OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (C E C)  
18 – 20 March 2016

PREVENT

The C E C is asked to:-

i) receive information on Prevent Duty and the Student Association’s responsibility under this legislation.

Prevent Duty forms part of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. This is legislation introduced in September that imposed a statutory duty on certain public bodies, including Universities, to ‘have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.’ Prevent is intended to deal with all kinds of extremist ideologies, including for example, those motivated by religion, politics, nationalism, environmentalism or animal welfare.

The Open University has taken steps to meet the requirements of the legislation by identifying where the risks of people being drawn into terrorism might arise and by amending policies and procedures to address these risks. In all discussions the emphasis has been on an appropriate level of response to the legislation with an emphasis on student welfare, identifying individuals who might be at risk and providing them with the appropriate support networks. On this basis, guidance for staff emphasises that proportionate weight to ‘the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism’ be given when carrying out normal functions and duties.

All staff at the University are expected to be aware of the Prevent duty and their responsibilities around it and there is a requirement for those who work most closely with students to complete extra training. Staff are not expected to make a judgement about whether someone is at risk of being drawn into terrorism, but they do need to raise concerns to the appropriate team if, for example in the course of their normal function, they witness a student expressing hate ideas or demonstrating behavior that seems to be suggesting violent intent. Appropriate assessment is then undertaken by staff who are trained to do so.

Since late 2015, the Students Association has been present at a series of meetings where Prevent issues have been under discussion. Currently student unions are not
covered by the Security Act except around activities that take place on University services. As the Association’s social forums are sited on the University’s Virtual Learning Environment, we have been asked to cooperate in this area. To this end, the Students Association are required to ensure that staff managing the forums are briefed appropriately and two places have been secured at University training in April. We also need to ensure that student moderators are made aware of Prevent duty and that they would be expected to contact the OUSA Controller if in the course of their normal moderating activity they had any cause for concern in this area.

Currently the Mentor Moderators are being contacted with the purpose of raising their awareness of Prevent issues and the Student Association’s responsibilities in this area. We are also seeking their advice on the best way to inform the student moderators without raising anxiety or any unnecessary alarm.

In due course, a short addition to Forum guidelines will be required, together with an appropriate reference in the Spirit of OUSA Forums and in the online training pack to fulfill what is expected of the Students Association in order that the Open University is in compliance with the Security Act.

Wendy Burrell
Deputy General Manager