Security Sensitive or extremism-related research – advice for researchers and research students

The University of Glasgow is legally required to comply with the duty to prevent people being drawn into terrorism ("the Prevent duty"). Section 26 (1) of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 imposes a duty on 'specified authorities' to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Government guidance[1] for HEIs on implementation of this duty states that:

"We [the UK government] would expect to see clear policies and procedures for students and staff working on sensitive or extremism-related research." (para 25)

The possession or distribution of sensitive material by researchers can be open to misinterpretation by law enforcement authorities and can put academics in danger of arrest and prosecution under counter-terrorism legislation. This document provides guidance on the safe management of security-sensitive research material. It is designed to protect research staff and students from any misunderstandings and/or false accusations relating to the possession or use of this material. This guidance is intended for all staff and students of the University who engage in or supervise sensitive or extremism-related research.

The guidance published by UUK[2] notes that it does not seek to restrict students or staff from carrying out research into any area. Rather, it has been designed to help researchers understand the risks involved to them in accessing and/or storing and/or disseminating material that is sensitive or extremism-related, or that may be regarded as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts. Any guidance issued should have due regard to the importance of academic freedom.

The requirements of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 should be taken into account in the course of the ethical review process.

Further advice may be sought on specific issues or cases from the Chief Operating officer & University Secretary or the Head of Security.

1 Does the intended research fit into any of the following categories?

Terrorism, extremism, terrorist or extremist organisations for groups, extremist ideologies, radicalisation/de-radicalisation?

1.1 The Terrorism Act (2006) outlaws the dissemination of records, statements and other documents that can be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts.

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[1] *Prevent Duty Guidance: for higher education institutions in Scotland.* HM Government and the Scottish Government, 16th July 2015.
[2] *Oversight of security-sensitive research material in UK universities: guidance.* Universities UK, October 2012. This was written to provide guidance on the Terrorism Act 2006.

1.2 Terrorism is defined as an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people; causes serious damage to property; or seriously interferes with or disrupts an electronic system. The use or threat must be designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is made for the purposes of advancing political, religious or ideological cause.

1.3 Radicalisation is defined as the process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo and/or reject or undermine contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice.

1.4 The UK Government defines extremism as vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. Extremism also includes calls for death of members of the armed forces.

1.5 Proscribed organisations may be prosecuted under UK law. However, the absence of such a ban does not mean that an organisation is not covered by the legislation. New organisations not previously identified as promoting terrorist or extremist agendas, or existing organisations which have changed their agendas and now promote such ideas, would be covered.

1.6 For a list of currently proscribed organisations, please use the following link:

https://assets.publishlng.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/atta chment data/ffle/670599/20 171222 Proscription.pdf

The list is compiled and maintained by the Home Office.

1.7 Research on individuals or groups historically associated with terrorism, extremism or radicalisation is not covered by the legislation, unless there is a risk that such research could cause people to be drawn into terrorism or supporting extremist ideologies, by for example advocating support for the individuals or group being studied.

2 Will your research involve visits to websites that might be associated with radicalisation or terrorist/extremist organisations, groups or individuals?

2.1 Whilst it is often not possible to know what a website contains until one visits it, researchers are advised to use their discretion and judgement before accessing websites.

2.2 Identifying whether a website might be associated with such material will depend to a large extent on the search criteria used.

2.3 Accessing websites that host content, such as Wikipedia, Twitter, YouTube etc. is not prohibited.

2.4 Researchers who access web sites that might be associated with radicalisation or terrorist/extremist organisation, groups or individuals should be conscious that such sites may be subject to surveillance by the police, and that accessing those sites might lead to police enquiries. Once full ethical approval for a piece of

research has been granted, researchers should use the university network to access such sites. This will ensure these activities are flagged as a legitimate part of their research. However, the University cannot guarantee protection from investigation by external authorities.

2.5 Researchers should be aware that the synthesis of material from diverse sources into a form which could be of value to terrorist/extremist organisations, groups or individuals could also lead to investigation and prosecution.

3 Does your research involve the download and/or storage of any materials relating to terrorism, extremism or radicalisation (for example, records, statements or other documents)?

3.1 The test for determining whether the materials being accessed are in scope is whether the materials are sensitive or extremism-related, or terrorism related.

3.2 Sensitive materials should be stored in a designated and secure file store/folder, accessible only to the designated researchers and the relevant research ethics officer. This approach is in line with arrangements across the sector.

3.3 Sensitive physical materials are also covered by the legislation. Such physical materials should also be stored securely when in the researcher's possession.

4 Might your research involve the electronic transmission of such materials to project co-investigators/collaborators?

The Terrorism Act (2006) and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) outlaw the dissemination of terrorist publications if the individual concerned has the intention to encourage or induce others to act. Publications created for the purposes of an approved and clearly defined research project should not amount to an offence because the requisite intention is unlikely to be present. However, researchers are advised to exercise caution and avoid electronic transmission of such research material where possible.

You must understand the risk in disseminating publications and that you will only transmit these materials to collaborators after they have been password protected.

4.1 An approved and clearly defined research project is one that has been vetted and approved through the applicable research project approval process. However, the legislation focusses on the intention to encourage or induce others to act, rather than the stage that has been reached in the research approval process.

4.2 URLs or web addresses are covered by the legislation. Again, the focus is on the content of the websites lying behind the web addresses.

5   Use of Social Media

5.1   The key issue to bear in mind is the risks lying behind the adverts, recruitment, or research practices being used. For example, where the research involves access to such fora that brings with it the risk of coming into contact with terrorist or extremist literature/propaganda, the researcher should assess the risks and consider what steps can be taken to mitigate these. The primary purpose of the wording is to protect the researcher, not prevent legitimate research.

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