

Implementing the Prevent duty: Information sharing

Sharing information is a key element of the Prevent duty in higher education. The statutory guidance includes an expectation that higher education providers will share concerns about individuals that may be vulnerable to being drawn in to terrorism, where appropriate, and engage with local partners such as police and the Department for Education's regional coordinators for higher and further education.

Information sharing is also vital to help a provider understand the locality in which they operate, the wider context and their assessment of risk.

The value of information sharing

The OfS's experience of Prevent shows that higher education providers recognise there is real value in information sharing and partnership working, though it has its challenges.

Early in 2018 we identified this as an area to explore, so that we could provide more support. The shifting data landscape, driven by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), gave added impetus.

In June 2018 we held two workshops covering information sharing. The aim was to highlight its importance, identify solutions to some of the barriers, and share good practice – including how providers can engage with partners to ensure they are receiving appropriate information. This is important for safeguarding, managing events and developing a response to risks and threats.

A range of higher education representatives, practitioners and agencies took part in the workshops including the DfE, National Counter-Terrorism Police and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Topics covered included:

- how the Prevent duty fits within the broader counter-terrorism strategy
- access to information and subsequent response to risk
- the value of sharing information widely and appropriately
- the importance of trust, role clarity and clear boundaries.

Speaking at the London event on 12 June, the Minister of State for Security and Economic Crime, Ben Wallace, discussed his perspectives on the Prevent duty and reflected on his experiences, not just in relation to higher education, but in other sectors and local communities. The Minister asked participants about the challenges they face and welcomed meeting representatives in future to further this work.

Both the ICO and legal firm Shakespeare Martineau emphasised that sharing information appropriately under the requirements of both GDPR and the Prevent duty is legitimate but that higher education providers may wish to consider a greater focus on transparency as part of this. This is a complex area and we are looking at how we can direct providers for further guidance.

There are also information sharing considerations beyond the legal framework. Gary Neave from the Church of England drew on his experience to discuss pastoral care, what it means to have someone's trust, and the barriers that breaking trust can create.

Information sharing in relation to Prevent can be complex. There is no one simple answer to the question of how information should be shared and with whom. However, the events in June confirmed some key points:

- It is very important to work in partnership, both within an institution and with external partners.
- This can deliver real benefits when managed well – for example by ensuring that individuals can get expert, timely and responsive support.

As the lively discussions at these events showed, there is a keen interest in exploring how best to make information sharing work.

The OfS Prevent team will continue working with stakeholders to help share knowledge and experience in this area. If you are keen to be involved, or have any suggestions for what could be improved, please contact us at prevent@officeforstudents.org.uk. All contributions are welcome.