

## **Prevent Duty is Impractical, Inappropriate and Dangerous say Manchester Academics**

This statement outlines a number of **reservations regarding the Prevent agenda** that Higher Education providers, including the University of Manchester, now have a statutory duty to observe.

**Background:** The Government, as a result of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, has recently proposed a programme of safeguards (Prevent) regarding the identification of radicalisation that 'specified authorities', including Higher Education Universities, are expected to implement. Prevent asks us, as University Staff, to identify potential radicalisation amongst students at the University (see Paragraph 15 of the Prevent Duty Guidance). Whilst University Staff, as all public service professionals, have always been expected to report imminent threats of criminal activity, the Prevent agenda sets a unique precedence insofar as it asks staff to identify indicators which might merely suggest a *propensity* to criminal ('terrorist') activity.

This remit granted to the lecturing and administrative community at the University is deeply problematic.

- 1) First, as lecturers, we are deeply concerned that our **role as teachers** is fundamentally compromised by the expectation that we also assume the role of the security authorities (i.e. monitor the character of students' opinions). This extended remit sets a dangerous precedent in terms of what roles University lecturers, on the basis of their own private judgements, are expected to assume.
- 2) Second, **it is impractical** for University lecturers to assume the role of surveillance. The Prevent guidance regarding potential student radicalisation is dangerously vague, leading to a considerable uncertainty regarding the risk factors that lecturers are expected to monitor. This uncertainty will ensure that the role expected of lecturers is simply impracticable. By the terms set out in the Prevent guidelines, it seems as though lecturers will feel compelled to police moral and/or religious beliefs (i.e. conservatism) as well as critique of current foreign policy as practiced by Western governments.
- 3) Third, there is a risk that a variety of **ordinary academic activities** will become the object of unwarranted scrutiny as a result of the Prevent guidance. Incidents at the Universities of East Anglia, Bath, and Staffordshire, alongside other domains outside of Higher Education (e.g. measures allegedly taken by schools in Lancashire and Waltham Forest respectively) suggest that the Prevent programme is not sufficiently well-defined so as to ensure that conventional academic practice does not become compromised. This not only creates unnecessary scandal, but strongly imperils the ability of Universities to pursue academic scrutiny with the intellectual and political freedom traditionally accorded to it.
- 4) There is a high risk that **all students perceived to be Muslim** become **criminalised** as a result of the Prevent programme. If the current guidelines are implemented, it is the case that the lecturing community will begin to profile all Muslim students in their charge. Criminalisation is the attribution of a unique risk to a particular constituency due to their ethnic, racial, religious and/or class background – wherein a certain background is rendered a 'suspect community'. This inevitable recourse to racial and religious profiling creates an unacceptable inequality in terms of how students are to be treated whilst at the University. Claims that this programme will not lead to racial and religious profiling are woefully naïve and lack empirical credibility.
- 5) Fifth, and perhaps most problematically, we strongly believe that the increased risk of ethnic and religious profiling engendered by the Prevent guidance significantly threatens the University's broader ambition to **recruit Muslim students** as well as compromising its ability

to provide a safe, inclusive and accommodating space for the Muslim students currently at the University of Manchester. This is a concern that is pertinent to the University's ambition to develop a stronger local presence, as well as to its goals in Widening Participation from disadvantaged groups as part of its Social Responsibility agenda.

In sum, there are a number of significant issues that the Prevent agenda poses to the academic freedoms and culture of inclusivity that the University of Manchester aspires to deliver. These risks concern the role of the lecturer, the sanctity of academic freedoms and intellectual curiosity, as well as the ability of the University to provide an inclusive and locally relevant recruitment agenda.

We therefore strongly encourage all staff to reflect upon these risks and would urge those who feel similarly troubled by the University's imminent assent to Prevent guidelines to join us in voicing their concerns.

Yours Sincerely,

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