

# **“TOLERATING THE INTOLERANT”:**

## **A Report on ‘Students not Suspects’**

**By Richard Black**

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## **A Report on ‘Students not Suspects’**

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## Executive Summary

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- ‘Students Not Suspects’ is a student-led campaign which has called for the abolition of the Prevent strategy since the passage of the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (CTSA). Since becoming official NUS policy in 2015, ‘Students Not Suspects’ has received support from academics, student unions, trade unions and a range of civil society organisations.
- Under the pretence of wanting to abolish Prevent, leading ‘Students Not Suspects’ activists have hosted extremist speakers at a series of unbalanced events. Many of them belong to organisations that have Islamist links and troubling histories of intolerance and sympathy for terrorism, such as CAGE, MEND, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) and Friends of Al-Aqsa.
- In April 2015, one month after the CTSA became law, the NUS National Conference passed a motion which mandated the NUS to work closely with the prisoner lobby group CAGE, an organisation which has a long history of publicly defending convicted terrorists. This turn towards extremism endangers the mainstream credibility of the NUS and undermines good relations between students of all faiths and backgrounds.
- As well as tolerating the intolerant, ‘Students Not Suspects’ activists have condemned individuals who have expressed opposition to extremism. They have accused critics and fellow students of being motivated by racism and Islamophobia.
- The influence of ‘Students Not Suspects’ has been built on the back of effective publicity campaigns involving panel discussions, workshops, protests and social media. While it has not succeeded in its overall aim of “scrapping” Prevent, it has encouraged numerous student unions to pass motions boycotting the policy and has toured speakers across the UK to audiences comprising thousands of students.
- While criticising Prevent is a perfectly legitimate political position and is far from extreme in theory, ‘Students Not Suspects’ has effectively become a vehicle for extremist interests. It advances extremist tropes, extremist speakers and extremist narratives – all the while attacking anybody, NUS officials or otherwise, who distances themselves from its position.

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# 1. Introduction

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This report provides a chronological overview of the background and history of ‘Students Not Suspects’ and its relationship with the National Union of Students (NUS). It focuses on key individuals and examines the changing context in which the campaign has operated. In particular, it analyses the developments behind the movement’s genesis in 2015 as well as its national tours in 2016 and 2017 under the divisive NUS leadership of Malia Bouattia and Shelly Asquith.

Originally founded in 1922,<sup>1</sup> the NUS is a voluntary membership organisation that claims to represent the interests “of more than seven million students”.<sup>2</sup> It is made up of hundreds of student unions from across the UK. In recent years, successive NUS representatives have framed government counter-extremism measures as threatening the welfare of Muslim students as well as wider civil liberties.<sup>3</sup>

‘Students Not Suspects’ is a student-led campaign which has called for the abolition of the Prevent strategy since the passage of the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (CTSA). Since becoming official NUS policy in 2015, ‘Students Not Suspects’ has received support from academics, student unions, trade unions and a range of civil society organisations.

This report explores the movement’s outreach strategy, with an emphasis on how it has made use of social media, panel discussions and workshops. The campaign has also featured direct-action tactics, such as protests and sit-ins. The report draws upon a range of case studies to present a detailed examination of the past views and associations of extremist speakers at ‘Students Not Suspects’ events as well as detailed commentary on the misleading arguments and tropes used to delegitimise Prevent.

It assesses the movement’s impact, referencing the number of student unions that have passed motions in support of the campaign, as well as key endorsements from individuals and other bodies. Furthermore, it records criticism of their activities from politicians, students and the media. The discussion finishes with a series of reflections as well as likely trends in 2017–18.

Based on the existing body of evidence, one can only conclude that ‘Students Not Suspects’ has become a vehicle for extremist interests. Under the pretence of wanting to abolish Prevent, leading ‘Students Not Suspects’ activists have hosted extremist speakers at a series of unbalanced events. Many of them belong to organisations that have Islamist links and troubling histories of intolerance and sympathy for terrorism, such as CAGE, MEND, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) and Friends of Al-Aqsa.

As well as tolerating the intolerant, ‘Students Not Suspects’ activists have condemned individuals who have expressed opposition to extremism.<sup>4</sup> They have accused critics and fellow students of being motivated by racism and Islamophobia.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, some of the NUS activists involved in the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign have previously made anti-Semitic remarks and continue to enjoy positions of

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Our History’, *NUS*, available at: <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/who-we-are/our-history/>, last visited: 19 January 2018.

<sup>2</sup> ‘What we do’, *NUS*, available at: <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/who-we-are/what-we-do/>, last visited: 19 January 2018.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent: A student handbook on countering the PREVENT agenda on campus’, *NUS Black Students*, 2 December 2015, available at: <https://studentsnotsuspectsdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/nus-black-students-campaign-preventing-prevent-handbook.pdf>, last visited: 19 January 2018.

<sup>4</sup> ‘CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism’, *HM Government*, July 2011, available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97994/contest-summary.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97994/contest-summary.pdf), last visited: 19 January 2018.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Statement on NUS President Megan Dunn’s announcement on CAGE and the Students not Suspects tour’, *Medium*, 7 October 2015, available at: <https://medium.com/@StudentsNotSuspects/statement-on-nus-president-megan-dunn-s-announcement-on-cage-and-the-students-not-suspects-tour-f8e6b9eb5d>, last visited: 19 January 2019.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

influence. They have invoked freedom of speech and civil liberties while promoting extremist speakers and ideologies that are opposed to those very same ideals.

‘Students Not Suspects’ was initially established by a group of NUS officers who held senior positions of responsibility. The campaign has since defined the entire institution’s relationship towards counter-extremism and towards the Prevent strategy as a whole.

This turn towards extremism endangers the mainstream credibility of the NUS and undermines good relations between students of all faiths and backgrounds. By officially endorsing the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign, the NUS continues to align itself with extremists against societal attempts to challenge the threat they pose.

The aim of this report is not to silence student activism or to promote not engaging with any criticism of Prevent whatsoever. The NUS and British students in general have a proud history of campaigning on a range of social and political issues, such as opposition to racism and far-right political movements. There are clearly outstanding concerns surrounding Prevent, which need to be addressed.

## 2. Background to the Issue

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The UK government’s Prevent strategy for challenging extremism and radicalisation forms part of a wider counter-terrorism strategy, known as Contest.<sup>6</sup> Prevent was first created in 2003 and launched publicly in 2006 in the aftermath of the 7/7 London bombings.

