 16), focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Table One: Phase One Participants**

Focus Group	Number of participants	Recruitment	Age	Gender	Duration
School – students	7	Students were chosen by the school to take part in the Get SMART project, as they would be good ambassadors for the school. These students took part in the focus group.	11-15	4 Male, 3 Female	34 minutes
School – parents & staff	8 (2 staff, 6 parents)	Parents of the Get SMART student group were invited by the school to attend. Staff opted in from professional interest.	N/A	All female	42 minutes
College - students	6	Students were invited to take part in the Get SMART project. Those with an initial interest took part in the focus group. Five of the six continued to be part of the project.	16-20		31 minutes
College - staff	5	Staff were introduced to researcher in lunch break.	N/A	All female	15 minutes

### Phase Two – Post Project Evaluation

Following 11 meetings of two project groups conducted by Rod Landman, Project Worker, Association for Real Change (ARC), the researcher visited the sites for a second time to gather post project data. Phase Two involved a more comprehensive data collection strategy, which comprised:

- i) **Focus groups** - A focus group took place with the students at each of the project sites.
- ii) **Interviews** - Semi structured interviews took place with the member of teaching staff who had been the Get SMART project liaison teacher at both sites. Additionally, a semi-structured interview took place with one student at the college. The student had moved onto a mainstream course so could not attend the focus group sessions.
- iii) **Online Survey** - An online survey aimed at teachers and parents was developed for participants to share the experiences of their involvement in the project. The liaison teachers circulated the request to participate to their colleagues in the school or college and they were asked to circulate to parents of the young people who had taken part in the project. Thirteen responses were collected, 100% of which were from teaching staff.

**Table Two: Phase Two Participants**

<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Recruitment</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>School Focus Group – students</b>	6 (all project participants)	Students who had taken part in the 11-week project were asked by their teacher to take part.	11-15	3 Male, 3 Female	30 minutes
<b>College Focus Group-students</b>	8 (3 were project participants, 5 attended the training workshop)	Students were asked by their teacher to take part.	16-20	4 Male, 4 Female	28 minutes
<b>Interview</b>	1	Asked to take part by teacher.	17	M	19 minutes
<b>Interview</b>	1	Direct contact with researcher	N/A	F	27 minutes
<b>Interview</b>	1	Direct contact with researcher	N/A	F	19 minutes
<b>Online Survey</b>	13	School and college liaison staff promoted the survey amongst staff.	N/A	N/A	N/A

### **Analysis**

As a range of qualitative approaches to evaluating the project were utilised, the data was thematically analysed (based on Braun and Clarke, 2006). Key themes and issues arising from the analysis have been drawn together to identify the impact of the project to all relevant stakeholders.

### **Ethics**

Prior to taking part in the project and evaluation, participants were given easy-read information sheets with details of the project. This was to ensure that participants understood the purpose and nature of the research and what was involved in participating. Written consent was taken from participants by the researcher. All documents were written in easy read format and were read aloud to participants. The evaluation had approval from the Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care ethics committee at Manchester Metropolitan University.

## Evaluation Findings

The findings of Phase One and then Phase Two of the evaluation are presented below. Verbatim quotations from participants have been included. To preserve anonymity, quotes have been attributed to 'student', 'teacher', or 'parent', M or F to indicate gender and 'school' or 'college' to indicate the project site.

### Phase One Results

To reiterate, Phase One was an initial exploration of the views of teachers, students and parents to establish pre-project knowledge of online extremism and radicalisation. Phase One also aimed to provide context to the project and explore how much of an impact participants felt that the project could make. The results of this initial exploration are presented below in separate sections for a) students and b) parents and teachers. These findings have been kept separate, as the findings are quite distinct from each other.

#### 1) Students

##### *Internet use*

To put the Get SMART project in context, the focus group discussions led participants to discuss how much and for what purpose they used the internet. At the college, all student participants had a mobile phone, all used the internet and were every day social media users. Most of the students also had other ways to access the internet such as a tablets or computers at home. A discussion around the types of activities or apps that were most commonly used showed that Instagram and Facebook were most commonly used, followed by Snapchat. The students also mentioned: Twitter, Messenger, Musical.ly, WhatsApp, Xbox, PlayStation, Skype, YouTube, Discord, Steam, Twitch, Reddit and EBay.

Similarly, at the school site with the slightly younger students, all of the focus group participants said they use the internet every day, most had mobile phones, but a couple used a PC, laptop or iPads. There was a lot of discussion at this focus group about popular Youtubers and gaming; the students were very knowledgeable and knew the names of many popular Youtubers. There was considerable talk about gaming; some mentioned Minecraft, but Fortnite was clearly the most popular game. Participants also talked about using: Xbox, Facebook, Netflix, Snapchat, Skype, Messenger, Discord, Musical.ly, and Instagram.

