The Open University

Policy on conducting terrorism and extremism-related research

Introduction
1. As a Higher Education Institution, the Open University (OU) conducts a wide range of research. The University Principles of Academic Freedom state that ‘all members of the University’s academic community have freedom within the law to question and test established ideas or received wisdom (and) develop and advance new ideas or innovative principles’. The University Code of Practice for Research sets out the standards that govern the conduct of research at the OU and includes a requirement for researchers to comply with all legal and ethical requirements relating to their research.

2. Where research is being conducted on issues relating to security-sensitive, radical or extreme topics, particular care is needed. It is the duty of individual researchers, and the University, to ensure that research in these areas is carried out appropriately, and takes account of the requirement to safeguard both the researcher and wider society.

3. Therefore, this policy sets out the duties of the University and the individual researcher in this area.

Scope of policy
4. This policy applies to all those conducting research connected to terrorism, extremism and radicalisation on behalf of the University, including postgraduate research students and visiting academics. Both externally and internally-funded research is in scope, as is research carried out in collaboration with other organisations.

The University’s responsibility
5. The OU has a responsibility to protect researchers working in these areas from both the possible radicalising effects of viewing extremist or illegal materials, and misinterpretation of intent by law enforcement agencies (which may result in legal sanction). It also has a responsibility to support its researchers who are working in these areas. In order to fulfil these responsibilities, the University needs to be aware of all research being carried out that falls into the category of terrorism and extremism-related research.

Registration
6. In order to enable the University to carry out its duties under the counter-terrorism legislation, researchers working in these areas are required to register their work with the Human Research Ethics Committee by completing and returning the HREC Project Registration and Risk Checklist or HREC proforma.

Accessing sensitive websites
7. Researchers should be aware that extremist and terrorist-related websites may be under surveillance by law enforcement agencies. Visiting such websites and /or downloading security-sensitive materials, particularly if they are terrorism-related, can be viewed by them as prosecutable offences if it is considered that the intent is illegal. Registration of the research with the University (see the process described in

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1 The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims (oxforddictionaries.com)
2 Vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs (UK Government Prevent guidance 2015)
3 The process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups (UK Government Prevent guidance2015)
paragraph 6) allows the University to provide information, if required, that the activity is part of legitimate research work.

**Storing and transmitting security-sensitive material**

8. The Terrorism Act 2006 and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 outlaw the dissemination of terrorist publications if the individual concerned has the intention to encourage or induce others. Therefore particular care must be taken to look after research data and materials that fall into this category appropriately, and dissemination should be avoided wherever possible.

9. Any data, files or other digital or electronic items including audio or video material used or produced in the course of terrorism and extremist-related research must be stored appropriately. IT has issued guidance to enable researchers to do this. A copy of this guidance will be forwarded to the researcher concerned when the project is registered with HREC.

10. Physical materials such as manuals, reports or other hard copy documents should be scanned and uploaded to a secure area, and the original hard copy then destroyed. If this is not possible, then the material should be kept in a locked filing cabinet or similar.

**Further information**

Further information on the University’s approach to the Prevent Duty can be found on the Prevent intranet pages.

Questions or comments regarding any aspects of the University’s response to the Prevent Duty, can be addressed to the OU Prevent Co-ordinator.

**Raising concerns**

Genuine concerns relating to the use or misuse of sensitive research material by any member of University staff should be raised by contacting Human-Resources-Policy@open.ac.uk.

**Breach of the policy**

The requirements set out in this Policy form part of the OU Code of Practice for Research, and breaches of the Policy will be dealt with via the Procedure for dealing with allegations of academic malpractice or misconduct.