

Article

How Christian Universities Respond to Extremism

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Abstract: This research article explores how two English universities with Anglican foundations responded to UK government requirements to counter radicalization on campus. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with student union representatives, senior staff in the universities responsible for implementing the legal requirements and also those with special responsibility for religion. Christian foundation education institutions are required to implement government policy in response to visible radical and religious extremism. The UK higher education context is post-Christian (with lower levels of religious adherence) and post-secular (with greater plurality and greater prominence of controversial religious-related issues). It presents challenges for Christian university identity when meeting the complex concerns about dangers to students, university independence and free speech, and common values and public accountability. The research found that key to universities being able to respond effectively to the challenge of legal compliance and student welfare, was staff expertise in religion, but they have doubts about their capacity to respond effectively, and both staff and student have fears about this policy.

Keywords: Christian; university; radicalization; post-secular; secular

1. Introduction

Scholars have written about the place of religion in higher education which is variously seen as a story of declining influence or diversification of expression [1] or one of re-emergent visibility [2]. Campus engagements with students who self-identify as religious, are typically framed by evolving socio-cultural and political contexts, with political cultures, migration patterns, and economic stability being key factors of variance impacting on developments. These local circumstances also impact on the professional work of staff in Christian universities and the relationship between government and university in particular ways.

In the UK, an increasingly secular society in terms of social attitudes towards religious identification [3], Christian universities have a complex issue of self-identity, when faced with largely plural and diverse student populations. Universities are required to implement controversial government policy aimed at mitigating violent extremism and radicalization, commonly associated with religion. Concepts of secularity are complicated by more visible religious related issues of public policy concern, presenting themselves in a society that is becoming less religious. Consequently, scholars have begun to debate the concept of a post-secular environment for education [4]. In trying to make sense of the complexity and diversity of the manifestation of a secular age, Lieven Boeve has written about education in societies that he frames as post-Christian and post-secular, in articles on school curricula [5] and Christian university identity [6].

This underscores Casanova's caveat that debates surrounding the secular or post-secular can become marooned due to conflicting conceptions [7]. Secular can refer to a political process that removes religion from public view; the numerical decline of religious populations and growth of

alternative (non-religious) identifying belief-groups; the move from society which preferences a single religious expression to one in which there is a multitude of religious and belief expressions with no advantage given to any; movement between degrees of acceptability and tolerance of public and private religious expression. These trends appear to different extents and different degrees. As some countries see religious participation on the decline (e.g., UK), others see a stronger and more explicit association of religion and Government (e.g., Turkey). The research reported in this article relates to government control over religion and how Christian universities negotiate identity and independence in their secular plural contexts.

In this area, increased secularization is, paradoxically, accompanied by increased visibility of religion. Part of that visibility is due to the political association of certain forms of religion with actions and activities deemed radical and extreme. This manifests itself in a legal and public policy context that impinges directly on university life.

This article seeks in part to exemplify these features as (traditionally conceived) Christian foundation universities engage with government policy on radicalization and religion in a context of religion and belief plurality, with increased religious visibility. Though both of the universities in this study have Christian foundations, they are both diverse and plural in their student and staff composition. Their student bodies have majorities that signify no religious association so should not be construed as 'faith member institutions'. In England, Anglican foundation universities typically identify their historic links to Christianity and express a concern to present or extend values linked to faith [8].

This article reports the findings of a project that sought to find out how universities with Anglican foundations negotiated their values in a time of public anxiety about intolerance, extremism and minorities, through an examination of their approach to implementing the PREVENT policy. It introduces the policy context of counter-terrorism in UK universities, summarises the research approach, and provides a thematic analysis of the data before drawing some conclusions.

2. The Hostile Context of Counter-Terrorism Policy on Universities

The UK Government passed legislation in 2011 and then in 2015 in the *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act*. Section 26 of the Act refers to legal requirements of UK universities. This policy enshrined into law the PREVENT agenda as part of the wider counter-terrorism strategy—a strategy that can be denoted as part of a process of securitization of religion, a characteristic of the positioning of education in a secularizing age [9]. PREVENT is one strand of the Counter-Terrorism strategy called CONTEST which is comprised of 4 'Ps': PURSUE, PREVENT, PROTECT, and PREPARE. PREVENT is most closely linked to everyday life in Britain as it integrates education, healthcare, immigration systems, and other systems into a culture of training of public sector workers to spot those who may be vulnerable to radical extremism.