At both sites, students discussed a preference for accessing the internet in a location where they had privacy.

*I feel a bit like awkward if I do it around everyone because I don't really want them to see what I am doing if you know what I mean (F, college)*

##### *Internet Safety Knowledge*

Most students said they were confident that they knew how to be safe online. Family members (mums and older siblings) were mentioned as being supportive at home, although this was not always welcomed.

*The sad thing is, is my mum connected her email to my Xbox (M, school)*

*My mum has specific rules. I have only had social media since I started college. Because of, because I was bullied in school, and so she didn't want me to get any social media until I was in college because she don't want no bullying to carry on, on social media basically, but she has specific rules now. She says that we are only allowed on social media for two hours max. (F, college)*

There was quite a lot of evidence that the students were knowledgeable about online safety. They said that they had learned from experience and from frequent sessions at school.

*On Snapchat....there is this button that you can press, it's called Ghost...and when you are pressing and it goes blue, your location goes. So, people don't know where you are. There is my friends have theirs on and I will tell them "guys turn it off", but they were like "no". And you could see exactly where they are, when they are at home at night, you can see where they live. I turn mine off. (F, school)*

*Only follow people that you know. (F, school)*

*Don't share any personal information with strangers. (F, school)*

*I normally just play games and some games are online, but if someone messages me, I will either delete the message and if he keeps on I will just block. (M, school)*

#### *Concerns about the Internet*

Despite having knowledge around internet safety, the students did discuss concerns that they had around internet use. There were concerns around viruses and around perceived surveillance. However, most of the focus group discussions around concerns were concerning interactions with other people online:

*You could get some people who are horrible on there. (F, school)*

*There's loads of horrible people. (M, school)*

*There's people like in college who use chat rooms who swears a lot, like not even like just talking. People are shouting, swearing... (M, school)*

This was related to both people that the participants already knew and (at the college site) related to strangers that the participants encountered online.

*Well for example, my ex-boyfriend....we were together...for about nine months and then I became really poorly with my anxiety and then I couldn't cope in a relationship, so we said we would be better off as friends and he got in a new relationship and I blocked him because he was being horrible, but then he started harassing my younger sister who is....thirteen and he kept harassing her like asking her things and then he went on to my sister's friend and asked for pictures, and then because I blocked him and then he's made, he made another account so I blocked him and then he made another account, (F, College)*

*Someone asked me, some random person from a different place and he tried asking me out and he was man, he was about in his thirties or forties. I know. (F, College)*

*There's this guy on Instagram actually called [name], he's a right little. He was grooming my sister. And he's fifty-two and he was grooming my sixteen-year-old sister. (College)*

*He's done it to me as well. (College)*

*Has he done it to you? (College)*

*Yes, he did it before your sister. (College)*

*So, you know who I am talking about. (F, College)*  
*Yes, unfortunately. (F, College)*  
*He's grooming young girls. (F, College)*  
*I think it's a paedophile then. (F, College)*  
*Yes. (F, College)*  
*Yes, the police, I went to the police when it first happened. (F, college)*

### *Extremism and Radicalisation*

Students at both sites were asked what they knew about the words 'extremism' and 'radicalisation'. At the college site, only one student had some understanding about the meaning of the words but did not have enough knowledge to discuss the concepts in terms of links with social media and grooming. Similarly, at the school, only one student knew what 'radicalisation' meant. The lack of knowledge meant that there was no basis for discussion in the Phase One focus groups.

## 2) Parents and Teachers

As stated above, the data collected from parents and teachers is presented discrete from the data from the students as it demonstrates their different perspectives.

### *Being Online*

At the parents' focus group, a discussion took place around how internet use for young people with learning disabilities and /or autism has specific benefits. The parents explained that after school activities were rare in part due to availability and in part due to logistics as the children attending the school often travelled some distance to get to the school. This meant that using the internet (gaming, social media) can be an attractive way to spend their free time after school. Additionally, the well-documented social barriers that young people with learning disabilities and /or autism may encounter, can be minimised online.