The British government defines extremism as follows:

Extremism is 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. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.<sup>7</sup>

Extremism and radicalisation continue to pose significant threats within the higher education sector. Individuals who have studied at UK universities and been convicted of terrorism offences include:

- Roshonara Choudhry, an English student at King’s College London (KCL), who tried to assassinate Labour MP Stephen Timms in 2010;<sup>8</sup>
- Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, an engineering student at University College London (UCL) and former President of the Islamic Society, who was convicted of attempted murder and terrorism in 2012 after trying to bomb a passenger flight to Detroit in 2009.<sup>9</sup> He is otherwise known as the “underwear bomber”;<sup>10</sup>
- Erol Incedal, a law student at London South Bank University (LSBU), who was found guilty of possessing a bomb-making manual in 2014;<sup>11</sup>
- Afsana Kayum, a law student at the University of East London (UEL), who was sentenced to 18 months in prison in 2015 for possession of a record containing information useful in the commission of terrorism contrary to the Terrorism Act.<sup>12</sup>

Radicalised foreign fighters who have studied at UK universities include:

- Aqsa Mahmood, a radiography student at Glasgow Caledonian University, who dropped out of her course and travelled to Syria in late 2013;<sup>13</sup>
- David Souaan, a politics student at Birkbeck, University of London, who was convicted in 2014 of preparation of terrorist acts;<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Prevent Strategy’, *HM Government*, June 2011, available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf), last visited: 19 January 2018, p. 107.

<sup>8</sup> ‘PM’s Extremism Taskforce: tackling extremism in universities and colleges top of the agenda’, *HM Government*, 17 September 2015, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pms-extremism-taskforce-tackling-extremism-in-universities-and-colleges-top-of-the-agenda>, last visited: 19 January 2018.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> ‘Underwear bomber plot failed because he “wore same pants for two weeks”’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 2014, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/al-qaeda/10989843/Underwear-bomber-plot-failed-because-he-wore-same-pants-for-two-weeks.html>, last visited: 19 January 2018.

<sup>11</sup> ‘PM’s Extremism Taskforce: tackling extremism in universities and colleges top of the agenda’, *HM Government*, 17 September 2015.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*



- Rashed Amani, a business student at Coventry University, who is believed to have travelled to Syria in March 2014;<sup>15</sup>
- Zubair Nur, a geology student at Royal Holloway, University of London, who was reported to have travelled to Syria in March 2015;<sup>16</sup>
- Salman Abedi, a business student at the University of Salford, who made a number of trips to Libya where he is thought to have learned bomb-making techniques at a training camp. He is believed to have financed these trips with his student loans and benefits. He later carried out the Manchester Arena terrorist attack in May 2017.<sup>17</sup>

This worrying picture of extremism among young people is supported by the latest data and empirical evidence. In 2016, the UK government announced that Prevent had stopped 150 people (including 50 children) from leaving Britain to fight in Syria and Iraq in 2015.<sup>18</sup> In November 2017, the Home Office published figures that revealed in 2015–16 that more than 2,000 children and teenagers had been referred to Channel, the multi-agency approach supported by Prevent. Nearly a third of all Prevent referrals were under the age of 15, and more than half under the age of 20.<sup>19</sup> Of all referral cases (7,631), 65% were Islamist in nature, while 10% related to the far right.<sup>20</sup> This breakdown of referrals underlines the fact that, in spite of a recent increase in far-right political activity, there is a greater danger from Islamist-related extremism in the UK.

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Mendick, R., Martin Evans and Victoria Ward, ‘Manchester suicide bomber used student loan and benefits to fund terror plot’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/26/exclusive-manchester-suicide-bomber-used-student-loan-benefits/>, last visited: 19 January 2018.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Counter-terrorism: Written question – 51248’, *HM Government*, 29 November 2016, available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/commons/2016-10-31/51248>, last visited: 22 January 2018.

<sup>19</sup> McCann, K., ‘More than 2,000 children referred to Government’s counter-terror programme in a year – including 500 girls’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 November 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/09/2000-children-referred-governments-counter-terror-programme/>, last visited: 19 January 2018.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

### 3. ‘Preventing Prevent’ Activism

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Various elements within the NUS have opposed Prevent. The NUS Black Students’ Campaign, a branch of the NUS purporting to represent “students of African, Asian, Arab and Caribbean descent”,<sup>21</sup> has repeatedly voted against the policy.<sup>22</sup> As early as 2012 it passed motions that characterise Prevent as furthering “attempts to demonise and isolate Islamic Societies” as well as engaging in “racist scapegoating of the Muslim community”.<sup>23</sup>

It claimed that the 2009 arrest of 11 Pakistani students revealed that “the government is targeting international and Muslim students with anti-terror legislation”.<sup>24</sup> A Special Immigration Appeals Commission judge later found that one of these students, Abid Naseer, was “an al-Qaeda operative” and “a serious threat” to national security.<sup>25</sup> He was later convicted of giving material support to al-Qaeda as well as plotting an attack against the Arndale shopping centre in Manchester.<sup>26</sup>

Following the passage of an anti-Prevent motion at the 2012 NUS conference, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Police Association of Higher Education Liaison Officers (PAHELO) issued guidance to their officers that stated that this action “may have an adverse affect [sic] on policing on campus”.<sup>27</sup>

Widespread student opposition to Prevent in the period between 2012 and 2014 was exposed in a report published by The Henry Jackson Society and Student Rights, entitled ‘Preventing Prevent? Challenges to Counter-Radicalisation Policy On Campus’ (2015).<sup>28</sup> This showed that extremism, radicalisation and terrorism are major threats to students on university campuses. It concluded that many criticisms of Prevent ignore this reality and actively misrepresent the policy. A further report, entitled ‘Myths and Misunderstandings: Understanding Opposition to The Prevent Strategy’ (2016), examined the recent rise in opposition to Prevent within universities as well as growing cooperation with extremists among some students, academics, trade unions and politicians.<sup>29</sup>

Anti-Prevent activists have propelled the extremists’ narrative that Prevent is a direct attack on Muslims and “nominal” Islamic beliefs. They have argued that the policy threatens freedom of expression, undermines legitimate political activism and promotes spying and surveillance instead of safeguarding. They have also exaggerated or misrepresented the facts surrounding a number of cases, with the aim of undermining Prevent.

Since these reports were published, student-led opposition to Prevent has become more vocal and better organised. They have continued to repeat these fabricated claims despite all evidence to the contrary.

