

Title of Proposal:

Rejecting the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and tackling Islamophobia.

Background

Background:

1. On 16 February 2015, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill (CTSB) received Royal Assent and therefore has become statutory¹
2. According to the Prevent Strategy, potential indicators of “radicalism” or “extremism” include:
 - a. “A need for identity, meaning and belonging”
 - b. “A desire for political or moral change.”
 - c. “Relevant mental health issues.”
3. Academics and campaigners fear the CTSB will criminalise ideas and create a culture where students are unwilling to speak out.
4. The National Union of Students have condemned the Counter terrorism and Security Bill and described the Prevent strategy as “further developing a culture of suspicion and surveillance on campuses, whilst also potentially conflicting with institutions’ duties to promote freedom of speech, by making them overly risk-averse and unwilling to engage in important topics of discussion.”
5. That Universities UK have expressed concerns about academic freedom in their parliamentary briefing on the counter terrorism and security bill.
6. This principle of academic freedom is enshrined in the Education (No 2) Act 1986, which places a duty on universities and colleges to “ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students and employees of the establishment and for visiting speakers”.
7. The UK government have introduced a new counter-extremism strategy and has placed a legal requirement on universities to comply with the Prevent duty on university campuses.
8. This ‘Prevent’ strategy requires staff to be aware of significant ‘changes in behaviour and outlook’ among students make it a legal duty for universities to monitor speaker events.
9. The Metropolitan Police have noted a 71% increase in Islamophobia in London between July 2014 and July 2015.
10. A monthly year on comparison shows that Islamophobic hate crimes reported to the Met in the month of March increased by just over 100% from 2014 to 2015.

¹ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/counterterrorismandsecurity.html>

11. Muslim women students are more likely to be victims of anti-Muslim hate crime because they can be visually identified as Muslims due to the hijab, niqab, or other clothing associated with Islam.
12. A significantly high proportion of Muslim students attend the City University London, hence both the 'Prevent' strategy and Islamophobia directly concern many students at City.

Principles

1. Universities have a particular duty and mission to promote freedom of speech and academic freedom, including a legal duty under the Education (No.2) Act 1986 to ensure the use of university premises is not denied to any person or group basis of their beliefs or views.
2. That students should not be victimised for suffering from mental health issues.
3. That the Prevent strategy gives the Government undefined powers to order that "extremist" speakers to be banned and asks Universities and Students' Unions to monitor student activity for 'extremism'.
4. That any expectation by the state for academic staff to be involved in monitoring their students is deeply worrying, and could have a damaging effect on relations between staff and students.
5. The monitoring and exclusion of ideas from public debate opposes the basic function of universities.
6. That it is important that students are introduced to a variety of opinions and encouraging them to analyse and debate them.
7. The CTSB significantly undermines the freedom and activities of university staff and students.
8. One of the purposes of post-compulsory education is to foster critical thinking in staff, students and society more widely. Our universities and colleges are centres for debate and open discussion, where received wisdom can be challenged and controversial ideas put forward in the spirit of academic endeavour.
9. Experiencing Islamophobia can make students feel very isolated, so the Student's Union will campaign to go the other way in making people feel that they belong to a strong community of faith at City University London.
10. Challenge Islamophobia and Prevent because; no group should be characterised by the views of a minority, extremists do NOT define Muslims, the media does not represent the REAL Islam and lastly because stereotypes are lazy and dangerous.
11. The 'Prevent' strategy will result in hardening perceptions of an illiberal or Islamophobic approach, alienating Muslims and playing into the hands of those who, by peddling a grievance agenda, seek to drive people further towards extremism and terrorism.
12. The 'Prevent' strategy is a significant threat to students' civil liberties and freedom of speech on City University London's campuses.

Idea/Proposal

1. To mandate the Student Officers to issue a public statement condemning the Prevent strategy and the government's counter terrorism and security bill.
2. For the Student Officers to work with campus trade unions on combatting the Prevent strategy and lobby them to condemn the CTSB.
3. For the student officers to encourage students to join the #studentsnotsuspects social media campaign and to raise awareness about the dangers of the counter terrorism and security bill and the Prevent strategy.
4. That CULSU and the student officers will not engage with the Prevent strategy unless legally required to do so. That City University London Students' community does not engage with the PREVENT strategy, to oppose the Counter Terrorism and Security Act and actively work to cut PREVENT funded initiatives.
5. To educate students on the dangers of the counter terrorism and security bill and the Prevent Strategy.
6. The NUS delegation will ensure CULSU students concerns are adequately taken to NUS conference.
7. The Students' Union will campaign as far as is practical,
8. The Students' Union will lobby City University London to be more open and transparent about how they are engaging with PREVENT, CHANNEL and other similar initiatives. This involves demanding publications of how the policy is operating within their university and gaining access to materials used to train staff (especially in the University's Chaplaincy Team) and students.
9. The Students' Union will lobby City University London to unitedly lobby the UK government citing the negative impact of 'Prevent' on students.
10. The Students' Union will lobby City University London to unitedly lobby the UK government to provide a clear legal definition of 'extremism'.
11. The Students' Union will lobby City University London to uphold the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 to ensure freedom of speech within the law on campus.
12. The Students' Union will lobby City University London to unitedly lobby the UK government regarding our serious concerns that introducing a statutory obligation on universities to report students who are displaying unusual behaviour is wrong, as it is not at all unusual for students to display changing behaviours which are a natural part of their personal development. It is also hard to define what 'unusual behaviours' means and therefore it is difficult to mandate the University to report this.

13. The Students' Union will promote reporting any instances of Islamophobia on campus to relevant authorities.
14. The Students' Union will work to tackle and raise awareness all forms of Islamophobia on campus and will lobby City University London to do the same.