

STUDENTS

- not SUSPECTS!

University staff will not be Home Office snoopers

University staff represented by the UCU trade union have rejected UK government demands that they act as snoopers on any students who criticise government policy or hold views the government doesn't like.

Earlier this year the Tory government rushed a bill through parliament which imposed duties on universities and other public bodies to 'monitor' and report views that the government saw as being 'extremist.'

Rather than welcoming reasoned debate they now want staff to report any views that they believe are 'extreme' or 'radical', and have even given guidelines on the type of research that should be carried out in 'sensitive' areas. This is a disastrous approach to dealing with difference, and already in England has led to students being victimised.

The Guardian reported in September that Staffordshire University student Mohammed Farooq, who was enrolled in the Terrorism, Crime and Global Security master's programme, was questioned by the university's 'Prevent' officer, as he had been seen reading a textbook entitled 'Terrorism Studies' in the library.

The university subsequently apologised for accusing him of being a potential terrorist, and admitted that the government's guidance 'lacked sufficient detail to provide practical direction'.

The Guardian also reported that Nottingham Research student Rizwaan Sabir was wrongly accused of conducting research into terrorism, although this was clearly a part of his doctoral research, - already approved by the university itself. After an enquiry, the police had to apologise and pay damages to the student - although the damage had been done (see over for details).

Both students were Muslim.

The UCU believe the Prevent strategy:

- *Seriously threatens academic freedom and freedom of speech*
- *The broad definition of terrorism will stifle campus activism*
- *The intention to force our members to be involved in the racist labelling of students is unacceptable*
- *The Prevent Agenda will force our members to spy on our learners, is discriminatory towards Muslims, and legitimises Islamophobia and xenophobia, encouraging racist views to be publicised and normalised within society*
- *The monitoring of Muslim students will destroy the trust needed for a safe and supportive learning environment and encourage discrimination against BME and Muslim staff and students*



The Prevent Duty Guidance.

We know the Scottish Universities themselves are unhappy about what the UK government is imposing on them. We want to work with them to end Prevent

What the 'Prevent' Guidelines say about 'extremism'

The aims of the Prevent strategy claim to be to:

'Deal with all forms of terrorism and with **non-violent extremism**, which can create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism and can popularise **views** which terrorists then exploit'.

Extremism is defined by Prevent as:

'**Vocal** or active **opposition** to **fundamental British values**, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.'

One major problem with this of course, is the definition of 'British values'. The present UK government seems to identify this with their own

current views, although they are a very divisive government.

A wider problem is that throughout history, Governments have often categorised views they disagree with as 'extremist.'

In the past, peace campaigners, campaigners for women's equality, members of trade unions, environmental campaigners have all been claimed to be extremists by governments who didn't like them.

Another 'British Value' that Trade Unions have always upheld is the need to safeguard freedom of speech - something that we are doing by opposing Prevent

Why the Government's terror laws are wrong (and won't work)

The Prevent strategy aimed at 'combatting extremism' in Universities is only one of the many 'counter terrorism' laws the government have pushed through in recent years.

In August 2015, the Guardian reported that the British Library felt unable to host a unique collection of Taliban documents because officials feared that holding the collection would violate British anti-terrorism laws.

The British Library said that, "although the archive was recognised as being of research value, it was judged that it contained some material which could contravene the Terrorism Act [2006], and which would present restrictions on the library's ability to provide access to the archive for researchers"

According to one of the academics putting the collection together, the archive contains newspapers, magazines, poems, tapes and videos, "most of it pretty innocuous" However, **based solely on a review of a 'catalogue of titles'** the Library decided that holding the archive might put them on the wrong side of current laws.

This is just one example of how a climate of fear can stop legitimate research. **It's the sort of thing that can easily spread to universities unless combatted.**

In 2008 Nottingham university postgrad student Rizwaan Sabir, was arrested for downloading an open source document for his dissertation. He was arrested and detained for seven days without charge as a suspected terrorist.

Documents from the professional standards unit of West Midlands police have subsequently revealed that, anxious to get a conviction, officers fabricated key elements of the case, leading to Dr Rod Thornton, lecturer at the university to say:

"The police were totally unprofessional. After their mistakes they tried to cover them up. I've seen some altered police notes, I've seen evidence made up. The whole thing seems to be a complete tissue of lies, starting from the cover up of their mistakes in the first place."

Three years later Dr Sabir went on to win £20,000 damages in an out of court settlement with the police.

It's the view of the UCU that bringing the police on campus can lead to the type of abuse shown in cases such as that of Dr Sabir's.

It also shows that universities are not equipped to make these kinds of judgments in this type of area.

Placing the responsibility on lecturers and other staff to search for 'potential terrorists' would undermine the relationship of trust between lecturers and students in a university setting.

It also undermines the ability to conduct real critical thinking and academic debate at university. Only through open debate, firmly based on academic research, can universities do their job.

The UCU at its UK conference in Glasgow in 2015 pledged to oppose Prevent and is asking all branches to contact university management to inform them of this position.

This has already been done at Glasgow Caledonian.

What you can do to help oppose the implementation of Prevent.

To help stop the scapegoating of minority communities such as Muslim and BME students:

If you are a student:

- Contact your student association officials and ask them to make their opposition to Prevent known to the university management (NUS opposes Prevent)
- Support the 'Students not Suspects' campaign

If you are a member of staff:

- Contact your Trade Union rep for advice on how this might impact your work. We can give advice on how to deal with unreasonable management demands, if they arise.

The Trade Unions at GCU have already informed management of their opposition to Prevent.

This has also been raised at Court level by the staff governors.

The UCU has written to management and are currently waiting details of how they propose to deal with the Prevent duties imposed on the sector, and have asked for this to be a topic at the next meetings of the Joint Consultation Committee

The UCU have recognised that **this is a government created problem** and that the demands for monitoring of students **does not come from the university itself.** We are urging the University to work with the trade unions to help get this legislation scrapped as soon as possible. **For the sake of academic freedom.**

The UCU@GCU - safeguarding academic freedom