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<sup>21</sup> ‘How We Work: Black Students’, *NUS*, available at: <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/who-we-are/how-we-work/black-students/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Sutton, R., ‘Preventing Prevent? Challenges to Counter-Radicalisation Policy On Campus’, *The Henry Jackson Society and Student Rights*, 2015, available at: [http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Preventing-Prevent\\_webversion3.pdf](http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Preventing-Prevent_webversion3.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018, p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Black Students Campaign Policy: 2012–15’, *NUS*, 23 October 2014, available at: <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/black-students-campaign-policy-2012-15>, last visited: 20 January 2018, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Simcox, R., ‘Will Gordon Brown’s critics finally admit he was right about al-Qaeda’s “major terrorist plot”?’’, *The Spectator*, 9 March 2015, available at: <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffeehouse/2015/03/gordon-brown-was-right-about-abid-naseer/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Fallon, C., ‘Abid Naseer: Terrorist plotted Manchester bombing’, *BBC News*, 4 March 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-31692375>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, E. and David Knowles, ‘Briefing Note for Police Officers and Police Staff whose role includes Engagement with Universities’, *ACPO*, May 2013, available at: <http://www.npcc.police.uk/documents/TAM/2013/201305-tam-prevent-pahelo-nus-resolutions.pdf>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Sutton, R., ‘Preventing Prevent? Challenges to Counter-Radicalisation Policy On Campus’, *The Henry Jackson Society and Student Rights*, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Sutton, R., ‘Myths and Misunderstandings: Understanding Opposition to The Prevent Strategy’, *Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism and The Henry Jackson Society*, September 2016, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Myths-and-Misunderstandings-PREVENT-Report-Final-29.09.2016.pdf>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

In March 2015, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (CTSA) imposed a statutory duty on universities and other public bodies, requiring them to pay “due regard to the need to prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism”.<sup>30</sup> The bill faced an immediate backlash from the NUS and a number of student unions. These efforts culminated in the creation of ‘Students Not Suspects’. In April 2015, one month after the CTSA became law, the NUS National Conference passed a motion which stated that it would “not engage with the PREVENT strategy”, would “encourage Unions and institutions to not comply with or legitimise PREVENT” and would “investigate, [identify] and block/cease accepting any PREVENT funding for any NUS activities or departments”.<sup>31</sup> The motion claimed that Prevent aimed “to monitor and control Muslim students”, created “an expansive surveillance architecture” and forced academic staff to spy on students.<sup>32</sup> It framed this in terms of a government conspiracy, saying that the CTSA was likely to be abused as it was part of a wider government agenda aiming at “manipulating public perceptions and current global events to scale back civil liberties and freedoms”.<sup>33</sup>

Most controversially of all, the motion mandated the NUS to work closely with the prisoner lobby group CAGE,<sup>34</sup> an organisation with a long history of publicly defending convicted terrorists.<sup>35</sup> CAGE welcomed the NUS’s decision to oppose Prevent. It claimed that this stance “avoid[s] the alienation of Muslim communities and sends a powerful message to students that all groups need to work together in countering the narrative that Muslims are a threat to society instead of equal partners committed to creating a more equal, just and fair society for all”.<sup>36</sup>

Seeking to distance herself from CAGE’s endorsement of the NUS, Toni Pearce, the serving NUS President at the time, clarified that she had “absolutely no intention of developing a working relationship – formal or otherwise – with Cage”.<sup>37</sup> She said: “CAGE is a deeply problematic organisation. It is clear that its leaders have sympathised with violent extremism, and violence against women, and people associated with the group have sympathised with anti-Semitism.”<sup>38</sup>

These accusations were not aided by an open letter warning of Prevent’s “chilling effect” on free speech that was published in *The Independent* on 10 July 2015.<sup>39</sup> While at least 40 NUS officers and individual student union officials were listed as signatories – such as Malia Bouattia and Shelly Asquith – there were also individuals with extremist views and associations,<sup>40</sup> such as Asim Qureshi,<sup>41</sup> Haitham al-

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<sup>30</sup> ‘Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015’, *HM Government*, February 2015, available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/part/5/enacted>, last visited: 20 January 2018, Part 5, Chapter 1.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Motion 517: Counter-Terrorism and Security Act’ in ‘NUS National Conference 2015 Final Proposals’, *NUS*, April 2015, available at: [http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/14670/CD10\\_Final%20Proposals%20Motions\\_v7%20FINAL%20FOR%20PRINT.pdf](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/14670/CD10_Final%20Proposals%20Motions_v7%20FINAL%20FOR%20PRINT.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018, pp. 79-80.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Murray, D. and Robin Simcox, ‘The evidence shows that CAGE is a pro-terrorist group’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 July 2014, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/10981050/The-evidence-shows-that-Cage-is-a-pro-terrorist-group.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: Stuart, H., ‘Understanding CAGE: A Public Information Dossier’, *Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism* and *The Henry Jackson Society*, March 2015, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Understanding-CAGE.pdf>, last visited: 20 January 2018, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> ‘CAGE welcomes NUS opposition to PREVENT strategy and CTS Act’, *CAGE*, 28 April 2015, available at: <https://www.cageuk.org/press-release/cage-welcomes-nus-opposition-prevent-strategy-and-cts-act>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Misleading stories in the media – why NUS does not work with CAGE’, *NUS*, 7 May 2015, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/misleading-stories-in-the-media-why-nus-does-not-work-with-cage>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> ‘PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent’, *The Independent*, 10 July 2015, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/prevent-will-have-a-chilling-effect-on-open-debate-free-speech-and-political-dissent-10381491.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Open letter shows concerns about student campaign against Prevent’, *Student Rights*, 13 July 2015, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2286/open\\_letter\\_shows\\_concerns\\_about\\_student\\_campaign\\_against\\_prevent](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2286/open_letter_shows_concerns_about_student_campaign_against_prevent), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Krol, C., ‘Mohammed Enwazi is “extremely gentle”, says British advocacy group Cage director’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 February 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11437579/Mohammed-Enwazi-is-extremely-gentle-says-British-advocacy-group-Cage-director.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

Haddad,<sup>42</sup> Uthman Lateef,<sup>43</sup> Reza Pankhurst,<sup>44</sup> Arzu Merali,<sup>45</sup> Sufyan Ismail,<sup>46</sup> Azad Ali,<sup>47</sup> Ismail Patel<sup>48</sup> and Shakeel Begg.<sup>49</sup>

This reputational damage had significant ramifications for the NUS. On 20 July 2015, the then British Prime Minister David Cameron singled out the NUS in a wide-ranging speech about extremism, which he delivered in Birmingham. He addressed the NUS, claiming: “When you choose to ally yourselves with an organisation like CAGE, which called Jihadi John a ‘beautiful young man’ and told people to ‘support the jihad’ in Iraq and Afghanistan it really does, in my opinion, shame your organisation and your noble history of campaigning for justice.”<sup>50</sup> The NUS described the Prime Minister’s comments as “misleading” and repeated its clarification that it would “not work with CAGE in any capacity”.<sup>51</sup> However, this contradicted the wording of the motion that the NUS had passed earlier in April, which said that it would work “alongside civil liberties groups including CAGE”.<sup>52</sup> A few days later, the NUS Black Students’ Campaign co-hosted an event attacking Prevent with the similarly controversial group IHRC.<sup>53</sup> This event’s description declared that Prevent will “demonise and persecute communities” and said that it “criminalise[s] communities and our right to dissent”.<sup>54</sup>

The IHRC has previously supported Omar Abdel-Rahman<sup>55</sup> (the so-called “blind sheikh”, convicted of conspiracy to murder)<sup>56</sup> and Dr Aafia Siddiqui<sup>57</sup> (an Al-Qaeda associate<sup>58</sup> convicted of attempted murder).<sup>59</sup> On 29 June 2015, the IHRC published a message from Mufid Abdulqader,<sup>60</sup> convicted of conspiracy to provide material support to a terrorist organisation in 2009,<sup>61</sup> and called on its readers to write to Abdulqader and support a campaign against his conviction. This collaboration between the NUS Black Students’ Campaign and the IHRC was the first indication that NUS President Toni Pearce had lost control over the behaviour of her fellow activists.