The UK government's PREVENT duty guidance webpage [10] contains specific guidance for higher education institutions and their duties under the current anti-terrorism law. This guidance identifies higher education institutions as bodies bound by this law with a requirement to identify an officer with responsibility for implementing the PREVENT duty. It lists key areas of interventions that higher education institutions must account for. These include external speakers and events, risk assessment of students, staff training, welfare and pastoral matters including chaplaincy, IT policies, student union societies, and monitoring and performance.

PREVENT has required changes for many working in university roles including student support and wellbeing, the work of interfaith councils, diversity and equality committees, governance groups, and chaplaincy. These bodies have had to respond to the new context and take on specific new duties as a result of the legal obligations under PREVENT.

PREVENT significantly increased the expectation placed on universities to extend safeguarding and monitoring of particular groups, especially, but not exclusively, Muslim students and staff. How universities seek to extend an ethic of hospitality, or 'tolerance', towards a broad range of students and

staff from plural and diverse backgrounds, has become challenged by the security concerns that are actually or are perceived to be focused on one segment of the university population, namely Muslims.

There has been considerable controversy around these initiatives among higher education staff and students. The National Union of Students has coordinated a 'Preventing PREVENT' project [11] which encourages students across British universities to oppose PREVENT. The material produced to support this campaign specifically identified as criticisms of PREVENT strategy:

- A tokenistic inclusion of non-Muslim extremism whilst it is overwhelming and disproportionately focused on Muslims;
- The secretive nature of PREVENT;
- Conflating safeguarding with community cohesion;
- The Islamophobic context in Britain;
- The creation of a surveillance state;
- The blurring of the lines of welfare provision and national security;
- Changing the fundamental nature of the relationship between staff and students (students not suspects);
- The lack of empirical support for the effectiveness of the strategy;
- The promotion of particular theological strands of Islam over others.

A similar project has been coordinated by the University and College Union (UCU) [12] which also opposes PREVENT and encourages dissent among staff members. At its 2015 Congress, UCU passed policy 11 which set out numerous objections to the PREVENT duty. These included the concern that it threatened academic freedom and freedom of speech, would stifle campus activism, would require university tutors to label students in what was essentially a racist way. A particular concern is the change and disruption of the tutor–student relationship with one that has a surveillance agenda that is discriminatory towards Muslims and legitimises Islamophobia and xenophobia. The requirement to monitor Muslim students will destroy the trust needed for an appropriate learning environment and encourage discrimination and could help racist parties flourish.

The PREVENT policy places a significant anti-terrorism legal duty on universities at a time of considerable public anxiety. It brings into a single focus the following factors:

- issues around student wellbeing and chaplaincy;
- issues around student religious affiliation and practice;
- issues around free speech and freedom in university culture, society and politics;
- issues around equality, inclusion and respect for different religions and beliefs;
- issues around staff-student relationships.

These responses in the professional working of universities are accompanied by a burgeoning body of academic literature surrounding the factors linked to PREVENT and higher education. For example, the 2017 edited collection by Panjwani, Revell, and Gholami [13] contains a number of differently authored studies that critically engage the politics of this connection. Gambetta and Hertog's study [14] explores in detail cases of educated people becoming involved in radical extremism in their 2016 book and the contexts surrounding those cases. There is not space here to provide a comprehensive review of critical discussion surrounding PREVENT, but it is more important in identifying the policy positions of the students' union and the main university academics' union, both of which are deeply hostile to the policy.

Given this hostility, and the extent to which policy around radicalisation has become a critical issue in political discourse, this project seeks to explore how academics, students, and professional officers in universities with Anglican foundations understand and interpret PREVENT and their Anglican university identity in context. From the interviews at two universities, we learn that academics, students, and university officers have conflicted concerns about the implementation of government

PREVENT policy for ethical, intellectual, and practical reasons as well as a strong concern that campus life is a welcoming one marked by freedom of speech. The relationship with an Anglican university identity is full of tension as religion is related both to the institutional culture they seek to cultivate, to greater or lesser extents and yet is also an identified feature associated with the foci that policy seeks to address and limit.

3. Methods

This was a qualitative research project which wanted to find out how Christian universities (universities with an Anglican foundation) were responding to radicalization, in particular the government expectations placed on universities. Two universities in the south of England were chosen, one with a comparatively low number of students (a small university) and one with a large number of students. Both are situated in provincial cathedral towns. 'Foundation' refers to a relationship with a Church. It is defined in the instruments or articles of the institutions indicating a historic connection, as well as some degree of ongoing connection which might manifest in particular provision requirements. These might relate to the curriculum focus (such as the education of teaching and health professionals) features of the pastoral care of students (such the employment of a chaplain and maintenance of a chaplaincy) and influence in leadership and governance (such as Church position on the university governing body and religious requirements of the Vice Chancellor). These are not consistently applied in both universities in the research. 'Foundation' does not refer to the religion and belief status of the staff or students. The institutions chosen were different in terms of the extent to which they foregrounded their self-identification of their Anglican foundation identity. University P tended to foreground its Anglican identity more directly and publicly than University Q.

