UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCHERS WORKING ON TERRORISM RELATED MATERIAL

Introduction
Scottish higher education institutions have a statutory duty, under the terms of The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 'to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism', this is known as the 'Prevent Duty'. This guidance explains how the University of Aberdeen complies with the terms of this Act and provides information pertinent to research and research-related activities which may be subject to this legislation.

Subject of the Prevent Duty
The Government's 'Prevent strategy' is to deal with all forms of terrorism and with non-violent extremism, which can create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism and can popularise views which terrorists then exploit. It also made clear that preventing people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism requires challenge to extremist ideas where they are used to legitimise terrorism and are shared by terrorist groups. This also means intervening to stop people moving from extremist (albeit legal) groups into terrorist-related activity, for example, the white supremacist ideology of extreme right-wing groups.

What is meant by terrorism?
The Counter-Terrorism Act 2015 uses the same definition as The Terrorism Act (2000). This defines terrorism as the use or threat of action designed to influence the UK or international government organisations or to intimidate the public involving serious violence against persons or damage to property, endangerment of life, serious risk to health or public safety or is designed to seriously interfere with or disrupt electronic systems. This includes threats and actions directed at persons, organisations, property and systems outside the UK.

Broadly speaking, the measures apply to research activity that investigates or interacts with persons or organisations across the political spectrum that may use or threaten to use terrorist measures against the UK or any other government in order to achieve its political aims.

How does the law affect research into terrorism?
The Terrorism Act (2000) introduced an offence for an individual to collect or make a record of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism; or to possess a document or record containing information of that kind (e.g. a terrorist training manual). In addition, The Terrorism Act (2006) makes it an offence to disseminate terrorist publications in order to encourage others to engage in terrorism.

The statutory duty introduced by The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 requires institutions to have clear policies and procedures for researchers working on extremism-related subjects. The Institution has a duty to ensure that research activities do not constitute an offence under either the 2000 or 2006 Acts.

What are the University's statutory obligations in relation to research?
The University's statutory obligations do not include the proscription of certain areas of research or avenues of scholarly inquiry, provided they remain within the law.

We interpret our duties under the 2015 Act as follows:

- to ensure that research that falls under the legislation can be undertaken **by** researchers in the full awareness of the associated risks and **terrorism** related legislative framework;

- to enable researchers to safeguard themselves from accidental dissemination of such materials. This includes the safe storage and limited sharing of data and materials;

- to ensure transparency on research that is the subject of the legislation at institutional level. This will allow us to confirm that relevant research was undertaken with the full knowledge of the institution, and that appropriate guidance was provided to the researcher(s) and adequate assurance that governance arrangements to ensure compliance with the Prevent Duty are in place.

How can the University support researchers who work on terrorism related material?
The list below details some ways in which the legislation may affect research or research-related activities such as dissemination. Please note that this is not exhaustive.

1. **External speakers and Events**

   The University needs to balance its legal duties in terms of both ensuring freedom of speech and academic freedom, and also protecting student and staff welfare. Encouragement of terrorism and inviting support for a proscribed terrorist organisation are both criminal offences. Higher education institutions should not provide a platform for these offences to be committed. However, when deciding whether or not to host a particular speaker, due consideration of the views being expressed or likely to be expressed, constitute extremist views that may risk drawing people into terrorism or are shared by terrorist groups. While the University is committed to facilitating debate and intellectual discussion, in these circumstances the event should not be allowed to proceed except where the University can be entirely convinced that such risk can be fully mitigated, for example by ensuring that they are challenged with opposing views as part of that same event, rather than in a separate forum. Where institutions are in any doubt that the risk cannot be fully mitigated they should exercise caution and not allow the event to proceed. These circumstances can arise during dissemination activities. The University's Estates department has a [procedure for room bookings](#) and appropriate risk mitigations should be considered by the event organiser.

2. **Access to terrorism related material**

   The University has robust policies in place with regards to information security and has in place a web-filtering tool to prevent staff and students accessing any websites considered to contain harmful material without the necessary permissions. The current [Web Content Filter Guidelines](#) set out our institutional policy on web content that is currently blocked or filtered. Researchers can apply to have blocks and filters removed by completing [WF1: Application for Exemption from Web Content Filter](#) –or [WF2: Application for Exemption from Web Content Filter of a shared computer](#). These require authorisation from Head of School or Head of Department or, in case of a student, the academic supervisor.

3. Safe Storage of research material related to terrorism

Under current legislation, recording, collecting and dissemination of material that assists, promotes or glorifies terrorist activities are offences. Researchers should store and safeguard their material carefully to ensure that they are not in breach of the legislation.

For researchers at the University of Aberdeen that means that research material and documents should be stored on secure network storage (H:\drive on any networked computer) in a password protected folder. Where documents and materials are stored on shared project drives, they should have access restrictions and should only be accessible to co-investigators and others closely involved with the research. For projects involving research students, the supervisor(s) should ensure appropriate risk mitigations are in place. Materials should not be stored on lap tops, pen drives or other mobile devices without encryption.

Further information on data storage and archiving is available here: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/it-datastorage.php or contact servicedesk@abdn.ac.uk.

4. Field trips and other research related travel

UK legislation is territorial and does not generally extend beyond UK borders. However, similar terrorism related legislation applies in many countries around the world and researchers should familiarise themselves with the legislative framework of the country they intend to visit for research or networking purposes. 'Importing' of terrorism related material from and into the UK may be an offence under terrorism legislation, and files and materials should be carefully chosen and protected with this in mind. This may apply also to obtaining materials abroad with a view to storing them on UK networks. Local legislation in the destination country may add further requirements.

On request, the University is able to provide a letter confirming employment as a researcher at the University of Aberdeen which can be used in support of legitimate research activities.

Managing your research activity

The University takes the safety of its staff and students seriously, to this end staff engaged in research should conduct their activities in accordance with the Research Governance Handbook and follow guidelines for good practice as appropriate. This includes thorough assessment at all stages of a research project for consideration of matters subject to the Counter-Terrorism & Security Act (2015) and expects that appropriate risk assessments, and where necessary risk mitigations, are in place to ensure compliance with this Act, and a regular monitoring of the research process to ensure that remedial actions can be put in place.

More information

Access to staff training for implementation of this Duty can be accessed _____

More information on the Counter-Terrorism & Security Act, and the University's processes for compliance is available from: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/prevent.php or contact buscontinuity@abdn.ac.uk

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