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<sup>42</sup> ‘FOSIS promotes webinar with Haitham Al-Haddad’, *Student Rights*, 25 June 2014, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2206/fosis\\_promotes\\_webinar\\_with\\_haitham\\_al\\_haddad](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2206/fosis_promotes_webinar_with_haitham_al_haddad), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Afsana Kayum and online extremism at UEL’, *Student Rights*, 19 March 2015, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2269/afsana\\_kayum\\_and\\_online\\_extremism\\_at\\_uel](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2269/afsana_kayum_and_online_extremism_at_uel), last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Radical Islam on UK Campuses’, *The Centre for Social Cohesion*, April 2010, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/RADICAL-ISLAM-ON-CMAPUS.pdf>, pp. 11-12, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir speaker event on Queen Mary campus cancelled’, *Student Rights*, 8 December 2009, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/682/hizb\\_ut\\_tahrir\\_speaker\\_event\\_on\\_queen\\_mary\\_campus\\_cancelled\\_](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/682/hizb_ut_tahrir_speaker_event_on_queen_mary_campus_cancelled_), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Arzu Merali’s Blog’, *IHRC*, available at: <http://www.ihr.org.uk/blogs/arzu>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Gilligan, A., ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing election’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 2015, available at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/11515630/Muslim-group-with-links-to-extremists-boasts-of-influencing-election.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Luft, O., ‘“Kill British” blog man fails in MoS libel bid’, *Press Gazette*, 28 January 2010, available at: <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/kill-british-blog-man-fails-in-mos-libel-bid/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Friends of al-Aqsa and campus activism’, *Student Rights*, 23 January 2017, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2442/friends\\_of\\_al\\_aqsa\\_and\\_campus\\_activism](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2442/friends_of_al_aqsa_and_campus_activism), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Dearden, L., ‘London imam who tried to sue BBC for calling him an extremist has case dismissed at High Court’, *The Independent*, 28 October 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/london-imam-sued-bbc-extremist-claims-case-dismissed-shakeel-begg-high-court-jihad-terrorism-a7384811.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Sherriff, L., ‘David Cameron Tears Into NUS For Links With Cage – The Group Accused Of Being Jihadi John “Apologists”’, *The Huffington Post*, 20 July 2015, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/07/20/david-cameron-shames-nus-links-with-cage-anti-terrorism\\_n\\_7831632.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/07/20/david-cameron-shames-nus-links-with-cage-anti-terrorism_n_7831632.html), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Statement on David Cameron’s misleading comments on NUS and CAGE’, *NUS*, 20 July 2015, available at: <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/statement-on-david-camerons-misleading-comments-on-nus-and-cage/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Motion 517: Counter-Terrorism and Security Act’ in ‘NUS National Conference 2015 Final Proposals’, *NUS*, April 2015, pp. 79-80.

<sup>53</sup> ‘NUS campaign works with IHRC to attack Prevent’, *Student Rights*, 29 July 2015, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2291/nus\\_campaign\\_works\\_with\\_ihrc\\_to\\_attack\\_prevent](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2291/nus_campaign_works_with_ihrc_to_attack_prevent), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> ‘Prisoners of Faith Campaign Pack: Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman’, *IHRC*, September 2007, available at:

[http://www.ihr.org.uk/attachments/5355\\_PFOmarAbdelRahmanFinal.pdf](http://www.ihr.org.uk/attachments/5355_PFOmarAbdelRahmanFinal.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Profile: Omar Abdel Rahman’, *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, available at: <https://www.investigativeproject.org/profile/101/omar-abdel-rahman>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Aafia Siddiqui Campaign’, *IHRC*, 11 September 2013, available at: <http://www.ihr.org.uk/activities/campaigns/10719-aafia-siddiqui-campaign>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>58</sup> ‘US jails Pakistani scientist for 86 years’, *BBC News*, 23 September 2010, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-11401865>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>59</sup> ‘United States of America v. Aafia Siddiqui’, *United States District Court Southern District of New York*, 8 September 2008, available at:

[http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case\\_docs/654.pdf](http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/654.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Alert: USA – Message from one of the Holy Land 5’, *IHRC*, 29 June 2015, available at: <http://www.ihr.org.uk/activities/alerts/11475-alert-usa-message-from-one-of-the-holy-land-5>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Federal Judge Hands Downs Sentences in Holy Land Foundation Case’, *The United States Department of Justice*, 27 May 2009, available at:

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/federal-judge-hands-downs-sentences-holy-land-foundation-case>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

## 4. The Genesis of ‘Students Not Suspects’

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In light of the conference motion passed a few months previously, NUS Vice-President of Welfare Shelly Asquith publicly declared in August 2015 that she intended to boycott Prevent, claiming that “black and Muslim students are bearing the brunt of a reactionary, racist agenda”.<sup>62</sup> Asquith called for an “uncompromising” stance – she said the NUS had sought “legal advice” and was working on coordinating a campaign alongside student unions and representatives from the University and College Union (UCU).<sup>63</sup> She also announced that there would be a series of ‘Students Not Suspects’ events in October, “co-organised by NUS, the Black Students’ Campaign, FOSIS [the Federation of Student Islamic Societies] and civil rights organisation Defend the Right to Protest”.<sup>64</sup> There was no mention of CAGE involvement at this stage. These talks would offer “a range of skills-based workshops for tackling surveillance culture on campuses”.<sup>65</sup> They received further backing from the UCU, which had already supported a boycott and warned of the CTSA’s “chilling effect” on academic freedom.<sup>66</sup>

NUS Black Students’ Officer Malia Bouattia said: “In bringing their battle ‘for hearts and minds’ – and against dissent – to spaces of education with the new Act, the government is inviting to our campuses the same brutality that plagues Black and Muslim people at the hands of the police and state in wider society.”<sup>67</sup> Bouattia and Asquith, both of whom were serving as senior NUS officers, were key organisers of this tour as well as future ‘Students Not Suspects’ events.