Interviews were conducted with key individuals responsible for the process of responding to the proposal in university management and representatives of students' unions from the time the universities implemented their practical responses. Eight participants were identified and approached through contacts within each institution. It was important to find particular officers, academics, and students who had worked with the development and implementation of the PREVENT policy response. Semi-structured in-depth interviews [15] took place between April and July 2017 with participants from two universities with Anglican foundations in England, five from one and three from the other. The participants included men and women and people who self-identified as Christians, Muslims, and of no religious background. The students were in their 20s and the staff were in their 40s and 50s.

Participants from the institutions included:

- Two current students with senior experience of Student Union work (at union officer level), and one former student union officer who is now an intern at the university;
- Six members of staff. These held multiple roles including operating responsibilities, including those with responsibility for work on PREVENT, a member of staff from within the Chaplaincy, a member of staff responsible for diversity and equality. Two hold senior university management team positions (one from each university) The sample included Christians (of differing denominations), Muslims, and those of no expressed faith or belief. The key priority was identifying and interviewing staff involved in the PREVENT policy and members of students' unions at the time of the implementation.

The majority of people interviewed self-identified as religious during the interviews (most were Christians and one was Muslim). Those interviewed included people from a range of different genders and sexual orientations. Their names are not revealed in this report. Four were interviewed individually and there were two interviews each with two participants. Interviews lasted 1–1.5 h. All interviews took place on their respective campuses. The six interviews used a semi-structured format, were conducted in private, with the consent of participants and the associated institutions. A specific question was asked about their involvement in the development of the PREVENT/Fundamental British Values university policy and any debates. They were asked about what happened, what the issues were

that were discussed, what the key debates were and how things were resolved. Questions were also asked about the values and Christian foundation of the university, the feelings about the government's motivations for the policy and any programmes of training used by the university in relation to PREVENT. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and analysed to draw out thematic patterns. Participants were made aware of a right to withdraw from the process. Recordings and transcriptions were held in secure environments and in accordance to UK legislation which the participants were informed about.

This article offers an interpretation of the interviews in the context of the present heightened concerns about extremism, and the increasing expectations for accountability.

4. Interpreting the Interview Data

Five key themes categories emerged during the interview process as it followed the participants' narrative. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed and those themes were confirmed. The aim of the research was to illuminate the understanding and thinking of professionals and students engaged in the experience of the implementation of a controversial policy and therefore the context and narrative of the participants' responses. The categories group data which have similar characteristics.

4.1. Confidence and Competence in Managing Religious Dimensions of University Life

In both of the Anglican foundation universities, Senior Management Team (SMT) members identified a need to be able to speak and make decisions in a religiously informed way when it comes to judgements around PREVENT. The controversy of the policy and the risk of poor implementation was acutely realized and spoken about by everyone interviewed.

One of the repercussions of the PREVENT expectations has been to elevate to a high level, in terms of senior management engagement, discussions about religion. Because of the specifications within the policy, these discussions demanded SMT engaged with differences within religion, specifically Islam, and an awareness of the question of a concern that student piety might be wrongly interpreted as problematic. Those with ultimate responsibility for the PREVENT duty, are expected by the policy to have a working understanding of religion and their student body's religiosity, to be able to make decisions around its implementation. When describing events related to the PREVENT policy, it was clear from the remarks made by SMT members, that PREVENT required managers to deal intelligently with religion as a topic. They are required to discuss the activity of chaplains, the presence or absence of certain a student-led societies (in particular Muslim Society and Christian Unions) and the use of university resources for religious association. The policy requires discussion around the provision and monitoring of places of worship, the monitoring of outside speakers invited by religious societies, the relationship between those societies and outside organisations, and the personal tutor role when it came to making judgements about students who were making changes in their life, such as becoming more pious in their religious practice.

All of the participants commented in some way, that good religious knowledge and understanding, including levels of understanding that include confidence around the diversity of forms of religious expression and also a confidence in engagement with students on matters of a religious nature, has become a critical factor that students, staff members, and senior leaders spoke about. Confidence and expertise in these areas might help students feel more confident that decisions being made by staff are informed, but student perception about this capacity is an issue of concern. The national campaign is known in the student bodies and there are anxieties around how universities are implementing PREVENT. One student union officer expressed a concern that university staff might misinterpret religiosity with the potential risk of long-term negative outcomes for them.

