Prevent Committee

Report of the sub-group set up to review Prevent-related events and responses during

Michaelmas Term 2017

At the request of the Chair of the Prevent Committee, Professor Eilís Ferran, a sub-group of the Prevent Committee met on Wednesday 13th December 2017 to review recent events and the responses to them by the Prevent Referral group and the Prevent lead, and report back to the Prevent Committee.

The sub-group comprised: Professor Michael Proctor (Chair), Ms Darshana Joshi and Ms Jocelyn Wyburd.

The following documentation was received by the group:

2. Correspondence between various parties in relation to the WomCam Forum event on 22 November 2017.
3. Correspondence in relation to the online Prevent Training
4. Correspondence with HEFCE in relation to the 8 November event and the Prevent Training issue
5. The University’s Annual Prevent Report to HEFCE for 2016-17.

The group reviewed the documentation pertaining to the three different topics and concluded as follows.


1.1 The group considered the circumstances around the decision made by the Prevent Referral Group to appoint an independent Chair for this panel event, and the representations made about this decision.

1.2 The group recognised that:

- The Prevent Referral Group had acted swiftly to address a situation which had the potential for disruption, not least in light of disruption at an event with the same speaker the previous day, and with a short timeframe in which to decide how best to take the matter forward;
- The imposition of an independent Chair was an action that was included in possible responses under the Prevent policy;
- The event had gone ahead, with minimum disruption which had been managed by the independent Chair, with assistance from the security measures put in place;
1.3 The group, however, questioned whether it might have been possible for the following alternative actions to be taken by the Prevent Referral Group:

- To communicate with the designated chair of the panel (an academic from SOAS) the University’s guidelines and policies on speaker events, thus allowing her to ensure both freedom of speech and constructive and respectful debate, without needing to impose an independent chair;
- In addition, to support the designated chair of the panel with Proctorial presence to help to ensure minimal disruption to the event and adherence to the University’s policies, in addition to the security measures put in place.

1.4 The group was of the view that these alternative measures would have constituted a lighter touch response to the risks assessed in respect of this event, which would have therefore avoided some of the subsequent backlash about the handling of the event by a wide range of stakeholders, including organisers, University academics and the UCU and some negative publicity on social media.

1.5 It was clear to the group that the decision to replace the designated Chair was not influenced in any way by the individual’s ethnicity, gender or religion, but related to her known political views. Nonetheless the replacement of an Asian Muslim woman as Chair by a white man has contributed to some of the backlash.

1.6 The group noted that the original lobbying against the event and, in particular, against one of the speakers seemed to have come entirely from outside the University community, rather than from within and questioned whether the response had been appropriately measured in respect of this context.

1.7 The group did, however, recognise that there had been disruption at a London university event involving the same speaker 24 hours before the Cambridge event and that measures to manage potential disruption were required, (and had indeed been requested by the organisers) but felt that a lighter touch response might have sufficed in spite of this context, as indicated in 1.3 above.

1.8 The group noted that the Prevent lead had kept HEFCE and the regional Prevent coordinators (for SW who had previously supported the Eastern region and the new Eastern region Prevent coordinator) informed at all stages and that no concerns had been expressed externally about the University’s implementation of its own policies.

2. The WomCam Forum event on 22 November

The group noted the correspondence in respect of this event and the responses provided by the Prevent Lead to submissions made, but did not deem that the matter required any further comment.
3. Issues raised about the Prevent Training materials

3.1 The group noted the comments which had been made on social media in respect of the University’s Prevent Training materials, particularly in respect of Slide 15 and actions which had been taken to address the potential for misrepresentation of the University’s own position on this content, including contextualising Slide 15 against Slide 16.

3.2 While recognising that the training material had been developed externally to the University (by the LFHE) and sanctioned by HEFCE for use in HEIs, and the underlying intention of the contents of Slides 15 and 16, the group also recognised that the contents of slide 15 had raised disquiet.

3.3 The group felt that the inclusion in a list of potentially extremist viewpoints in various contexts, the only 2 geo-political examples come from the same region (West Bank/Palestine) which had resulted in negative reaction, not least because one of these is official UK Government policy. Thus, while the aim of the slide is to stimulate debate about when viewpoints held legitimately become extremist, the current contents of the slide are potentially inflammatory.

3.4 The group would therefore like to propose to the Prevent Committee that a recommendation might be made to the LFHE to review the presentation of this slide, to include an alternative geo-political example from another part of the world, in order to provide for greater breadth and balance of examples.

3.5 The group noted the correspondence with HEFCE and one of the co-authors of this training module and that the University’s Prevent lead had therefore ensured that HEFCE and the regional Prevent coordinator(s) were appropriately notified about the social media coverage and the University’s own actions in response to this.

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15 December 2017