Asquith later authored a ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign guide in which she wrote that “communicating what Prevent is and why it’s a pile of sh\*t doesn’t have to be difficult and technical – it can even be fun”.<sup>68</sup> She advocated direct action tactics such as placing leaflets “under doors in halls, or slotting them into books in the library”,<sup>69</sup> promoting the campaign at “big lectures and events”,<sup>70</sup> performing “parody ‘spot check[s]’” according to the radicalisation guidelines,<sup>71</sup> and coming up with “creative ways to spread the campaign on campus in ways that people cannot avoid”, such as “posters in the toilets and lifts, stickers inside textbooks and symbols students can wear to start conversations”.<sup>72</sup>

Asquith also instructed supporters to build “local networks” and tactical “alliances” with student groups such as FOSIS and trade unions such as UCU, Unison, UNITE and the NUT (the National Union of Teachers, now the National Education Union).<sup>73</sup> Other methods she recommended included “encouraging as many students as possible to send emails to a specific target, call a hotline, or write letters and postcards”; promoting “static demonstrations, marches and occupations”; “taking a group to the Registrar’s office and refusing to leave”; causing “reputational damage” to university staff and

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<sup>62</sup> Asquith, A., ‘Why I won’t be working with Prevent (and how you can avoid it, too)’, *NUS Connect*, 13 August 2015, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/why-i-won-t-be-working-with-prevent-and-how-you-can-avoid-it-too>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* See also: ‘Students not Suspects tour’, *Defend the Right to Protest and NUS Black Students*, 14–23 October 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1487881704845683/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>66</sup> McVeigh, K., ‘NUS fights back against government’s “chilling” counter-radicalisation strategy’, *The Guardian*, 2 September 2015, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/sep/02/nus-fights-back-against-governments-chilling-counter-radicalisation-strategy>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>67</sup> ‘NUS call for “all-out defiance” of Counter-Terror strategy’, *The Mancunion*, 1 September 2015, available at: <http://mancunion.com/2015/09/01/nus-campaign-against-prevent-counter-terrorism-act-non-compliance/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Asquith, S., ‘Students Not Suspects Campaign Guide’, *Scribd*, available at: [https://www.scribd.com/document/292280283/Students-Not-Suspects-Campaign-Guide?ad\\_group=725X175X90c0979efbfeff60bbe205819255dbf&campaign=Skimbit%2C+Ltd.&content=10079&irgwc=1&keyword=ft750noi&medium=affiliate&source=impactradius#scribd](https://www.scribd.com/document/292280283/Students-Not-Suspects-Campaign-Guide?ad_group=725X175X90c0979efbfeff60bbe205819255dbf&campaign=Skimbit%2C+Ltd.&content=10079&irgwc=1&keyword=ft750noi&medium=affiliate&source=impactradius#scribd), last visited: 20 January 2018, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

politicians who are supportive of the policy; and passing motions “to not comply with Prevent” through student unions.<sup>74</sup>

The NUS published a model motion to boycott Prevent on 5 September 2015.<sup>75</sup> This motion mandated student union officers to “not engage with the Prevent strategy”, to “educate” students on the “dangers” of the Prevent Strategy, and to “lobby the university to be more open and transparent about how they are engaging with Prevent”.<sup>76</sup> Asquith would later claim that “as of December 2015, more than 32 students’ unions have passed non-compliance policy”.<sup>77</sup>

In the course of research, Student Rights discovered that three of the events advertised on the upcoming ‘Students Not Suspects’ tour would feature CAGE Outreach Director Moazzam Begg.<sup>78</sup> Begg was due to be joined at the Manchester event by Simon Pook,<sup>79</sup> the solicitor of convicted terrorist Munir Farooqi.<sup>80</sup> Both Begg and Pook had recently appeared at an event held in August 2015 calling for Farooqi’s release, which referred to him as “an innocent victim” who had been “framed” – an event that was also promoted by the NUS Black Students’ Campaign.<sup>81</sup>

Critics accused the NUS of “lying and distorting its own record”.<sup>82</sup> An NUS representative tried to explain that the events were being organised as “coalitions with a number of other organisations” and that “some of our officers with different views have chosen to work with the coalition”.<sup>83</sup> Toni Pearce, the previous NUS President, claimed that she had taken an official stance against working with CAGE. At the same time, she tolerated senior NUS officers who organised and hosted events with them. ‘Students Not Suspects’ was created as a vehicle for this apparently separate “coalition” of interests.

In September 2015, the Higher Education Minister Jo Johnson wrote to Megan Dunn, the new NUS President, to express his concerns about the NUS’s opposition to Prevent. He said: “Universities represent an important arena for challenging extremist views. It is important there can be active challenge and debate on issues relating to counter-terrorism and provisions for academic freedom are part of the Prevent guidance for universities and colleges.”<sup>84</sup> In spite of these assurances, Dunn replied that she was “concerned that NUS is being put under pressure for simply encouraging ministers to reflect on legitimate concerns about the practical and unintended consequences” of Prevent.<sup>85</sup>

Prior to the revised Prevent duty guidance coming into force on 18 September 2015, the government’s Extremism Analysis Unit revealed that “hate speakers” had been recorded at 70 events the previous year.<sup>86</sup> These findings led to another intervention from the Prime Minister. Chairing a meeting of the government’s Extremism Taskforce, David Cameron said: “All public institutions have a role to play in

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> ‘Model Motion – Boycott Prevent’, *NUS Connect*, 5 September 2015, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/model-motion-boycott-prevent>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Asquith, S., ‘Students Not Suspects Campaign Guide’, *Scribd*, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Moazzam Begg to speak at NUS-organised event tour’, *Student Rights*, 3 September 2015, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2299/moazzam\\_begg\\_to\\_speak\\_at\\_nus\\_organised\\_event\\_tour\\_update\\_nus\\_statement\\_](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2299/moazzam_begg_to_speak_at_nus_organised_event_tour_update_nus_statement_), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects: Manchester’, *Eventbrite*, 21 October 2015, available at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/students-not-suspects-manchester-tickets-18397638833?aff=crellivorg#>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Munir Farooqi given four life sentences for terror charges’, *BBC News*, 9 September 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-14851811>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>81</sup> ‘NUS Black Students’ Campaign’, *Facebook*, 14 August 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153275574968197>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Doyle, J., ‘National Union of Students under fire for inviting speaker from controversial group Cage whose leaders once described Jihadi John as “beautiful”’, *The Daily Mail*, 4 September 2015, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3221890/National-Union-Students-fire-inviting-speaker-controversial-group-described-Jihadi-John-beautiful.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Wintour, P., ‘Government warns NUS to stop opposition to Prevent strategy’, *The Guardian*, 17 September 2015, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/sep/17/government-nus-stop-opposition-prevent-strategy>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Dunn, M., ‘Our open letter to Jo Johnson on the Counter-Terrorism & Security Act’, *NUS Connect*, 21 September 2015, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/our-open-letter-to-jo-johnson-on-the-counter-terrorism-security-act>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>86</sup> ‘PM’s Extremism Taskforce: tackling extremism in universities and colleges top of the agenda’, *HM Government*, 17 September 2015.