“and the biggest problem that I have with PREVENT and this is something that not a lot of people think about, is because these things, it's something that organisations like 'Teachers, not Informers' actually talk about, is that the people who actually put on their shoulders to

spy on students—this is teachers. Teachers and lecturers who are actually not professionally trained to do so". [Student 1 at University P]

This concern was echoed by senior managers and staff members more generally and led to a heightened focus of attention around decision making about whether recommendations for CHANNEL be made or not (CHANNEL is the next step after an initially identified concern regarding a student has been made).

This highlights the importance not only of university managers and staff have competence in religious understanding, particular in terms of their student and staff body, but also of this expertise being understood and visible to the student body. The consequence of students not having that confidence is a heightened sense of fear about potential misapplication or crude application of PREVENT requirements. Students have such fears and these became manifest in phrases such as 'PREVENT list', 'I wonder am I on the list', 'Should I be careful about my dissertation topic'.

The university managers who were interviewed felt it was essential to communicate their own doubts about the policy, making clear the university is 'reluctantly compliant' to counter fears in the student and staff bodies that the university was simply accepting the assumptions surrounding the policy. The Chaplain expressed this in terms of being consistent with higher education's intellectual independent status as a critical examiner of all things. For Anglican universities seeking to advance their Anglican identity more strongly, there is scope to link this intellectual independence with the 'alternative perspective' that an Anglican institution might be said to have about education and the Christian tradition of critical reflection. This was referred to by staff members and students in both institutions.

4.2. Right-Wing Extremism, Christianity, and Student Societies

Although much of the attention around PREVENT in terms of student societies has been focused on Muslim societies, staff, and students at Anglican universities identified issues with Christian and also some non-religious societies and groups. Whatever the true intention of the government in applying the PREVENT policy, in the implementation in Anglican universities, the policy is being applied in ways that concern groups other than Muslim.

In one case a key chaplaincy intervention in University Q challenged a particular narrative within a Christian society related to the status of women and questions around attitudes towards members of the LGBTQ+ community. Although this was not treated as a PREVENT matter, the narrative being challenged was one that extremist organizations similarly draw on. According to SMT staff member 2, the role of the chaplain (who was acting autonomously, not under instruction from senior management or PREVENT officer) was vital in helping to mentor that situation to a more open, tolerant ethos, reflective of a broader Christian perspective than the previous ethos.

By way of comparison, similar initiatives, sometimes involving directly institution-sanctioned challenges to society ethos, had taken place with other kinds of societies, including sports societies. One mentioned included an intervention to remove certain sexualized practices for new society members that magnified sexist attitudes.

University staff were dealing with a wider set of religiously sensitive matters related to values, ethos and wellbeing. These that could link to PREVENT, in so far as extremists attitudes to issues of gender equality and sexual orientation equality can be associated with socially conservative attitudes in religious or cultural groups that are not violent.

Staff interviewed also identified concerns about far-right extremism that their PREVENT activity included. At the universities involved this was more prominent than examples involving Muslim students and staff officers commented this was perceived to be a more serious threat. There were more specific examples of issues in this category though this may be a result of the universities having smaller populations of Muslim students than other universities. Far-right extremism is a genuine issue of concern by university staff with the responsibility for PREVENT oversight.

One senior staff member expressed a general concern about the under-reporting of far-right activity. Arguably this is tangentially bolstered by the National Union of Students (NUS) account that PREVENT is mainly an Islamophobia and racist tool. By labelling the references to far-right extremism as tokenistic, the opponents of PREVENT downplay concerns about far-right extremism. University Q explicitly puts a strong emphasis on the far right in training as was a particular local issue of concern raised in security reports provided by the Police to the university.

There is a tentative association between Christianity and far-right groups. Far-right organizations in England make references to Christian heritage to bolster their own narratives, and sometimes promote socially conservative attitudes to women, as well as socially excluding attitudes towards other religions, in particular, Islam, identifying its foreignness to England's Christian character. They also exhibit prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities. Some Christian organisations hold similar views and in the public debate Christianity is commonly linked to socially conservative attitudes and opposing views on LGBTQ+ issues. Though the Church of England holds a broader position on these issues, its public and unresolved debate about LGBTQ+ issues and women Bishops is a potential risk area for Anglican universities seeking to both extend a welcoming, hospitable, confident Christian identity and punish university staff or student members who are discriminatory in these areas.