*My son loves the social aspect of the internet (parent, school)*

*The internet can be such a good thing and it can help them grow and help them gain knowledge and it can help them experience things and see things that they might not be comfortable going face to face for. (parent, school)*

*I think there's a massive potential for people with autism to become part of a community, to become part of something much bigger than themselves on the internet and....they don't have all those horrible tensions that they have in real life, like, they can't make eye contact, they find that really difficult, that doesn't apply online so you've got a lovely freedom being online. (parent, school)*

### *Internet Safety Knowledge*

During the focus group with the students, participants appeared to be confident and knowledgeable around internet safety. However, despite the evidence of knowledge around internet safety presented above, when asked how knowledgeable the children are around internet safety, the parents said:

*[daughter]'s definitely not (parent, school)*

*...they know the rules around internet safety but when they're in that moment, when they're on that game, it's different (parent, school)*

*I think they're very aware of all of it because it interests them but they're not aware of the keeping yourself safe because they're too involved in...but I'm enjoying myself (parent, school)*

Despite the benefits described above, parents also raised concerns about how having learning disabilities and /or autism may mean that the young people may not have the social skills or scepticism to question the motives of people they encounter online, thus making them vulnerable.

*He wouldn't absolutely have a clue. Not at all. He'd just be, "no but it's my friend, it's my friend, they're my friend now". It's like but no, you don't know them, you know but no he's so trusting, he's so wants the friendships, he wants people to like him, he wants to talk to people that he'd take anybody, anybody at all and that's scary so that's why I want to have the tools and the facilities to be able to keep him safe because he can't do it himself. (parent, school)*

*[son] loves the social aspect of the internet but doesn't know how to manage it so another child will say something abusive which at the age of thirteen lots of children are taking the mickey and making nasty comments and then he gets really stressed and will shout nasty things at them and so he wants that social aspect but he can't really cope with that social aspect. (parent, school)*

The majority of parents (from the school site) said that their children communicated with strangers online, and that they were concerned about it.

*...so then you have to have the discussion, "but you don't know them, you've never seen them, you don't know what they look like, they might not be a child, how are they your friends?" And I actually had to switch one man off actually. [Son] said can I be your friend and that's when they log that person's name in and clearly it was a grown up man and clearly he sounded a bit strange because [Son] went "will you be my friend?" and he sort of went well – and I went that weirdo's going and I quickly switched him off before [Son] could take his online name. I was like, he's going, I didn't care if he heard me, I thought I don't care. (parent, school)*

One parent explained that a family friend had discovered that her daughter was looking for a boyfriend online (this took place on the game Roblox and she is now banned from playing by her Mum):

*[daughter] will be asking people for boyfriends and just basically pimping herself out on games (parent, school)*

### *Parents Knowledge*

College staff explained that it was not uncommon for students who are on supported learning courses to have parents who have additional needs themselves and therefore sometimes unable to deal with problems around internet safety. While the school parents focus group participants did not have learning disabilities, they still identified a difficulty in lacking the digital skills themselves to be able to fully supervise and support the safety of the children.

*I do want to lock down the internet a lot more than what I have but it's having those skills myself to do it (parent, school)*

*It's so that you know, I can do the basics but it's the things that slip through that I don't know how to ban that and he knows I don't know so he sits there laughing at me because he's like "ha, ha" and when he's going on something he shouldn't because he's not allowed upstairs on his, he sort of turns round and tries to sit in the corner of the sofa sort of with his iPad up high so that I can't see what he's doing. (parent, school)*

*It's just modern technology, it's moving so fast and it's knowing how to keep up with it. (parent, school)*

### Exploring the Need for Get SMART

Despite a lack of knowledge about what extremism and radicalisation meant, at both sites, following a simple introduction to the project, the students felt it was important to learn about radicalisation and extremism and were enthusiastic about the Get SMART project.

The findings from the informal focus group with college staff indicated that staff felt that the Get SMART project was likely to be valuable. Staff said that knowledge around internet safety for the students was a “huge problem”. They explained that there was a safeguarding issue with disclosure around incidents involving grooming on social media (Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram). Despite the concern around online safety, the teachers reported that they had not had any experience of having to intervene in a situation involving extremism or online radicalisation amongst their students.

The parents all agreed that the children understand what grooming is following education from both themselves and the school e-safety officer. Parents overall took a hard line when explaining the risks in relation to grooming. However, parents did not think the children would make a connection between grooming and extremism and radicalisation. They learn a lot about grooming at school and at home but not in relation to terrorism.

### Phase One Summary

All of the college students and most of the school students owned their own mobile phones. All used the internet and social media daily with Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and gaming being the most commonly mentioned activities. At both sites, students expressed a preference for accessing the internet in a location with privacy. The students generally stated that they felt confident in knowing how to stay safe online; they were also able to recite numerous online safety rules. Despite this confidence, the students had some concerns about internet use: viruses, surveillance, and a range of concerns about interactions with other people online (both people they knew and strangers) ranging from encountering swearing online to sexual harassment. Students at both sites were asked what they knew about the words ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalisation’. At each site, there was one student who had some understanding about the meaning of the words but neither has enough knowledge to discuss the concepts in terms of links with social media and grooming. Despite this at both sites, following a simple introduction to the project, the students felt it was important to learn about radicalisation and extremism and were enthusiastic about the Get SMART project.