rooting out and challenging extremism. It is not about oppressing free speech or stifling academic freedom, it is about making sure that radical views and ideas are not given the oxygen they need to flourish.”<sup>87</sup> He added: “Schools, universities and colleges, more than anywhere else, have a duty to protect impressionable young minds and ensure that our young people are given every opportunity to reach their potential.”<sup>88</sup>

Megan Dunn, like her predecessor Toni Pearce, stressed that she had no intention of working with CAGE. She claimed that “there will be no NUS resources used to work with Cage” as this “would not be compatible with the NUS’s policies on ‘anti-racism, anti-fascism and how we define anti-Semitism’”.<sup>89</sup> She also said that the NUS would continue to oppose the “hugely damaging” impact of the CTSA and Prevent.<sup>90</sup> In response to her stance against CAGE’s extremism, on 7 October 2015 Dunn was furiously condemned in an open letter which accused her of “betrayal”.<sup>91</sup> It was signed by a number of senior NUS officers including Shelly Asquith and Malia Bouattia, as well as future NUS President Shakira Martin and future Vice-President Ali Milani.<sup>92</sup>

This letter downplayed the mounting evidence of CAGE’s history of extremism<sup>93</sup> and exposed the sharp divisions that were developing within the NUS leadership and the wider student movement. Rather than engage with her concerns, the signatories described Dunn’s criticism as “only one high profile example of the sustained attacks Muslim-led organisations across the spectrum have been subjected to under PREVENT and counter-terrorism legislation”.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, they said that refusing to work with CAGE would deny the NUS “a wealth of experience and information in tackling PREVENT”, repeated “baseless, Islamophobic smears” and adopted “the narrative and language of the government”.<sup>95</sup> Shelly Asquith repeated these claims at an event held at the University of Bristol, describing these criticisms as “Islamophobic smears by the right-wing press”.<sup>96</sup> The activists involved in the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign would promote CAGE speakers at campus events across the UK. They would truly transform ‘Students Not Suspects’ into a national movement and wield enormous influence over the future direction of the NUS.

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Coughlan, S., ‘Student leader rules out link-up with advocacy group Cage’, *BBC News*, 5 October 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34415207>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> ‘Statement on NUS President Megan Dunn’s announcement on CAGE and the Students not Suspects tour’, *Medium*, 7 October 2015.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Murray, D. and Robin Simcox, ‘The evidence shows that CAGE is a pro-terrorist group’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 July 2014. See also: Stuart, H., ‘Understanding CAGE: A Public Information Dossier’, *Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism* and *The Henry Jackson Society*, March 2015, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Statement on NUS President Megan Dunn’s announcement on CAGE and the Students not Suspects tour’, *Medium*, 7 October 2015.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> ‘“Students not Suspects” continues to work with CAGE’, *Student Rights*, 20 October 2015, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2313/\\_students\\_not\\_suspects\\_continues\\_to\\_work\\_with\\_cage](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2313/_students_not_suspects_continues_to_work_with_cage), last visited: 20 January 2018.

## 5. The Evolution of ‘Students Not Suspects’

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The inaugural event of the advertised ‘Students Not Suspects’ tour was held at KCL on 14 October 2015. Moazzam Begg, one of the headline speakers, described Prevent as “the poison chalice condemned by its creators that needs to be stopped” and claimed that top figures in the police force had confessed that “because of these Prevent laws, we are heading into a police state”.<sup>97</sup> Begg also accused Western audiences of being “hypocrites” for focusing on Western victims of recent terrorist attacks and downplayed the terrorism threat, arguing that “Islamic State is not a threat to the West like it is a threat to the Muslim world”.<sup>98</sup> He condemned the media for not reporting the deaths of fighters belonging to Jabhat Al-Nusra,<sup>99</sup> the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda which has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the UK government.<sup>100</sup>

Mohammed Umar Farooq, a student at Staffordshire University, also spoke at KCL.<sup>101</sup> A member of staff at Farooq’s university questioned him about his personal views after he was found reading a book on terrorism in the college library. Despite stressing his opposition to extremism as well as explaining his academic interest in terrorism studies, he was reported to security guards.<sup>102</sup> Farooq’s case would be regularly referenced at campus events across the UK. Leaflets would misleadingly claim that Farooq was “arrested for reading a module core text”.<sup>103</sup> However, the surrounding context was never properly explained – in reality, it resulted from poor practice by an untrained official at a time when the duty had not even been brought into force. No Prevent staff were involved and the university staff apologised to Farooq after a short investigation.<sup>104</sup>

During this first tour, further ‘Students Not Suspects’ events were held at the University of Birmingham,<sup>105</sup> Swansea University,<sup>106</sup> Manchester University,<sup>107</sup> Strathclyde University<sup>108</sup> and the University of Bradford.<sup>109</sup> In addition, events hosting CAGE and attacking Prevent – but not explicitly advertised as ‘Students Not Suspects’ – took place on this tour, as well as on future occasions.

*The Daily Telegraph* calculated that CAGE representatives spoke at a total of nine events between September and November 2015, with Begg speaking at eight of them.<sup>110</sup> In her capacity as NUS Black Students’ Officer, Malia Bouattia shared a platform with Begg at universities in Birmingham and Manchester.<sup>111</sup> In Birmingham, Bouattia described the programme as “totalitarian”, and claimed: “Prevent has been embedded into every sphere of life: public, private and civil – essentially, everyone’s affected by Prevent in some way or another, and that’s what makes it so insidious; there truly is no

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<sup>97</sup> Ullah, A., ‘King’s Hosts Inaugural “Students Not Suspects” Event Despite Government Opposition’, *Roar News*, 15 October 2015, available at: <http://roarnews.co.uk/?p=18195>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>98</sup> Osborne, L., Paul Bentley and Katherine Faulkner, ‘Fanatics’ campaign of hate on campus is revealed: Islamic zealots who backed Jihadi John are poisoning the minds of students’, *The Daily Mail*, 7 January 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3389444/Fanatics-campaign-hate-campus-revealed-Islamic-zealots-backed-Jihadi-John-poisoning-minds-students.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> ‘Proscribed Terrorist Organisations’, *HM Government*, 2014, available at: [https://web.archive.org/web/20140714131716/https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/324603/20140627-List\\_of\\_Proscribed\\_organisations\\_WEBSITE\\_final.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20140714131716/https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/324603/20140627-List_of_Proscribed_organisations_WEBSITE_final.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> Ullah, A., ‘King’s Hosts Inaugural “Students Not Suspects” Event Despite Government Opposition’, *Roar News*, 15 October 2015.

<sup>102</sup> Ramesh, R., ‘Student accused of being a terrorist for reading book on terrorism’, *The Guardian*, 24 September 2015, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/sep/24/student-accused-being-terrorist-reading-book-terrorism>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>103</sup> “Students not Suspects” continues to work with CAGE’, *Student Rights*, 20 October 2015.