4.3. Narrative Complexity: Free Speech, Motivations Suspicion, Tokenism, and Welcome

One of the factors identified by staff in the universities interviewed was around what can best be described as narrative complexity. The critical narrative around PREVENT, found in union literature and critical academic literature, is that it is a policy that is irredeemably Islamophobic and racist because the true targets of the policy are Muslims. Some students expressed concerns that the inclusion of far-right concerns in PREVENT policy documentation and training was tokenistic. In one of the universities involved, University P, this was a major concern within the student body with a political debate taking place in the previous year attracting over a hundred students, and the creation of a 'preventing PREVENT' strategy.

Students interviewed expressed concerns about the degree of surveillance and active profiling at the university and the potential for poor judgement to lead to difficult consequences:

"Here is where I had the worry because I am not sure what the university have access to. Like this is what I am like 'do they know what I am googling?' Like if I start googling stuff towards my degree do they have the access to see what I am googling? I don't know if I was under PREVENT, I might be. Now, this is the biggest danger, they don't tell you, they don't tell you until it is too late. If you are not on the level where they are 100% sure that something is going on, or they think they're 100% sure but 99% of the times they are wrong, and the police officers come to your door drag you and start like questioning this stuff, you don't know if you are under PREVENT. Like I'm not going to be surprised with the degree that I am doing with being an international student, with being with darker skin and all this stuff and having the beard, it's not going to be a surprise for me if I am on the list of the PREVENT officers". (Student 1 at University P. Student 1 is an international Muslim student)

This is clearly a fear for this student, although both students at University P commented that they felt free to debate PREVENT in their classes.

"[Student 1] Like actually we are really encouraged to actually speak up your mind and say what you want to, especially like in religious studies classes sometimes we even discuss things like PREVENT. In politics classes, we discuss things like PREVENT with our lecturers. Like it's a really open debate. But I think it's because of the nature of my degree like I don't think that if you study mathematics you're going to have such a conversation, or if you study animal science you're not going to have this type of conversation.

[Interviewer] What about Education, because obviously, you've got kind of the Education side, that sounds quite similar to what you said?

[Student 2] Yes I had some very similar experiences in the fact that lecturers were very open to allow you to challenge views as much as possible. And there were some, let's say not controversial modules but modules that would bring out views that probably could be controversial for certain people. But I don't think anyone has ever felt they had to keep those views to themselves or never felt they could speak up about their views".

A different example which reflected this kind of complexity about the relationship between the narrative and the actual risks was recalled by Staff member 1 at University P where an ethnically white recent convert to Islam had been expelled for threatening behaviour. There was a sense of trying to counter tendencies within the policy that seemed to focus on one particular group. "We were taking something that had particular targets in sight and deliberately trying to make it more generic." (Staff Member 2, University P).

There was a kind of policy pacification and also recontextualization to the particular needs of particular institutions with regional issues that might differ. One staff member interviewee at University P described this as trying to add a concern about possible radicalization to a list of concerns that the university might have about student welfare in general, rather than adopting a wholly different approach. A staff member at university Q said that PREVENT had been incorporated into the broader wellbeing strategy of the university. It included a strong emphasis on freedom of speech and was relatively 'soft touch' around speakers. This was because risk assessments had been undertaken that identified that key areas of concern were to be found elsewhere.

Within both universities, there was a concern to ensure the policy was outworked in the context of the universities values.

"[We] make sure that those legal requirements are satisfied but find any of making should those requirements being outworked in this specific context in a way that reflects [university Q's] values and approaches". (SMT Staff member 1 University Q)

Different views were expressed about the relationship between the Anglican tradition, the university and the PREVENT policy and they were nuanced. Staff members from university Q supported a low profile reference to the Anglican foundation and a high profile expression of institutional concern about the government policy. Members from university expressed a more public and explicit association with the Anglican foundation and felt the university took a cooperative stance to the policy, though they themselves had grave reservations about it.

One interviewee saw a possible intellectual compatibility between the policy, the university, and the Anglican tradition, but offered caveats about how the policy might be interpreted in problematic ways, and might come into conflict with some Christian ideas especially given the Anglican tradition of giving a maximum degree of latitude and accommodation of ideas on the one hand and for worship the Book of Common Prayers on the other:

"... it is the tradition that supports a common life, common practice, common understanding but gives great freedom for challenge, questioning. so hopefully it is an environment that naturally works against a radical idea which is unsustainable or unjustifiable. Part of the difficulty is the language itself. Is what is radical wrong is what is extreme necessarily wrong because these are relative terms measured against what are particularly or judged to be norms by a society at a certain place and a certain time so in a sense I am nervous about that kind of language because some positions of the Reformation could be described as radical or extreme, there was ways of interpretation Jesus that sees him as radical or extremes, so what matters more is not the idea itself but the fact that the ideas are tested, that the spirits are tested, if you will. So there's not a prejudice about 'if you say x then that must be wrong' but if you say x it must be testable". (Chaplain Staff Member 2, University P)

A key issue is the capacity, clarity, and confidence for universities at a senior level to be confident in their self-understanding as a university with a Christian foundation that welcomes students of all backgrounds. Students from both universities thought that the welcome offered to students of different religions was an important priority for development related to these issues.

