

Prevent Duty is creating a “hostile environment” on campus, says Islam Soc

The Chair says Prevent feels like “a direct attack” on Muslims on campus

By [Chris Owen](#), Editor (2015/16)

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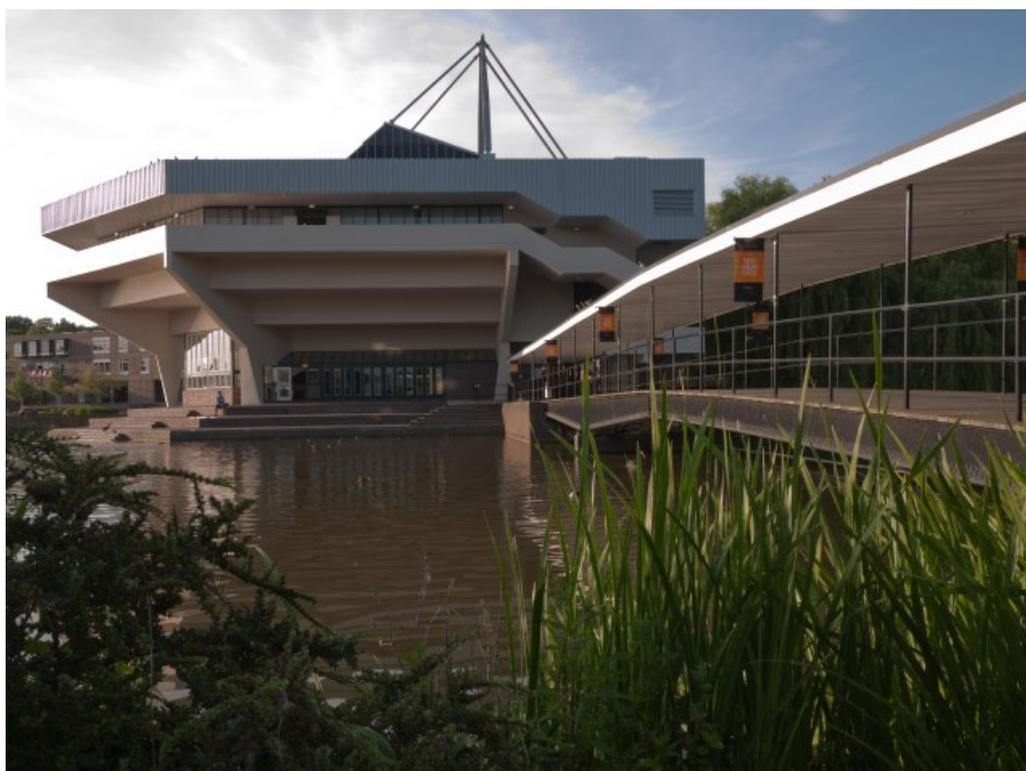


Image: [John Robinson](#)

The Chair and Vice Chair of the University of York’s Islam Society have spoken out against the Prevent Duty, claiming that it feels like “a direct attack” on Muslims on campus.

Soon to be fully implemented at York, the Prevent Duty is a statutory duty placed on workers in public bodies – including doctors, teachers and lecturers – to report suspicious behaviour that may be a sign of radicalisation. The scheme has been criticised by those who believe it leads to racial profiling and enables everyday surveillance.

Saher Ahmed, a second year PPE student and Chair of Islam Society, told Nouse that the Prevent Duty is creating a “very hostile environment” on campus for Muslim students, calling the issue a “social welfare concern”.

“Some people are introverts,” Ahmed said. “Some people might have mental health issues, and Prevent would target them as well because they have suspicious behaviour. That doesn’t have anything to do with them looking at how to join jihad or something.”

Prevent, she believes, is blurring the line in public perceptions between Islam and jihad, and the recent introduction of mandatory Prevent training for certain staff at York, sent out “in error” and later retracted,

makes her want to “limit [her] own freedom of speech”.

“It makes me want to just be quiet and not say anything in the fear that something might be taken out of context, or they might think that I have these certain views,” Ahmed said. “I just feel like it restricts me from expressing my faith. And I know a lot of people, especially Muslim females, who would probably end up taking their headscarf off, just so they aren’t as identifiable as Muslims.”

Ali Umbetov, second year Politics and Philosophy student and Vice Chair of Islam Soc, raised concerns about the impact Prevent on campus may have on international students coming to York. He believes it could lead to less students applying to English universities from overseas.

The University has released a statement about how it intends to safeguard students and ethnic minority groups against discrimination under Prevent, which [appears in an article on the Nouse website](#). The University’s strategy has four main aims: safeguarding anyone at risk of radicalisation; avoiding stigmatisation of any particular group; ensuring academic and speech freedoms are protected, and meeting its legal obligations under the Act.

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University Registrar and Secretary David Duncan commented, “As the article indicates, we will not target the implementation of Prevent on particular groups or societies, and will do everything we can to reassure students about our proportionate and sensitive approach to this legal duty. To this end, at the suggestion of the GSA President, Rasha Ibrahim, a meeting has been arranged for next week with representatives of the Islamic Society.

“As covered in the last edition of Nouse, the email message you refer to was retracted because it erroneously indicated that individual members of staff had been identified to complete the awareness raising module. In fact, we would invite all staff and students to access it – it is available via the VLE (for students) and the LMS (for staff). The module stresses that we should not make assumptions about people because of their religion or the way they dress.

“As indicated in the article, we will make other packages available to staff and students as and when they are available.”

YUSU President Ben Leatham said that the comments from from Islam Society “are very concerning. The Prevent duty that universities have to legally implement is fundamentally flawed and can easily lead to racial profiling as well as censorship.

“Although I do think that compared to other institutions this University is approaching its implementation in a more measured way, transparency has to be a priority. It needs to be clear to students exactly what is happening with regards to Prevent on campus so concerns can be eased or questions can be asked.

“I will continue to push the University to both communicate to students about Prevent as well as implement it in a measured way. I will also continue to lobby nationally against the duty as well as offer support to Unions across the country whose institutions have taken a far more targeted approach”.



4 comments

Stephen

27 Mar '16 at 6:07 pm

Being honest the uni are so ineffective they probably won't be able effect Prevent for about another 6 years and even then it'll be shit and probably accidentally be discriminatory against Sikhs by accident, and the scaffolding on Greg's Place will *still* not be gone.

[Report](#)

Hakam

29 Mar '16 at 1:47 pm

The Israelis use racial profiling and it works just fine for them. I'm totally in favour of this.

[Report](#)

Bob

2 Apr '16 at 5:32 pm

I don't understand what prevent has achieved or done to cause such ruckus or be labelled an “attack”.

[Report](#)

jamsie

5 Apr '16 at 2:33 am

I'd rather a few people get upset if it means actually doing something about radicalisation, rather than pretending it isn't happening for fear of offending people.

[Report](#)

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