Fighting the Structural Racism of the Prevent Strategy and the Hostile Environment

What we will do:

1. For the sabbatical officers to issue a statement condemning the structural racism faced by Muslim and BAME students under the Prevent strategy and international students faced under the Hostile Environment policy.
2. Mandate EUSA to do everything legally possible to minimise the impact of the Prevent strategy and the Hostile Environment policy upon students and to register students’ objections to these policies in the strongest possible terms.
3. Educate students on the dangers of the Counter Terrorism Security Act and the Prevent Strategy as well as their legal rights in relation to them.
4. Educate international students on the nature of the Hostile Environment, their rights, and organisations that can support international students experiencing hardships.
5. Provide assistance to students who undergo Prevent-related procedures because of their research.
6. Work with the university in developing the Prevent training that gets shared with staff, and using the expertise of BAME staff and students to ensure that this practice is non-discriminatory.
7. Lobby the University to be open and transparent about how they are engaging with Prevent and other similar initiatives, including: publishing how the policy is operating in the University, how they are updating their materials to reflect the changes in the Prevent duty as notified by the Supreme Court at the end of 2019, and holding consultations with the student body about how it affects students.
8. Work jointly with campus trade unions and other relevant student groups or networks to seek legal advice from the University’s immigration solicitor and develop a framework for minimal compliance with the official requirements of visa sponsorship.
9. Lobby the University, jointly with campus trade unions and other relevant student groups or networks, to follow this framework of minimal compliance that will satisfy the University’s duties as a visa sponsor without excessive and/or intrusive surveillance of students and staff.
10. Lobby the University, jointly with campus trade unions, BAME liberation groups, and other relevant student groups or networks to publicly oppose the Prevent duty and the Hostile Environment Policy.

Background to this:

1. The statutory requirements of the Prevent agenda, as part of the Government’s ‘anti-extremism’ work, have been used to create an expansive surveillance architecture to spy on the public and to police dissent.
2. Under Prevent, lecturers have been known to report students as being ‘at risk of radicalisation’ for merely taking an interest in political affairs in class, or for observing their religion more closely, whilst politically active students have found themselves visited by counter-terrorism officers.
3. The Government’s counter-terrorism policy systematically targets people of Protected Characteristics, especially Muslims and ethnic minorities, by placing specific emphasis on “threats ... from terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq and Al Qa‘ida associated groups” and “Islamic extremists” as “the most significant” terrorist threat.

4. The Tell Mama project (Measuring anti-Muslim attacks) has reported a 692% spike in anti-Muslim hate crimes in the week following the Christchurch mosque attack last year, and a total of 1,213 anti-Muslim hate crimes reported recorded by 20 police forces across the UK from January to June 2019.

5. Universities are also required by the terms of their license to sponsor student visas to monitor the attendance of international students.

6. The Hostile Environment policy and the visa sponsorship requirements give broad guidelines to universities, leaving it at their discretion to interpret and implement the policies as they see fit.

7. This attendance monitoring implemented at Edinburgh University requires a similarly expansive surveillance architecture used to monitor every single contact point.

8. The Staff Student Solidarity Network has published samples of emails sent to UK students and international students for missing contact points that demonstrate discriminatory treatment.

9. Upon missing classes, UK students are advised to seek support whereas international students are threatened with escalation procedures of being reported to the Home Office.

10. International students have also faced pressures to cross picket lines during industrial action or risk their immigration status because the University did not have a consistent policy to accept industrial action as legitimate exemption from attendance.

11. International students also face other, dispersed forms of discrimination because of the Hostile Environment in workplaces or housing.

12. The Students’ Association has previously passed the ‘End the Hostile Environment! Defend Migrant Rights’ that sets objectives to defend the rights of students affected by the Hostile Environment.

Beliefs and motivating actions:

1. Both the Hostile Environment and Prevent strategy are structurally racist policies that systemically target vulnerable and marginalised groups.

2. These policies adversely affect both students and staff, and thus students and staff must work together in solidarity to oppose such an intrusion of the surveillance state into university campuses.

3. The rise in anti-Muslim attacks points to a rise in Islamophobia which is state-sponsored and legitimised by the mainstream media and the government’s counter-terrorism legislation which has been warned to risk alienating British Muslims.

4. The implementation of the Prevent Strategy on campus will not only isolate Muslim students but undermine the civil liberties of other groups such as environmental, political and humanitarian activists.

5. The Hostile Environment policy further alienates international students and adversely affect their wellbeing when they are already facing significant financial barriers and discrimination in society.

6. Both the Hostile Environment policies and the Prevent strategy require lecturers and admin and professional services staff to monitor students’ work and engagement in a drastic intrusion of a surveillance state into higher education.
7. Edinburgh University’s implementation of attendance monitoring to satisfy its sponsorship duties are a maximalist interpretation of the Home Office guidelines and are excessive and intimidatory towards international students.

8. This motion will provide further clarity on actions the Students’ Association can take to oppose the hostile environment.

Submitted with 20 student signatures in March 2020.