“And I understand that we can have our church background and our links to the church and I don’t mind that at all but I think as part of that as . . . said then we need to be welcoming of all religions and show that’s what Christianity is about and it’s about welcoming everyone from all different backgrounds”. (Student 2, University P)

Another student from University Q made a similar point and commented that the university needed to be better at celebrating the different kinds of people who are at the university.

“we are being extremely welcoming of different cultures but we need to be better at celebrating the different kinds of people who are at the university and to make leaders of the people who are here”. (Former Student 1, University Q)

From a meta perspective, clear threads of policy reinterpretation are present in the policy discussion and implementation in Anglican universities. A constructivist and opportunistic hermeneutic is evidently at play by staff members and students each seeking to interpret the university’s Christian identity through this issue.

4.4. Compliance, Subversion, Intellectual Criticality, and Training

Staff Member 1 at University P commented that the concerns expressed by staff members fell into two kinds: a worry that the university might not be doing enough to protect students and others from terrorism, and a worry that the university was being unethical in engaging with the PREVENT strategy.

This feature came up consistently across all the staff members and students interviewed. There is a tension in seeking to be a values-led institution, and the requirement to be compliant to the law. In particular, very serious reservations were expressed about exposing the student–staff relationship to safeguarding processes.

“My background is in the close reading of texts, so any text must be read closely and critically, which is not to say negatively, that’s not what I understand by critically, but I, you know, we continue to have those critical close reading based conversations of PREVENT. I’m not, I’m not a . . . an advocate of PREVENT at a personal level but I recognise that it is something we are required to comply with. I tend to use the language of subversion rather than revolution”. (SMT Staff Member 2, University Q)

The linking of safeguarding responses to judgments about religiosity causes considerable worry for everyone. The concerns about the true motivations of government and the desire for intellectual independence play a key role in constructing a need for universities to adopt a reluctantly compliant but intellectually critical approach to the policy. The question of subversion and revolution reveals an essential problematic around this policy. This language suggests legal obligations may be met in such a way that undermines some aspects of the purpose of the policy.

This was more than merely an ideological disagreement with government policy but went more deeply into the practical possibility of supporting staff to make judgments that could have life-changing impacts in areas where there is considerable uncertainty—such as deciding whether a student is at risk. SMT Staff member 2 at University Q was direct about the basic problem of expecting staff to be able to make secure judgements about these kinds of risk, given the degree of uncertainty in the field of judging risk and future direction of change in future student development.

The need to take a public position of unsatisfied or reluctant compliance was identified by students. It was important for students to know that their universities were critical of policy and enacted it out of

legal duty. It was important that the staff also heard from their SMT members a critical understanding of the weaknesses of the policy, even if they were compelled to undertake certain processes. There was a strong sense of a wish for dissent among students and some academic members of staff, and a reluctant compliance from the senior managers and operating officers.

The difficulty of agreeing to the line in the balance between critical independence and legal compliance was a key challenge for universities. In the case of training for staff, University P created a task group to agree on a bespoke training package that was specifically orientated to take the least discriminatory approach to PREVENT. This came about after training packages available were scrutinized, but all found wanting. Some voices within the task group wanted a more oppositional and critical element to be expressed within the training but this was not agreed. The attempt to provide a modified approach which included all opinions about PREVENT was particularly difficult and did not result in something that was supported by all. The proposed solution of a more moral way of implementing PREVENT did not gain unanimous support.

University Q identified training for those it considered needed the training but also made public its general critical view of the policy and training, whilst still complying with the law.

An analysis of university positioning reveals ethical risks. University P could be accused of muddying its ethical standpoints by trying to create a veneer of respectability with an essentially immoral policy whilst University Q might be accused of not truly taking seriously its commitment to student safeguarding. Both universities would reject these criticisms and both would have a strong basis for such as rejection as each was genuinely committed to reaching the right balance in executing responsibilities, as far as could be judged from the interviews.

