

## PREVENT AT LSE

Prevent is one of the four strands of the government's "CONTEST" counter-terrorism strategy; the other strands are Pursue, Protect and Prepare.

Prevent aims to prevent people being drawn into terrorism, by identifying the early, non-criminal signs of "radicalisation" in individuals and helping them to avoid moving into active support for or commission of terrorism.

CONTEST has been around for a number of years, and universities have been urged to cooperate with the Prevent programme from the start. However, only with the passage of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and the subsequent entry into force of statutory guidance on 18 September 2015 has cooperation with Prevent become a legal duty on universities.

As it applies to LSE, the Prevent duty is primarily about setting in place policies, systems and procedures. The purposes of these are:

- to identify, as far as can reasonably be expected, individuals in our community who may be at risk of radicalisation;
- to help any individuals so identified to avoid moving into terrorism-related criminality, if necessary by referring them to external sources of help;
- to ensure as far as reasonably possible that activities on campus or under LSE auspices, such as events with external speakers, do not encourage vulnerable individuals towards terrorism; and
- to report periodically to HEFCE on our policies, systems and procedures as well as on specific incidents or concerns that may arise.

There are many misconceptions about Prevent. What it is not may be as important as what it is:

- Prevent is not aimed at Muslims. It is aimed at terrorism of all sorts. Of 2015 referrals to the "Channel" deradicalisation programme in the West Midlands (the only region where figures are available), only 37% were identified as Muslim. In some regions, right-wing terrorism is more of a concern than Islamist terrorism.
- The Prevent duty does not take precedence over our existing legal duties, such as to protect freedom of speech within the law. It sits alongside.
- The Prevent duty does not change in any way the definition of legal free speech or behaviour.
- Prevent does not require intrusive monitoring of our students.
- Prevent is not aimed at curbing "extremism" as such – only violent extremism that can lead to terrorism.

The final point above is particularly important. The Home Secretary has long aspired to place curbs on "extremism" using a contentiously broad definition. But there is still no sign of her long-awaited Extremism Bill. Just as her aspirations for the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act were substantially modified by other voices within the Coalition government and the House of Lords, so even now it appears that it has not been possible so far for the government to agree on how extremism beyond the terrorism-related sort should be addressed.

The Prevent duty does not apply directly to students' unions, although they are encouraged to cooperate with host institutions. The LSESU resolved in January 2015 "That LSESU and the student officers will not engage with the Prevent strategy and cut any links it indirectly has with the programme via the university". However, we continue to keep the LSESU informed of all Prevent-related work of the School.

The School established a Prevent Group early in 2015 and is actively addressing the new legal duty. Almost all relevant policies and procedures, including those on events, free speech and student wellbeing, are either already robust in Prevent terms or have been made so with relatively minor changes. We are well on top of the reporting requirements. However, implementation continues to present challenges in a number of areas:

- Training all the relevant staff (or briefing as we prefer to call it internally).
- Engaging with and consulting students.
- Ensuring we cover events not booked or organised centrally, including off-campus.
- Ensuring that legitimate research into sensitive subjects can happen without researchers being suspected of terrorist leanings.
- Stepping up IT filtering to constrain illegitimate access to sensitive material from LSE facilities.
- Sensitively updating the guidance to staff on Prevent in the context of student pastoral care and wellbeing.

Plans are in hand to address all of these challenges.

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