

Passed 23/02/16

Students not suspects: Boycott Prevent

The Union Notes:

1. The government's Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a statutory requirement on public bodies – including universities – to 'prevent people being drawn into terrorism' and to implement the 'Prevent' agenda.¹
2. The Prevent agenda, as part of the Government's 'anti-extremism' work has been used to create an expansive surveillance architecture to spy on the public and to police dissent, systematically targeting Black people and Muslims.
3. Under Prevent, lecturers have been known to report students as being 'at risk of radicalisation' for merely taking an interest in political affairs in class, or for observing their religion more closely, whilst politically active students have found themselves visited by counter-terrorism officers.
4. That the Prevent strategy guidance (from as early as 2011) stated that university staff, lecturers and chaplains to report to the police any Muslim students who are isolated or depressed.²
5. The Government's counter-terrorism/security policy is fundamentally flawed in its approach; its operant concepts of 'extremism' and 'radicalism' are ill-defined and open to abuse for political ends.
6. The National Union of Students have condemned the Counter terrorism and Security Act and described the Prevent strategy and Channel policies as "further developing a culture of suspicion and surveillance on campuses, whilst also potentially conflicting with institutions' duties to promote freedom of speech, by making them overly risk averse and unwilling to engage in important topics of discussion."³
7. That the Prevent Strategy has been widely criticised for demonising Muslim students on campus by various Human Rights groups such as Liberty.⁴

¹ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/pdfs/ukpga_20150006_en.pdf

² <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/aug/29/university-inform-vulnerable-muslim-students>

³ <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/statement-on-counter-terrorism-and-security-bill#.VLhyssQbvQ.gmail>

⁴ <https://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/sites/default/files/Liberty's%20Second%20Reading%20Briefing%20on%20the%20Counter-Terrorism%20%26%20Security%20Bill%20in%20the%20House%20of%20Commons.pdf>

The Union Believes

1. That students are not suspects.
2. That students should be offered help and not victimised for suffering from mental health issues.
3. That any expectation by the state for academic staff to be involved in monitoring their students is deeply worrying, and could have a chilling effect on relations between staff and students.
4. That the Counter Terrorism & Security Act could serve to isolate many students who already feel that the only avenue through which the Government will engage them is 'anti-radicalisation' initiatives, resulting in further alienation and disaffection.
5. The Act further criminalises Muslims and Black people (already marginalised groups).
6. The Counter Terrorism and Security Act discourage the freedom of speech.
7. Academics, as well as anyone in a public sector job, should not have to be part of this surveillance.
8. The implementation of the Prevent strategy on campus will not only isolate Muslim students but undermine the civil liberties of other groups such as environmental, political and humanitarian activists.
9. The monitoring and exclusion of ideas from public debate opposes the basic function of universities; introducing students to a variety of opinions and encouraging them to analyse and debate them.
10. The policy significantly undermines the freedom and activities of university staff and students.
11. Our public services (i.e. hospitals, schools, universities, prison services) should exist to serve the general public and not be used against the very people it exists to serve.

The Union Resolves

1. That USSU should issue a public statement condemning the Prevent strategy.
2. For USSU to work with trade unions on combatting the Prevent strategy and lobby them to condemn the Counter terrorism and Security Act.
3. To mandate all the Sabbatical Officers to lobby the university to be more open and transparent about how they are engaging with PREVENT, CHANNEL and other similar initiatives.

4. Demand publications of how the policy is operating within the University and Student's Union. This includes access to materials used to train staff and students.
5. Hold consultations with the student body regarding how this affects students.
6. That USSU and the Officers will not engage with the Prevent strategy, in the exception of being requested by students to support them through the processes of PREVENT / CHANNEL, etc.
7. That USSU will educate students on the dangers of the Prevent Strategy.
8. That the USSU NUS delegation should support the motion condemning the Counter terrorism and security bill at the NUS National conference 2016.