

## **Submission re prevent duty guidance**

The Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) is an interdenominational organisation with over 4,500 British doctor members in all branches of medicine. A registered charity, it is linked to about 70 similar bodies in other countries throughout the world. There are around 800 student members spread throughout all the medical schools in the UK.

Although not a 'body listed in Schedule 3', we have an interest in this draft guidance as part of our work involves providing speakers for student groups on university campuses throughout the UK.

As such our comments are confined to the 'Higher Education' section of the draft, from paragraphs 50-74 inclusive.

We affirm the importance of free speech on campus, and recognise the potential risk of misuse of higher education institutions as platforms for drawing people into terrorism. However we are concerned that the guidance as currently drafted would have a chilling effect on free speech and freedom of association, wholly disproportionate to its impact on the prevention of terrorism.

Of particular concern are the draft recommendations on 'Speakers and Events' (paragraphs 64-71). The draft rightly notes (paragraph 65) the duty of the university to ensure freedom of speech. However we see the provisions expected in paragraph 66 as being incompatible with ensuring freedom of speech.

Fourteen days' notice for booking a speaker for an event is impractical for a student society such as a Christian Union that may well have an external speaker visiting every week, and where last minute changes are sometimes necessary. A small group of Christian medical students might well arrange for a local doctor to join them for a meeting on campus to discuss an ethical issue at short notice. Such events would appear to be banned by this guidance. What about a long planned event where a speaker is unwell the day before, and a replacement is brought in?

Submission of content for such an event would restrict the nature of events on campus. If a debate or discussion is held, it may be very difficult to know the exact content of such an event in advance. Is such debate to be stifled?

Institutions of higher education will not want to see their students cloistered as a result of an overprotective bureaucracy, which places unreasonable demands on many perfectly legitimate outside speakers who will be effectively censored. This guidance will perhaps unintentionally lead to an increasingly narrow spectrum of views being represented and debated on campus. Without exposure to a broad range of views and healthy debate, how can students choose their worldview in the marketplace of ideas, fight extremism and prepare for life beyond study?

'A system for assessing and rating risks' for such events is likely to be bureaucratic in the extreme, and expose small student societies to large amounts of paperwork, simply to be able to have any external speaker at their event. This would be particularly significant for relatively small and informally organised groups of students – for example a group of Christian medical students who arrange to meet with a doctor recently graduated from their university to discuss life as a Christian junior doctor. It is clear that this event is not associated with promoting terrorism, but by our

reading would be subject to the same bureaucracy as a large set-piece event for hundreds of students attended by a highly controversial speaker and attracting media interest.

We would urge that the specifics of these draft regulations be reconsidered, and suggest that it would be better for universities to be free to form their own policies under the existing guidance already quoted from Universities UK.

*Laurence Crutchlow (Acting Head of Student Ministries)*

*Philippa Taylor (Head of Public Policy)*

*Peter Saunders (CEO)*

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