<sup>104</sup> Sutton, R., ‘Myths and Misunderstandings: Understanding Opposition to The Prevent Strategy’, *Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism and The Henry Jackson Society*, September 2016, pp. 27-28.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Students not Suspects tour’, *Facebook*, *Defend the Right to Protest and NUS Black Students*, 14–23 October 2015.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> ‘CAGE’, @UK\_CAGE, *Twitter*, 20 October 2015, available at: [https://twitter.com/UK\\_CAGE/status/656474435101270016](https://twitter.com/UK_CAGE/status/656474435101270016), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Rayner, G. and Tom Whitehead, ‘Six universities face inquiry over Cage campus talks’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/12085765/Six-universities-face-inquiry-over-Cage-campus-talks.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>111</sup> “Students not Suspects” continues to work with CAGE’, *Student Rights*, 20 October 2015.



escape from this programme.”<sup>112</sup> Begg further claimed that Prevent “is a spying scheme, which essentially targets one community”.<sup>113</sup> He added that “these new laws are something the Stasi of East Germany would be proud of”.<sup>114</sup> Comparisons of Prevent to totalitarian regimes drew upon emotive historical examples. Begg also compared the plight of British Muslims to Jews under Nazi rule at a ‘Preventing Prevent’ event held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).<sup>115</sup>

These claims were by no means limited to speeches. During this time, activists linked to ‘Students Not Suspects’ distributed leaflets across campuses which inaccurately claimed that students would be considered extremists under Prevent if they desired “political or moral change” or sought “identity, belonging or meaning”.<sup>116</sup> On 2 December 2015, the NUS Black Students’ Campaign published a handbook entitled ‘Preventing Prevent’. As well as being edited by Malia Bouattia, it included contributions from other leading ‘Students Not Suspects’ activists such as Shelly Asquith, Samayya Afzal, Piers Telemacque and Aadam Muuse.<sup>117</sup>

While they stated that their overall aim was to “challenge and repeal” Prevent, their tactics included coordinating action at “a national level” and “on multiple fronts”, such as “challenging it on every campus to lobbying it nationally to legal action”.<sup>118</sup> The handbook promoted an unbalanced portrayal of the policy. In her foreword, Bouattia claimed:

Those on our campuses suffering from the sharpest forms of state repression will find their oppression further institutionalised. The already suffocating restrictions on international students will be multiplied, while for Muslim students there truly will be no respite from the storm of Islamophobia that greets them in every other section of society.<sup>119</sup>

These apocalyptic predictions demonstrated the deeply ideological and incoherent worldview of the NUS Black Students’ Campaign and the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign. The handbook claimed an affinity between government policy and anti-Muslim hatred emanating from the far right, stating that Prevent “strengthens the deeply Islamophobic notion that Muslims are a suspect community in Britain ... the same ideology of the EDL and other such groups”.<sup>120</sup> This was a blatant misrepresentation of Prevent and its opposition to all forms of extremism, including the far right.

Without citing any evidence, it claimed that Prevent is motivated by “a hard right-wing” and “neoconservative perception of the world and Islam” that “recycles old, damaging Orientalist ideas about Muslims: as inherently violent, illogical and dangerous”.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, it argued that Prevent advances the “Clash of Civilisations” thesis in which “Muslims and Muslim cultural values are seen to be inherently incompatible with and antithetical to values and life in ‘superior’ Western civilisation, and an inevitable cause of conflict here”.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> “‘Students not Suspects’ Event Discusses Government Counter-Terrorism Strategies”, *Redbrick*, 20 October 2015, available at: <http://www.redbrick.me/news/students-not-suspects-government-counter-terrorism-strategies/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Rayner, G. and Tom Whitehead, ‘Six universities face inquiry over Cage campus talks’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 2016. See also: ‘Hilary Aked’, @hilary\_aked, *Twitter*, 14 October 2015, available at: [https://twitter.com/hilary\\_aked/status/654349647817900032](https://twitter.com/hilary_aked/status/654349647817900032), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Rayner, G. and Tom Whitehead, ‘Six universities face inquiry over Cage campus talks’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 2016.

<sup>116</sup> “‘Students not Suspects’ continues to work with CAGE”, *Student Rights*, 20 October 2015.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent: A student handbook on countering the PREVENT agenda on campus’, *NUS Black Students*, 2 December 2015, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

Echoing CAGE’s own critique of the programme as “playing up the threat of Muslims”,<sup>123</sup> the handbook stated that Prevent forces British Muslims “to assimilate and prove loyalty to Britain”, polices “Muslim and Islamic expression” and “constructs the divisive notion of a ... good, ‘moderate Muslim’ (which is contrasted with and played off against the ‘bad Muslim’); one who is willing to compromise their faith and assimilate to appease the state”.<sup>124</sup> This apparently results in a “state-sponsored version of Islam”.<sup>125</sup>

Ignoring the pre-criminal and voluntary nature of Prevent delivery, it further claimed that “taking the fight against ideology to ‘non-violent extremism’ has effectively criminalised anyone who disagrees with the government or expresses dissent”<sup>126</sup> and repeated earlier claims made on the ‘Students Not Suspects’ tour that it had become “a totalitarian programme”.<sup>127</sup>

‘Preventing Prevent’ advanced extremist narratives and promoted extremist groups such as CAGE, MEND<sup>128</sup> and the IHRC.<sup>129</sup> Oxford-based activist Aliya Yule – who later spoke at a ‘Students Not Suspects’ event at the University of Oxford<sup>130</sup> – recommended that her Twitter followers consult IHRC briefings and campaign materials.<sup>131</sup>

Student Union officers from across the UK were not averse to fabricating baseless claims. The Vice-President of the University of Strathclyde Students’ Association (USSA) claimed in a promotional video for a ‘Students Not Suspects’ event: “Part of the Prevent duty guidance explains certain symptoms that a university would have to look out for. The symptoms say that if you are not white you are more likely to be a terrorist.”<sup>132</sup>

The USSA later spread claims that lecturers have reported students for “observing their religion more closely”.<sup>133</sup> This is a clear distortion. The Channel Duty Guidance is explicit that “outward expression of faith, in the absence of any other indicator of vulnerability, is not a reason to make a referral to Channel”.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the guidance states that it will only investigate “those cases where there is a genuine vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism”.<sup>135</sup>