Parents and teachers explained why internet use can be important for young people with learning disabilities and autism. They enjoy the social aspects and ability to link with friends that aren’t local. However, parents also raised ways that the social aspects can still be complex online and their children may lack the scepticism to wonder if people online really are who they are. Parents explained that they cannot always keep up with the technology that their children are using, so do not know how to adequately supervise and support. Parents overall seemed happy to take a hard line with explaining the risks in relation to grooming. Parents did not think the children would make a connection between grooming and extremism and radicalisation. They learn a lot about grooming at school and at home but not in relation to terrorism. The findings from the informal focus group with college staff indicated that they had not had any experience of having to intervene in a situation involving extremism or online radicalisation but that they felt that the Get SMART project was likely to be valuable because internet safety for the students was a significant problem.

## Phase Two Results

Referring back to the Methodology section, Phase Two of the evaluation of the Get SMART project involved focus groups, semi-structured interviews and an online survey.

Between Phase One and Phase Two, the students at the school and the college had taken part in the 11-week training programme (described in detail in Rod Landman of ARC's report of project activities).

In the same way that Phase One results were presented, Phase Two results are presented here in two sections 1) Student Views and 2) Teachers Views. This is followed by sections with input from both groups on how the project met expectations and plans for next steps.

### 1) Students

At the school, six students took part in the focus group. All six had taken part in the 11-week Get SMART project and five had taken part in the training session to the teaching staff (one had been unwell the day of the session so had been unable to take part). At the college, eight students took part in the focus group. Three had taken part in the Get SMART project, with two having delivered the training (the third having been off sick that day). The remaining students were the students that received the training from the peer educators.

### Get SMART Project Goals

At the focus groups, students demonstrated clear understanding of the aims of the Get SMART project.

*It was about staying safe online, anti-terrorism online and things. (college, M)*

*How to stay safe online. (school, M)*

*It was mainly about terrorism. (school, M)*

*How to prevent radicalisation and stop it from happening to anyone else. (school, F)*

*Who to go to if someone's been radicalised. (school, F)*

At the college, students volunteered to take part in the Get SMART project and were quite open about their expectations and motives to take part:

*I wanted to get off lessons and then for the first two sessions it was just me getting out of a lesson I didn't like but then I did start to enjoy it...I really enjoyed the project. (college, M)*

*The first few I didn't really know what to expect...but then after I kind of understood what was going on and I did quite enjoy it and so I was able to follow everything. (college, M)*

The students were also able to give clear explanations about their experiences of being involved in the project, what they had learned during the weekly sessions, and how they had developed and delivered their training sessions (some of the detail was not accurate but the quotes demonstrate understanding of project content):

*We looked at – we were looking at things online about people who had done terrorism things because of online radicalisation, like, there was this person who built a bomb and put it on a train or*

*something because something online and we watched a video about a man who had become part of an Islamic terrorist group because of his friend group (college, M)*

*We've been looking at PowerPoints of people who are terrorists. There was this person, Damon Smith, I think, was going to bomb the- the Exeter restaurant called Giraffe.(school, F)*

*And then this 17-year-old was going to bomb a Justin Bieber concert, and another person was going to bomb the underground in London. (school, F)*

The students also explained that they had had visitors from the police who talked to them about the Prevent Strategy and from ISD. The students described their planning and delivery of their training sessions. The students from the school delivered an hour-long presentation in a quiz format to 32 teachers. At the college, the training session for other students made use of a storyboard format.

### *Student Knowledge*

At Phase One, there was only one student at each site who could define radicalisation or extremism. At Phase Two, the students were all able to join in focus group discussions about the subject and had clearly learned a lot.

*M. And you shouldn't accept someone you don't know, or talk to anyone you don't know.*

*F. And how they can groom other, other kids that have special abilities like us.*

*F. Special needs.*

*F. Yes, special needs is what I am trying to say, special needs like us because when that happens and they don't know what they are doing, they could end up doing something serious like bombing or stuff like that and it's to stop that from happening, and letting them be in control of themselves, but not let anyone else control them.*

*M. It also keeps them safe from possible, going down a bad road in the future.*

*(school)*

*It's helped me understand a bit more about how it can affect people and how easy it is for them to be able to like infiltrate certain groups of people and turn them evil.(college, M)*

*It probably did help me understand a bit more about what groups to stay away from and how to spot something before it happens and so I think I'm a little bit safer because now I understand how they work and what to look out for. People trying to do certain things like gifting or trying to convince you to do something or join something. (college, M)*

*...people tell you that this is right and they are trying to tell you to be, like, religious or something like that and then they're saying things that's wrong and you just believe it. (school, M)*

*...it's like another person persuading you to do bad stuff. So basically that's what radicalisation is – someone persuading you that things are right. (school, F)*

Students at the college said if threatened online they would tell their parents, a tutor, or another authority figure. The students were asked if they thought that being part of the Get SMART project had increased their knowledge:

*F: I think I learned more during the Get Smart project.*

*F: To be honest, before I did it I didn't even know what radicalisation was.*

*F: Same here. I didn't even know that word existed.*

*(school, students)*

At the college, the students delivered their training workshop to other students and these students also reported an increase in knowledge.

