

Ending Securitisation, surveillance and Prevent

Submitted by City, University of London Students' Union and Students' Union UCL

What's the Problem?

Policies such as Prevent, Fitness to Study and UK Visa & Immigration monitoring has served to expand and normalise surveillance on our campuses. This 'securitisation' limits; internal democracy, academic freedom, access to support services, freedom of expression & belief. Students directly targeted go through a traumatising process, thus deterring grassroots organising. This has led to racial and religious profiling (esp. Black and/or Muslim students) of students at institutions like KCL, UCL and Leicester, where students are either locked out of their institutions, stopped and searched or their personal information is passed onto the police.

Prevent is part of the Counterterrorism & Security Act 2015 that mandates all public sector workers to identify those who could potentially engage in extremist activities.

In particular, Muslim students are disproportionately targeted by prevent since those implementing the policy are required to trust their "gut feeling" on who they believe will engage in such activities, which reinforces harmful stereotypes and otherisation. In a time of rampant islamophobia this has manifested as Muslim students' beliefs and practices being further demonised. Because of this we have seen; surveillance cameras installed in prayer rooms, prayer rooms removed, students disallowed the right to pray, islamic societies disbanded, emails and sermons monitored.

External speaker processes have been altered at many HE institutions as part of Prevent. Events have been burdened with increased security and restrictions, including external chairs being imposed on events, particularly in the case of Palestine societies. 33% of all Prevent referrals are from the education sector. FE Students are particularly vulnerable to targeting as 66% of all referrals are of those under 20. Prevent has repeatedly proven to be ineffective, with 90%-95% of referrals being 'false positives'. However, these individuals still face the stress of invasive interviews, police interrogations and a police file.

Government guidance on engagement monitoring for Tier 4 Visa compliance for international students is influenced by the 'hostile environment'. Institutions are enacting this through intensifying their tracking and surveillance technologies. These changes are disguised by adding them to automated 'welfare' tracking systems. And the expansion of "fitness to study" policies for students viewed as problematic. Surveillance technologies comprise of; compulsory attendance monitoring applications, monitoring of online activity and emails, Room and seat tracking technology. Students who are seen as non-compliant may face deportation if they don't allow personal privacy invasion and academics can face personal fines if they don't report students.

Safeguarding, community protection and wellbeing provision (eg sexual violence prevention and mental healthcare) are all being merged with securitisation leading to further embedding of racist and islamophobic ideologies within welfare support structures in FE and HE. This causes violations in trust and confidentiality, stigmatisation, and additional barriers to accessing essential support.

What could be the Solution?

To protect the rights of students, Student Unions' (SUs) policies and Government legislation that upholds the Prevent Duty and surveillance technology usage to monitor students should be scrapped.

Police presence on campus should be opposed, particularly given the use of body camera footage of disabled people being sent to the government for punitive investigations, sanctions, and imprisonment.

Students need transparency on the specific ways data on their attendance is being used. The surveillance of international and disabled students must stop and ultimately the government, SUs and institutions should be lobbied to scrap technologies and policies.

Policies on non-engagement with Prevent within students' unions and other surveillance apparatus should be created e.g. through producing template motions. Many SUs nationally have non-engagement motions with Prevent to delegitimise it, but others actively engage, and SU officers actively receive Prevent training. Motions should aim to cease regular contact with institutional prevent leads and SUs should cease internal Prevent training.

SUs need to clearly understand the legal boundaries because they don't have a legal duty to comply, but are unaware of this. Union Development resources and training should be disseminated on the legal aspects of Prevent. There should be bespoke support for students who face Prevent referrals and other rights abuses. Organisations like FOSIS, Netpol, UCU and NEU should be collaborated with. Attempts to further rebrand and situate counter-extremism, discriminatory profiling and surveillance as welfare-oriented should be opposed: securitisation is not safeguarding

There should be an end the use of the Prevent duty, especially as a safeguarding tool. Prevent is an inappropriate framework for safeguarding, as fear of inclusion on a Prevent database discourages marginalised students from disclosing incidents. Colleges and universities to implement anti-racism training to counter the racist stereotypes that Prevent perpetrates.