4.5. University Chaplaincy and Staff Who Engage with Religious Students and Local Religious Institutions

One factor that clearly matters is having staff who understand religious development in young people, and who understood that university life was a key time of change for learners, where they tried on different approaches to life and broke out of the traditions of their upbringing. Staff who are pastorally attuned and able to engage and intervene in a capacity that is outside the usual academic–student relationship is clearly a matter of importance. In the interviews it was clear that there were examples when staff members in important student engagement roles had good knowledge and engagement with religious students, and that this mattered significantly:

“I was drawing on a past of also working with students. I had worked with Muslims students, you know some years previously looking at, consulting with them about their experience at University P, what they wanted, what their relationship was with the Mosque . . . and you know, so I’d had quite a lot of engagement with Muslim students”. (Equality and Diversity Staff member 1 at University P)

Staff members commented that this made a material difference to the approach taken at University P describing a critical moment in the meetings developing policy when that insight was drawn on to directly challenge assumptions about religiosity that would classify devotion as suspicious.

Chaplains have a new dimension to their role in that they are specifically identified in government policy as having a role in the PREVENT agenda. Chaplains are common features of English universities though may be salaried, unsalaried, lay or ordained, denominationally and religiously particular (representing a Church or religion) or with a specific multifaith/worldview mandate. Chaplains in universities with Anglican foundation tend to be members of the Church of England, and usually ordained ministers of the Church. Because they provide spiritual pastoral services and operate in a liminal space between the academic staff and student body, often supporting groups of students as well as engaging with them in personal and pastoral capacity, they are likely to encounter student groups in quite a different way from usual teaching staff, as illuminated by Peter McGrail and John Sullivan [16]. They are more likely to be involved in university committees and structures concerned with students’ religious identity and may have responsibility for oversight and maintenance of places

of worship, and therefore be familiar with activities taking place in those spaces and in the student groups that they come into contact with. They are likely to have detailed academic and practical knowledge of religious life and expression in the student body and are more likely to hear about concerns of a religious nature from students and staff.

University P has opportunities for links between the student experience, staff members, and representations of the different religions on campus through a facility established by the chaplaincy. University Q participants mentioned the perceived benefit of having a chaplain strongly linked to student life and societies. The presence of a strong chaplaincy was important in the universities where interviews took place. That included pastoral intervention in student societies and also in terms of critical advisors on policy development.

Chaplains at university P formed a multi-religious advisory group with members of any religion and belief positions and links to local religious communities, which formed a structure to discuss matters of concern about the implementation of the PREVENT policy, among many other things, and also provided a source of expertise about local religious conditions. This enabled the university to seek advice about questions related to the range of religious behaviour being expressed by its student body.

The inclusion of the Chaplain on a working party established to oversee the implementation of the requirements of PREVENT led to a change in strategy by the university management. There had been a suggestion that attendance at prayer in Muslim prayer rooms would be monitored through a register system without sufficient cognisance of the degree of insensitivity the monitoring of worship patterns in this way might generate. This led to a change in strategy by the university management where there had been a suggestion that attendance at prayer in Muslim prayer rooms would be monitored through a register system. As a result, this proposal was dropped.

In one case a chaplain facilitated change in a student religious group that had developed a particularly narrow approach to student leadership that excluded women, to one that was inclusive and in accordance with the university's expressed values. This was facilitated without a formal process of sanction from university management but through a soft influence strategy (i.e., without a formal sanction of the official process being required).

In the particular Anglican institutions involved, having effective chaplaincy provided a key resource to SMT and the student body. Whilst chaplaincies are common in many kinds of campuses, that Anglican foundation institutional association with the chaplaincy provided an additional resource. In some cases, the Anglican chaplaincy had undertaken extensive work to make links with religious leaders of many religions to provide an extended network of support. The Chaplain interviewed commented that because of their explicit mention in the PREVENT policy, the role of chaplains and chaplaincy, as well as other officers with a specialist understanding of religion and belief, has been brought to the attention of university leaders and managers and their pastoral duties are now linked to the question of student safeguarding due to the PREVENT policy.

5. Concluding Discussions

Many UK universities face a campus context which is visibly religiously diverse and also laden with political policy objectives and pastoral responsibilities and duties. Universities with particular religious foundations are additionally challenged by those identities and any ethical requirements that such identities demand, and how they might frame or condition any response to the issues given their identities. The staff interviewed said that their universities try to be a welcoming and inclusive environment for students of all beliefs and none. University management is left to lead their staff and managers to articulate and negotiate such identities as they seek to welcome and safeguard all students and engage in a policy context which is clearly felt by staff and students as hostile. In the UK, specialist understanding of religion has become more important in the implementation of government policies that are viewed with suspicion. University management is challenged to ensure staff members feel in a position to make judgements expected by the PREVENT policy, in particular in terms of judging when a student may be vulnerable to radicalization, when many may feel making

such judgements undermines their relationship with students. A poor knowledge of religiosity in university communities is likely to impair such judgements whether or not they are morally justifiable.