*In my way of speaking on grooming, grooming is when there's loads of teenagers that have special, special needs and/or not special needs and they isolate themselves away from family, friends and that's how they can get groomed because if they isolate themselves they have no friends, family to help them through an important, important, something important that they are doing and they go on the internet and isolate themselves away from their family and friends, that's when a person on a game could convince them to be a bomber or something... I think it's because they go on the internet a lot and they search other stuff like religious stuff as well and when they search religious stuff that's when people get to know the bombings and Syria and stuff like that and sometimes they would say, oh, we need you on our side, we need you to be a good person, but they are really manipulating them to become a bomber. (college, F)*

*Yes, I have learnt a lot more because I, at the time I didn't know there was little kids like teenagers that were being groomed and to bombing stuff and that. I had no idea about that at the time, but the only bombings I know is like the serious stuff, so that's the only bombings that I knew in London and stuff like that and Manchester, the Ariana Grande concert, that's about it. (college, M)*

#### *Student Enjoyment of Project*

The students at both project sites clearly enjoyed being part of the Get SMART project.

*F: I've loved it.*

*Q: Have you?*

*M: Same.*

*F: Same. (school, students)*

The students clarified some of the reasons that they enjoyed being part of the project:

*Because I like teaching teachers, like, what radicalisation is so that they can teach other students so that they know in the future. (M, school)*

*I think I enjoyed it because I learned something new and I learned new ways how to keep myself safe online. Like, when I- When I learned about radicalisation and learned the signs of someone being radicalised, now I could just go and tell someone and point out the simple terms. (F, school)*

*Yes I found it fun being able to learn more about online and staying safe and radicalisation and how it works. Learning, yes, learning because lots of things interest me even if they're not good, just learning more things, just knowing and Get Smart [are] getting smarter, it just interests me what the internet can be used for, good and bad and just knowing what people do. (college, M)*

The students also described their pride in taking part in the delivery of the training workshops at the end of the project:

*Q: So how long was the presentation?*

*M: About an hour.*

*Q: An hour?*

*F: An hour?*

*(Laughter)*

*F: Yes.*

*[multiple voices] (Laughter)*

*F: It was not an hour.*

*F: It was.*

*F: It was half-three to four o'clock.*

*[multiple voices]*

*M: I stood up for an hour?*

*F: Yes.*

*F: Yes.*

*F: Yes.*

*F: That's mad. That's mad.*

*(school students)*

### *How Could it Be Improved?*

The students were directed towards discussing suggestions for any aspects of the project that they did not enjoy or how the Get SMART project could be improved if it was to be repeated.

*Some of the people who I was working with...some of them were quite, like, interruptive and annoying and sometimes it would like disrupt my train of thought and that's about it really that I didn't like about the project. (college, m)*

In most instances though, the students found it difficult to identify any areas for improvement.

*M. Well to be honest it was fine as it is.*

*M. Yes, it was completely fine.*

*M. It was all brilliant. (College, students)*

*Q: So if you were given the option of changing anything about this project, what would it be?*

*F: To not- To not have it stop; to carry on forever.(school, students)*

## 2) Teachers

This section examines the data from the interviews with two teachers (one from each site) as well as the data from 13 responses from teachers to the online survey.

### *Increasing Staff Awareness*

The teachers from both the school and the college were fully informed about the goals of the Get SMART project. The teachers explained how their involvement in the project had increased their understanding and awareness of the importance of digital engagement for the students and how they were likely to be active internet users and potentially vulnerable.

