

Implementing the Prevent duty: Student engagement

Across the sector, Prevent duty implementation is typically embedded within student welfare and safeguarding, which are strategic priorities for the OfS. As monitor for compliance with the duty, the OfS is also committed to ensuring continued improvement and sharing of practice.

Engagement with students is not only a requirement of the duty, but meaningful engagement is fundamental to its effective implementation.

Regional workshops

In response to feedback from the sector, the OfS held a series of regional workshops in May 2018 aimed at showcasing how the sector is approaching student engagement.

More than 200 people signed up, including both practitioners and student representatives. The student representatives' involvement was especially welcome. The OfS puts students at the centre of what we do: we want every student to have a fulfilling experience of higher education.

The workshops explored how working with students can help make implementation of the Prevent duty inclusive and beneficial for broader communities, as well as having a positive impact on their time in higher education. Additional input was provided by the Department for Education, the Charity Commission and the [Tim Parry and Jonathan Ball Peace Foundation](#), a charity specialising in conflict resolution.

As a forum to share effective practice and find solutions to barriers, the workshops produced insights which will help many working on student engagement in relation to Prevent:

- Effective implementation of the Prevent duty takes focus, investment, planning, diplomacy, trust and good communication. With student populations and sabbatical teams changing yearly, providers need to be flexible and creative.
- Students have differing opinions, and this needs to guide approaches to engagement. It is important to understand the student demographic; try to find out why students do or do not engage with the Prevent duty; identify what if anything you can do in response; and recognise that if some do not engage, this should not deter continued efforts to reach students.
- Engagement with students should use a variety of formal and informal channels, including opportunities for open dialogue with all students. Transparency is vital.
- Prevent should ideally be embedded within providers' welfare and safeguarding areas, and integrated into existing support structures and processes and wider initiatives run by the institution. It should become a standard item at Committee level.
- It is important to have clear policies and processes which outline the requirements of all users, to develop focused training using appropriate materials, and to conduct equality impact assessments.
- More widely, higher education providers also find it valuable to promote understanding, build confidence and facilitate interaction across institutions and wider/local communities.

The OfS's role

The OfS will continue to foster improvement in student engagement as we move to a more risk-based approach to monitoring.

Feedback following the events suggested that the OfS should continue to establish networks and facilitate opportunities to share ideas and good practice – at governance, senior management and practitioner levels. The value of promoting and showcasing effective engagement with the Prevent duty was confirmed and it was suggested that we could further develop guidance, case studies and training materials. We will consider these suggestions as part of our future planning.

Getting involved

If you are a student and keen to be involved in influencing this important area of work, the OfS Prevent team would be keen to hear from you.

You may have ideas about how we can better engage with students, or you may be able to help us identify any gaps and what we might do in response. If so, please get in touch at prevent@officeforstudents.org.uk.