The findings of this small-scale qualitative study sustain the view that knowledge should include some specific elements. As well as an understanding of the diversity of Islam there should be an understanding of the distinction between religious piety and extremism. In addition, there should be an understanding of the links made between far-right organizations and Christianity and the possible relationship between socially conservative religious attitudes to certain issues (especially around sexuality and also views of other religious truth claims) and the positions taken on those issues and language used by organizations that advocate intolerance, violence and terror to secure their objectives. There are complex links between faith, religious and political radicalization, and the promotion of equality and LGBTQ+ issues. There is also a narrow path to be taken in balancing between the right to free speech and free belief on campus, with intolerant attitudes and ideas that are expressed in some groups.

Given that university time is a period when students experiment and make important decisions and changes in their view of life and world, including religious changes, there is an inevitable difficulty in applying this policy, given the uncertainty around these judgment areas. Religious identity is being associated with radicalization, extremism and terrorism, and that association, necessitated by the required implementing of the PREVENT policy on university campuses, establishes an intersectional link between securitization and secularization.

The religiously founded institution negotiates the intersection of state attempts at surveillance and detoxification of religion, in its attempt to curtail religious radicalization. The secular (or post-secular) interconnects with key questions around the responsibility of public institutions and the freedoms and limitations on religious expression and identity. How a university might be Christian or secular, or indeed independent, is affected by the political context in terms of security and public threat, as well as attitudes towards accountability. There is clearly a perception that the (secular) government authorities expect all universities, (including Christian ones), to police Muslim activity in some ways and therefore, arguably, become involved in the limitation of the freedom of expression and belief because of fear and danger. Radicalisation and terrorism provoke increased secularization with accompanying limitations on liberty. This comes in the name of responsibility and accountability in higher education.

Whether we are living in what may be described as an 'age' (or locality) that is secular, one that is marked by multiple secularities or one that is marked by post secularity, one recommendation from this research is that a sophisticated understanding of the forms of religious expression appears to be an essential organizational requirement in education institutions. From the interviews, a poor understanding of the various elements listed becomes an obstacle or threat to either effective decision making around the implementation of the PREVENT policy or indeed its critique. It increases the likelihood of bad judgements that could significantly harm staff-student relationships and individual student opportunities and wellbeing. The SMT Staff member from University Q simply did not think accurate and appropriate judgements could be made by staff in general about the risk of radicalization.

A strong and coherent self-understanding appears to be an asset in intervening and contribution to the discussions around the development of the local policy of PREVENT and how it could be implemented. This was true irrespective of the extent to which a university sought to foreground its Anglican identity (which university P might be characterized as doing) or wore such an identity 'lightly' (which staff at university Q self-identified their institution). In any context, what seemed to matter in the decision making and implementation approach, was a confidence and coherence about identity, aims and the culture of the institutions.

Regardless of whether the PREVENT policy itself is intrinsically flawed (a matter beyond the scope of this research), a second recommendation is for a clarification of how Christian universities communicate their stance on the policy with all stakeholders, and whether that communication contains tones of reluctant compliance, contextualization, subversion, and intellectual criticality.

A third recommendation is that some involvement of chaplaincy, or other religiously literate officers, in guidance, development, and implementation of PREVENT policy is clearly necessary but this may also bring a risk for chaplains if they are so closely associated with institutional management on such a controversial matter.

One question which is asked through this context is whether an open secular environment that is inclusive to diversity, fractures in the face of a less tolerant, possibly even consciously (or unconsciously) anti-religious government policy. In becoming increasingly 'independent' from religious control, in what was ostensibly viewed as a more open and progressive liberal society, Christian foundation universities risk a loss of independence as government policy becomes less tolerant of religious freedom, and more focused on securitization and surveillance. A final recommendation from this research is for Christian universities to establish and communicate a clarity about their self-understanding as religious institutions. Whereas they might have once (rightly or wrongly) been viewed as guardians of Christian cultural normativity and opponents of progress, Christian universities could take on a new mantle in creating the open, plural, and tolerant societies they were previously cast as opposing. In an, arguably, post-Christian and post-secular society, Christian universities might find a voice and purpose in support of hospitable, faith-inclusive and dialogic campus communities.

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