*...we do live in such a rural area, you know we do see lots of students who are incredibly isolated. You know and that's a way of you know communicating with their friends and peers. (College, tutor)*

*And some of the discussions that we had in the Get SMART meetings were incredibly honest and illuminating. I mean, I've worked with autistic young people for a long time but what they were saying about how important it is to feel that sense of belonging and to be part of a community-- and how- when you can be anyone you want online. And for them that's an incredible positive, because nobody judges you - they don't feel they're judged. They feel that they can say that they're 22 years old and strong and nobody is going to know the difference, and that's incredibly important for them*

– it’s so powerful for them. And also they can use that fixation with detail, that obsession with a game, they can use it in a positive way. (teacher, school)

And it’s easy for us to say...”don’t go on this site, don’t play that game, or if this game makes you feel like that, don’t play it”. You know? But, actually, it’s really important to them. And maybe we’re missing a trick sometimes because it’s a great way of them learning to regulate their emotions. It’s a great way of them learning to be part of a community. And if we were scared of IT opportunities and if we try and limit that or we’ve got a fear factor, I think we’re limiting opportunities for our young people with additional needs, because it can be incredibly empowering. (School, teacher)

However, mirroring the parents views in Phase One, the teaching staff also raised some concerns:

*I think one the fact that they are often, they are often accessing these sites in such isolation and they won't discuss that with parents or carers. (College, tutor)*

All thirteen of the responses to the online survey agreed with the statement that ‘young people with learning disabilities and/or autism may be at greater risk of being targeted online for extremism than other young people.

While the focus of the Get SMART project was on student education, the project also spread awareness of the risks for students of online radicalisation amongst the teaching staff. Staff had existing knowledge following compulsory training around Prevent and local training around safety and social media. However, the Get SMART project went much further and put the previous training in context:

*We’d done a lot of work around Prevent. Our head of ICT does a lot of work – keeping yourself safe online.....We’re very hot on, you know, the channel processes, Prevent duty and so on. The staff have had a lot of training on that. But I think...what was quite enlightening was to hear about it from the kids’ point of view and to hear about how important their online world is to them. Because we can very often, you know, I missed out on being the generation that’s grown up with computers. Most of our staff are, you know, of my age – maybe slightly younger – but it’s not the sea that we swim in. For them it’s their life; it’s the world. And I think sometimes we have this view that, ooh, technology, you have to be so safe, you have to be so careful around it, yes, you do, but you’ve also got to take on board that it opens up a lot of worlds and opportunities for those young people. (teacher, school)*

#### *Perception of Student Experience*

Respondents to the online survey stated that students’ knowledge of extremism and terrorism increased pre and post project as can be seen below in Table Three. This data is somewhat consistent with the data presented in Phase One, which demonstrated the lack of awareness of the students prior to the commencement of the project. It is possible that teachers have over-estimated the level of pre-project knowledge.

**Table Three: Pre and Post Project Student Awareness of Terrorism and Extremism**

	<b>Pre Project</b>	<b>Post Project</b>
<b>Too Aware</b>	0	0
<b>Appropriately Aware</b>	2	11
<b>Some Awareness</b>	7	2
<b>Not very Aware</b>	3	0
<b>Not at all Aware</b>	1	0

The teachers emphasised how beneficial the Get SMART project had been for the students who took part in it.

*It was an empowering experience for the students involved (teacher, online survey)*

*...they're really sad, actually, that it's finished. They want it to go on. They want to take it further, because I think it's changed their perceptions of themselves. (teacher, school)*

*I think that was particularly enabling for our youngest member of the group. I think that's had quite a profound effect on him and his perception of himself. He's very interested in online; he's very interested in the computers and games. And sometimes because he's spent so much time on games it has become a negative and I wanted to give him an opportunity to look into it and to look at the positives and to tell people about the positive aspects of that as well, which he's had an opportunity to do. So he feels he's got a voice now too. (teacher, school)*

*I've seen students who really have got a lot out of it in that they have kind of, you know they have grown in confidence from that knowledge and that training as peer educators and also that awareness and ability to keep themselves safe, so that has been a huge plus. (college, tutor)*

As well as benefits directly relating to the goals of the project, there were also additional benefits.

*I think what I hadn't quite realised was how it was going to benefit the students' oracy skills as well and how it was going to benefit the confidence. I would never have thought before the project started that those particular students would have been- would have had the confidence to stand up in front of 40 members of staff and deliver training.... is a massive breakthrough for them. (Teacher, school)*

*So they're far more confident. They're far more, yes, we did that, we trained you all, we trained 40 of you. You know? And that's a big deal for a 15-year-old, 16-year-old....So it's kind of made me think that we can push the boundaries even more than we already do with them. (teacher, school)*

There was only one instance of a student who was not able to continue with being involved in the project:

*One young lady in particular found it too stressful....Yes, yes or they have safeguarding issues. On a personal level that you know and their mental health was such that I think more, not so much the stress of the session but probably more their general mental health. They had just taken such a dip that they weren't able to continue with those sessions. (college, tutor)*

### *Weaknesses*

As with the students, staff were asked to consider any weaknesses to the project or to suggest ways in which it could be improved:

*It's time-consuming. But it's been worth it in terms of what they've achieved and what they've learned. You've got to have a staff team who are committed to it. (teacher, school)*

*I think for us it, for us and again that was logistics because it went, it kind of straddled two academic years that was really problematic. Yes and that was just about the funding and the timings, certainly that we would look in the future that we had in one academic year. (College, tutor)*

It was only through the online survey that a couple of concerns or suggestions were made. One respondent made the point that careful assessment of who the project involves is needed as some students interest could be “over developed” by the introduction of the subject matter. This is an important argument but responses to the online survey showed that post project, the staff rated students’ knowledge of extremism and terrorism as being mainly ‘appropriately aware’ with eleven respondents; and ‘some awareness’ with two respondent. None of the survey respondents selected the ‘too aware’ option.

### Meeting Expectations and Value for Money

At Phase Two interviews and focus groups, teachers and students were asked about the extent to which the project met their expectations and whether they considered the project represented value for money. The Get SMART project exceeded the expectations of those involved.

*Q: So, was it as you expected it to be?*

*M: It was better.*

*F: Yes.*

*Q: How was it better?*

*M: Because I thought it was just going to be like what every teacher said that [unclear] about your safety.*

*M: It’s just radicalisation, we have never you learn that, so it’s different.*

*F: I loved it because, like, I feel like they had good stuff. Well, not good but you know what I mean. (school, students)*

*Yes, especially because of the people it could have helped to allow them to understand and help more. Yes, I think it was money well spent. (College, student, M)*

The training event at the school was described by one of the teaching staff as being ground-breaking.

*Never. That’s never happened at [school].....Students have never delivered training. (teacher, school)*

Twelve of the thirteen online survey respondents said that the project was ‘very worthwhile’ with the remaining one stating that it was ‘quite worthwhile’.

At the college, the training event was delivered to other students and this was considered to be an important contribution to the success of the project.

*...peer education is invaluable, absolutely invaluable because you know they, there is not that barrier is there, you know if I as a teacher, if I speak to a student, okay I might know them but there is still a barrier, okay but if they are taught and they are allowed to discuss with other students who they associate with....they really take that on board and they really open up. So in that way it’s absolutely invaluable. (Teacher, college)*

### Future Plans

Participants spoke about how they would like to see the project develop. Participants envisaged three ways that they would like to see the project develop further.

Firstly, it was recommended that the students who took part in the Get SMART project could deliver their workshops to wider groups of people within their own school or college. For instance, the

teacher at the school suggested a Key Stage 4 assembly at the same school and then widened out to other schools in the local area. One of the student participants at the college also supported this recommendation:

*...maybe to have like it just spread wider so more people know across the country so then the knowledge can be spread and everyone who's interested get to know and perhaps be safe online.  
(college, M)*

Secondly, it was suggested that the 'user-led' and/or peer education aspect of the project was a key element to its success. Giving students strategies to safeguard themselves was considered important thus another suggestion was to run further 11-week training sessions each year at the current sites, or widen to different locations to give different students the opportunity for ownership of the development of their own training.

*I think what's been viable for them has been the whole process– and making it their own. And the group that they are, for them, the quiz format, worked really well. And then also the feedback, because they had a flipchart and they took feedback from people and wrote it up. Great. That worked for them; really interactive. For other groups, they might want to take a different approach. So, I wouldn't feel comfortable training staff with slides that somebody else had created, so I don't see why they would- another group of students would want to do that. I would imagine that everybody would want to evolve the process and make it their own. (teacher, school)*

Thirdly, two of the online survey respondents pointed out that for the current student the learnings from the Get SMART project need to be reinforced and students reminded of the content in order to embed the knowledge.

## Phase Two Summary

At Phase Two, after the 11-week programme, students were confidently able to explain the project goals, summarise the weekly activities and explain the process of developing the training workshops. The students were all able to join in focus group discussions about the possible links between grooming, extremism, radicalisation and terrorism and had an increased awareness of potential dangers. The students enjoyed being part of the project, learning, teaching and participation in new activities. Students had limited suggestions for areas for improvement for the project except expressing a desire to see it continue.

School and college staff had already undergone compulsory Prevent training as well as local training around risk and social media. However, the Get SMART project increased their understanding and awareness of the importance of digital engagement for the students, reinforced the importance of online lives and their potential vulnerabilities. Teachers explained that the students had enjoyed taking part in the project and that it had increased students awareness and knowledge of online risks. Additionally teachers emphasised the profound impact the project had on the confidence and self-esteem of the participants.

