

Cambridge and the Prevent Duty: A briefing for all staff on how the University is responding

1. What is the Prevent Duty?

The Prevent Duty is part of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act, which was passed by Parliament in February 2015 and came into force in July of that year.

Section 26 of the Act places a statutory duty on a number of 'specified authorities', including higher education institutions (HEIs), to have "due regard to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".

Prevent has its origins in the response of the then Labour government to the London bombings of 2005. The Prevent Strategy, as it was referred to then, was revised by the Coalition government in 2011 with the following objectives:

- To respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat the country faces from those who promote it,
- To prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support,
- To work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation that need addressing.

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act means that universities and other relevant bodies must now fulfil certain legal obligations to demonstrate compliance with the Act.

2. What must the University do to fulfil its legal obligations under Prevent?

As mentioned above, the legislation states that specified authorities must have: "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".

In the context of Prevent, 'due regard' means to:

"Place appropriate weight on the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism when they consider all the other factors relevant to how they carry out their functions".

Therefore, the definition of due regard means that specified authorities have considerable freedom in deciding how they respond to statutory requirements under the duty.

This has been confirmed by HEFCE, as the body responsible for monitoring how HEIs respond to Prevent:

“The duty applies to a wide range of providers with very different institutional structures and cultures. Relevant higher education bodies are responsible for assessing Prevent-related risks in their own context and deciding on appropriate and proportionate actions in response to their assessments of those risks.”

The University must also have regard to specific advice issued by the Secretary of State for HEIs in meeting the Prevent duty. This guidance makes clear that HEIs should:

- Demonstrate the commitment of senior leaders to the Prevent duty,
- Undertake a risk assessment of where and how students might be at risk of being drawn into terrorism, as well as undertaking risk assessments with regard to certain other policies and procedures,
- Develop an institutional action plan to mitigate risks identified,
- Identify a Prevent lead to take charge of delivering the operational response to the duty,
- Set up a programme of training for staff to help them recognise vulnerable individuals and respond appropriately,
- Consult with students, student unions and appropriate student societies,
- Provide sufficient pastoral and chaplaincy support for all students,
- Have policies and procedures in place to:
 - Share information about potentially vulnerable people,
 - Manage external speakers and events in a way that balances the University’s legal responsibility to uphold freedom of speech with its requirements under the Prevent Duty,
 - Consider the risks associated with the misappropriation of IT facilities and social media.

Finally, HEIs, as part of their response to the Prevent Duty, must be mindful of their legal obligation to uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom.

3. The Prevent Duty is NOT about the following...

- Snooping on staff or students,
- Interfering with academic freedom,
- Ignoring legal responsibilities under equality legislation,

- Preventing research and teaching on sensitive topics,
- Ignoring responsibilities with regards to confidentiality and data protection.

Prevent is about recognising potentially vulnerable individuals and being able to offer them an appropriate level of support.

4. How has the University responded to the Prevent duty?

Strategically and organisationally

The following institutional activities have been completed:

- The University has formed a Prevent Committee as a joint committee of the Council and the General Board,
- Professor Eilis Ferran has been appointed the University's Prevent lead in her capacity as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Institutional and International Relations. Professor Ferran is also chair of the Prevent Committee,
- The Council discussed Prevent and the University's response to the duty at five separate meetings in 2016. The Council has approved the membership and terms of reference of the Prevent Committee and approved the submission of the University's Prevent action plan and risk register to HEFCE,
- A briefing note was produced to provide guidance to members of the University Council, the General Board, Head and Secretaries of Schools, Heads of Non-School Institutions and Divisional Directors in the Unified Administrative Service about the specific responsibilities of those in leadership positions,
- There was a formal Discussion on Prevent, raised as a topic of concern in May 2016, which allowed members of the University to consider the implications of the duty and the collegiate University's response. Remarks from the Discussion were subsequently considered, and responded to, by Council,
- The University's approach to Prevent was discussed at a meeting in April attended by the Officers of the Student Unions and the University's Prevent Coordinator, who also attended a meeting of a student-led Prevent taskforce which has been established by the Officers of the Student Unions. The Presidents of the Cambridge University Students Union and the Graduate Union are members *ex officio* of the Prevent Committee and members of the Council and General Board.

Action plan

The University's detailed response to Prevent is defined by the requirements issued by the Secretary of State's guidance and the University's action plan. However, as mentioned elsewhere in this briefing, it is important to realise that specified authorities, including HEIs, have considerable freedom in terms of how they implement their responsibilities under Prevent.

At all times, the University will seek to take a proportionate and risk-based approach to the Prevent duty, using, where possible and appropriate, existing policies and procedures.

With the above principles in mind, the Prevent Committee has acknowledged that:

- The collegiate University already had a clear understanding of its Prevent-related responsibilities before the duty was put on a statutory footing in 2015,
- The University and the Colleges can draw on a wide range of policies and procedures to mitigate the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation,
- In viewing Prevent as a matter primarily of safeguarding vulnerable individuals, the University and the Colleges have excellent welfare and support services, as well as a variety of active faith networks and prayer facilities
- It will not seek to apply web or email filtering as part of its response to the duty – despite government advice to consider it. The University was not persuaded that filtering could be used effectively to prevent access to certain material, notwithstanding the lack of clarity on what to filter. Filtering would also likely hinder access to legitimate content, as well as access to sensitive material for legitimate reasons.

Where revision of existing policies and procedures are necessary to fulfil the University's action plan, they will be light touch, and will focus on helping individuals assess risks and seek further advice within the University if they have any concerns. Much emphasis will be placed on upholding the excellent levels of pastoral care that the collegiate University provides for all its staff and students. The impact on the University community will therefore be negligible.

Training

All staff should be aware of the process of radicalisation, definitions of extremism and how to raise concerns in this context, and training is a key part of the University's effort to raise awareness of these issues. All staff are requested to complete *Module 1 – The Prevent Duty in HE: Introduction on*

the [Moodle Prevent training site](#). A Raven login is required. Additionally, staff who are responsible for providing pastoral or student support are also requested to complete *Module 5 – A Student and Staff Wellbeing Issue: Safeguarding, Pastoral Care and Student Support Online*. Additional training for specific staff may be added to this site during 2016/17.

5. In summary...

The University views its responsibilities under the Prevent duty in the way that it would view its responsibilities towards any disturbing behaviour. In other words, it takes reasonable and proportionate steps to be aware of the risks, is prepared to take appropriate action, and to know when, and how, to seek the involvement of external partners in the very unlikely situation that their input may be required.

6. Further questions

If you have general queries on how the University is responding to the Prevent duty, please email prevent@admin.cam.ac.uk

Prevent Committee
October 2016