

## Staff speak out over duty to spot possible terrorists

It comes after an email containing “mandatory” training in identifying radicalisation was later retracted

By [Chris Owen](#), Editor (2015/16)  
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The Channel tutorial asks respondents to consider “suspicious” behaviour in individuals of different ethnicities

An email sent out to an undisclosed number of staff, later retracted by the University’s Human Resources Department, has prompted renewed concerns about the introduction of a legal responsibility to identify radicalisation, known as the Prevent Duty, among University faculty.

The email told staff that they had been “nominated by [their] Manager/Head of Department” to “complete an on-line tutorial detailing the Channel process”.

Channel is the element of the Prevent strategy that calls on local councils, educators and others to spot character traits that make an individual susceptible to radicalisation. The online tutorial is a series of slides displaying case studies that supposedly equips frontline staff with the skills “to intervene to steer vulnerable people away from being drawn into terrorist-related activities”.

Staff were told that completion of the Channel process for “identified” faculty members was “mandatory” and a “statutory requirement”. However, a second email was sent out within 24 hours of the first, after a number of staff approached their managers or Heads of Department to ask why they had been identified

as requiring training.

The second email told staff that they had received the first “in error”, as it had only been “intended for a small group of staff previously identified by their line managers”. Staff were told in the second email that they were no longer required to complete the online training, and that the University is “still considering its institutional response to the Prevent Strategy”.

David Duncan, Registrar & Secretary, told Nouse that no one who received the email had actually been identified by their manager or Head of Department to complete the training. This comes as the University’s draft strategy for enacting Prevent on campus goes to the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee this week.

Miqdad Asaria, a Research Fellow in the Department of Health Economics, was one of the staff members who received the training email. He told Nouse that he asked a friend if they had also received the email, who told him she thought she had received it “because she was Irish”.



The email, that told lecturers and others that they had been identified by their Managers, was retracted “in error” 24 hours later

Another staff member thought their work on homelessness outreach had resulted in them being nominated.

“Everybody was feeling guilty, and I think that says something about these kinds of schemes and what they do to the psychology of people,” said Asaria. “They make everybody feel criminalised and watched.” Asaria understands that around 700 staff completed the mandatory training, which presents case studies of suspicious behaviour alongside faces of various ethnicities. “There’s lots of things which are concerning about this,” he told Nouse. “Certain people are being selected by their managers to do the training, which is obviously uncomfortable.

“If you imagine you’re in a position of responsibility, like an academic, where you have to write references

for people and make hiring decisions, and you're told that certain types of people are bad news, it impacts your instincts towards those people," he continued. "You're not going to take any risks on their behalf; you're not going to do them any favours because you'll get yourself in trouble.

"It's not only that people are being taught to have these biases; it's now our legal obligation - it's illegal for us not to be racist. That's what the Prevent programme is telling us. That it's our statutory duty as academics, teachers and doctors to take part in this programme."

Asaria said that Prevent is "something that the University doesn't seem to have resisted very much", and highlighted that students should be made aware that "if they're certain types of students, they are being watched, and there is a legal obligation placed on staff to discriminate against them".

Katy Sian, lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Prevent specialist, shared Asaria's concerns, and described Prevent as "embedded Islamophobia".

"The ambiguity surrounding Prevent brands the entire Muslim population as potential extremists," Sian said. "As such we have Muslim students who are actually terrified to speak in classrooms... We've got first-year, second-year and third-year students who are increasingly afraid to even present their views in seminar spaces."

She stated that, "This is problematic because the role of universities in democratic societies are supposed to be places in which debate and dissent can take place. However, through Prevent we are witnessing both an attack on civil liberties and the undermining of academic freedom.

"Our role as lecturers is to emphasise critical thinking - we're not police informers. That goes beyond our job description. And I think through this we're seeing the subversion of that pedagogic relationship between lecturers and students."

Sian commented that the mandatory duty on staff to uphold the University's ruling on how to implement Prevent "is where the real tension is coming" as "there may be consequences for staff who chose to follow the developing advice from the Universities and Colleges Union to potentially boycott Prevent.

"The overall impression seems to be that universities are unsure of what's actually going on," Sian said. "There are no clear guidelines on how [Prevent] is being implemented, and this will inevitably lead to more confusion and chaos. It seems to be quite a mess right now."

When Nouse asked David Duncan, Registrar & Secretary, about the extent of statutory obligation on staff to enact the Channel process, he commented: "We have already made a basic awareness-raising package available to all staff and students via the Learning Management System and the VLE (the same package is available to the public via the Internet).

"However, to date completion of this has only been mandatory for 95 key members of staff. We will engage in further training and awareness raising once the Health, Safety & Welfare Committee has approved our formal policy and procedure for the Prevent Statutory Duty. Our aim is to take a measured, proportionate response to the Duty, in full consultation with the campus trade unions and student representatives."

YUSU President Ben Leatham said: "It is evident from incidents at other institutions across the UK that the Prevent Duty has led to surveillance and racial profiling. This is completely unacceptable.

"Here at York we are working closely with the University to ensure they are implementing the Prevent Duty in a measured way that enables and protects all students, regardless of demographic. We are also supporting counterparts nationally whose institutions are taking a much more targeted and interventionist approach."



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