Overall, the project exceeded the expectations of participants in terms of both knowledge and awareness gained but also the wider benefits of self-awareness, confidence and giving young people a voice. The delivery of the programme and training workshops were described by a teacher as "ground-breaking". Both students and staff discussed the importance of making more young people with learning disabilities and /or autism aware of online radicalisation as this is not an area commonly explored in special education settings.

## Strengths of the Project

To summarise the findings of the evaluation of the Get SMART project, the strengths that have been identified are:

- Other local, national and international organisations have produced guidance for how to support people with learning disabilities and/or autism using the internet and especially social media. However, the Get SMART project is the first of its kind to focus on online radicalisation and extremism.
- The user-led feature of the project was successful and led to the students understanding the project aims, taking ownership and enthusiastically engaging with taking part.
- Students and teachers agreed that student knowledge and awareness of the risks of extremism and online radicalisation moved from being very limited to being well informed.
- Students who participated in the project were reported to have found it empowering and to benefit from increasing confidence and practicing their presentation skills.
- The involvement of school and college teaching staff in the project led to increased awareness of the importance of supporting young people with learning disabilities and/or autism to take part in the digital world. This combined with an increased awareness of the potential vulnerabilities and possibility of risk of online grooming and radicalisation.

## Areas for Improvement

To summarise the findings of the evaluation of the Get SMART project, the areas for improvement that have been identified are:

- The administration of the project was not straightforward for the liaison school and college teachers due to the project spanning two academic years. This also meant that one student at each of the project sites was not able to continue on the project because they had moved onto new courses. Any further development of the project would be best suited to be timed to coincide with the academic year.
- At the college site, there was only four of the project participants available to take part in focus groups and interviews and only two were available to deliver their training workshop. This was linked to the first point as students had moved onto different courses. There is also higher than average absence rates within the supported learning department due to the nature of the students' additional needs.
- At both sites, the students were less confident about explaining to the researcher what the sessions with the visitors to the project had entailed and could not discuss much about their visits unprompted. This is perhaps related to the final suggestion for future plans that the students require reinforcement, consistency and a possibly a couple of visits from each visitor.
- Teaching staff's time pressures meant that it was not possible for college staff to attend the Get SMART project meetings nor the final workshop where the students delivered their training to fellow students. While the training was aimed at students, had it been possible for one or two members of staff to attend the session there may have been deeper understanding of the issues around students with learning disabilities and/or autism and

their involvement with an online live and potential vulnerability (as the quotes from the school teacher included in this report demonstrate).

## Limitations of the Evaluation

Schools and colleges are busy environments in which to conduct research. The data collection for the evaluation was constrained by time limitations, which are always present when carrying out research in schools and colleges. Students, teachers and parents alike have limited time available to participate. An additional complication was the role of gatekeepers whereby the ARC project worker and the school or college liaison teachers arranged the focus groups with the students and distributed survey details. Combining these elements of constraints, the teaching staff attempted to arrange a focus group with parents during Phase Two but no parents came to the session. This was unfortunate as it would have been interesting and useful to compare parent's pre and post project discussions.

## Conclusions

Looking back to the questions that the evaluation aimed to address:

### **1. What is the pre and post project knowledge of online grooming for terrorism amongst people with learning disabilities, college staff and family carers?**

Prior to the commencement of the Get SMART project, the students were unable to take part in discussion about their knowledge of online grooming for terrorism due to a lack of knowledge. Only one student at each setting was able to define extremism and radicalisation at phase one. Post project, the students were all able to join in focus group discussions about the subject and had clearly learned a lot.

### **2. To what extent do people with learning disabilities, college staff and family carers have experience of online grooming for terrorism?**

None of the students, teachers nor parents or family carers had had any previous experience with online grooming for terrorism.

### **3. How has being involved in the project work made an impact on participants?**

Both teachers and students confirmed that being part of the Get SMART project had increased the knowledge of the students around internet safety, extremism and risks around online radicalisation. At the college, the students delivered their training workshop to other students and these students also reported an increase in knowledge. The students at both project sites clearly enjoyed being part of the project. As well as benefits directly relating to the goals of the project, there were also additional benefits in terms of increased confidence and pride in taking part in the delivery of the training workshops. The teachers at the school and college increased their awareness of the importance of digital engagement for the students and how they were likely to be active internet users and potentially vulnerable.

#### **4. To what extent do participants feel the project was beneficial?**

Despite a lack of knowledge about what extremism and radicalisation meant, the students felt it was important to learn about radicalisation and extremism and were enthusiastic about the Get SMART project. Teaching staff and parents had significant concerns about internet safety, thus welcoming a project to educate students and address this. At Phase Two, teachers and students were enthusiastic about the project, which exceeded the expectations of those involved. The user-led nature of the project was a key feature. Survey respondents considered the project 'very worthwhile' (12 out of 13 responses).

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