‘Students Not Suspects’ held a national day of action on 7 December 2015,<sup>136</sup> with workshops, demonstrations, publicity campaigns and leafleting activities coordinated to take place in London,<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqui, ‘Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A response to the revised *Prevent* strategy’, *CAGE*, 2011, available at: [https://cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/CP\\_Good\\_Muslim\\_Bad\\_Muslim.pdf](https://cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/CP_Good_Muslim_Bad_Muslim.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent: A student handbook on countering the PREVENT agenda on campus’, *NUS Black Students*, 2 December 2015, p. 18.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>128</sup> Gilligan, A., ‘The baroness, Islamic extremists and a question of free speech’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/11488175/The-baroness-Islamic-extremists-and-a-question-of-free-speech.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: Gilligan, A., ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing election’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 2015; Wilson, T., ‘MEND: “Islamists Masquerading as Civil Libertarians”’, *Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism* and *The Henry Jackson Society*, 31 October 2017, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HJS-Mend-Report.pdf>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Bruno Leipold’, @BrunoLeipold, *Twitter*, 24 May 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/BrunoLeipold/status/735183310947635200>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>131</sup> ‘aliya’, @aliyayule, *Twitter*, 25 November 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/aliyayule/status/669481482935775232>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Prevent PREVENT at Strathclyde’, *YouTube*, 15 October 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQgvniRAKak&app=desktop>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>133</sup> Farukuoye, T., ‘USSA hosts protest of government terrorism policy’, *Strathclyde Telegraph*, 21 November 2015, available at: <https://strathclydetelegraph.com/2015/11/21/ussa-hosts-protest-government-terrorism-policy/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Channel Duty Guidance: Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, *HM Government*, 2015, available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/425189/Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_April\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018, p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>136</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent – Day of ACTION! #StudentsNotSuspects’, *Facebook*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/528980720592096/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/673935815605645313>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘SWSS’, @SWSSNews, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/SWSSNews/status/673870990053498880>, last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘Imaan’, @kclsu\_vpwc, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: [https://twitter.com/kclsu\\_vpwc/status/673866982635266049](https://twitter.com/kclsu_vpwc/status/673866982635266049), last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘UEL Students’ Union’, @uelunion, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/uelunion/status/673852434293374976>, last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘Brunel SU President’, @UBSPresident, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/UBSPresident/status/673841988526088192>, last

Sheffield,<sup>138</sup> Bristol,<sup>139</sup> Glasgow,<sup>140</sup> Norwich,<sup>141</sup> Swansea,<sup>142</sup> Manchester<sup>143</sup> and Leeds.<sup>144</sup> Disturbingly, SOAS Students’ Union claimed the following day that a senior member of university management gave them an explicit guarantee “that students won’t and haven’t been reported to Prevent” despite it being a legal duty.<sup>145</sup>

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visited: 20 January 2018; ‘Hamza’, @DemOperaTunity, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at:

<https://twitter.com/DemOperaTunity/status/673839891080441856>, last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘sarah’, @sarahgillborn, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at:

<https://twitter.com/sarahgillborn/status/673821758303166464>, last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘Imaan’, @kclsu\_vpwc, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at:

[https://twitter.com/kclsu\\_vpwc/status/673805828957315072](https://twitter.com/kclsu_vpwc/status/673805828957315072), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Alex Prestage’, @alexoprestage, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/alexoprestage/status/673957275401367552>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Davey Silver | Hallam’, @HallamEducation, *Twitter*, available at: <https://twitter.com/HallamEducation/status/673917148197232640>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/673872688805474304>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Jamie Cross’, @cross4jamie, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/cross4jamie/status/673866121859198976>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>140</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/673872688805474304>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.* See also: ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/673830605201809408>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 8 December 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/674390539320586240>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

## 6. ‘Students Not Suspects’ in the 2016 Academic Year

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In January 2016, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) announced that it would contact six British universities about “how they assessed the risks and what mitigations they put in place to safeguard staff and students” at events featuring CAGE.<sup>146</sup> Following a *Daily Mail* investigation into many of these campus events, the then Home Secretary and future Prime Minister Theresa May described CAGE’s views as “damaging extremist rhetoric”.<sup>147</sup> She added: “Our universities have a proud tradition of championing free speech – but this should never be at the expense of giving extremist views the oxygen they need to flourish.”<sup>148</sup>

Moazzam Begg said in an interview with the *Socialist Worker* shortly afterwards: “The Daily Mail is racist and xenophobic – Cage wasn’t the first to be attacked and it won’t be the last.”<sup>149</sup> Another extremist who attacked Prevent in the *Socialist Worker* was MEND former Director of Engagement and current National Community Head Azad Ali.<sup>150</sup> He said: “It is part of cracking down on dissent and civil liberties and it’s having an acute impact on Muslims.”<sup>151</sup> Azad Ali lost a libel case in 2010, which found he “was indeed ... taking the position that the killing of American and British troops in Iraq would be justified”.<sup>152</sup> He has praised Hamas,<sup>153</sup> expressed admiration for Al-Qaeda preacher Anwar al-Awlaki,<sup>154</sup> referred to non-Muslims as “sinners”<sup>155</sup> and said that “democracy, if it means at the expense of not implementing the Sharia, of course no-one agrees with that”.<sup>156</sup>

Student activists drew upon Begg’s experiences in Guantanamo Bay in order to whitewash the negative coverage of Begg and CAGE’s extremism. Asquith told the *Socialist Worker* that the media “neglect to mention the incarceration and torture of Moazzam and how he’s never been charged with a single crime”.<sup>157</sup> Sai Englert, a member of the NUS National Executive Council (NEC), wrote in *The Huffington Post* that “[Begg’s] experiences make him extremely well qualified to discuss the destructive consequences of the ‘war on terror’ and ‘anti-radicalisation’ policies implemented by this government and its predecessors”.<sup>158</sup>

Englert believed that this fact alone legitimated his “voice in this debate”; he also made further attacks against the NUS President Megan Dunn over her refusal to meet with CAGE, accusing her of “dividing

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<sup>146</sup> Rayner, G. and Tom Whitehead, ‘Six universities face inquiry over Cage campus talks’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 2016.

<sup>147</sup> Osborne, L., Paul Bentley and Katherine Faulkner, ‘Fanatics’ campaign of hate on campus is revealed: Islamic zealots who backed Jihadi John are poisoning the minds of students’, *The Daily Mail*, 7 January 2016.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Tengely-Evans, T., ‘Exclusive – Moazzam Begg and Shelly Asquith defy smears – fight racist witch hunt’, *Socialist Worker*, 12 January 2016, available at: <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/41962/Exclusive+-+Moazzam+Begg+and+Shelly+Asquith+defy+smears+-+fight+racist+witch+hunt>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Meet the Team’, *MEND*, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/about-mend/meet-the-team/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>151</sup> Tengely-Evans, T., ‘Exclusive – Moazzam Begg and Shelly Asquith defy smears – fight racist witch hunt’, *Socialist Worker*, 12 January 2016.

<sup>152</sup> Luft, O., “Kill British” blog man fails in MoS libel bid’, *Press Gazette*, 28 January 2010.

<sup>153</sup> Ali, A., ‘We are the Resistance!’, *Between the Lines*, 30 December 2008, available at:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20130709160454/http://blog.islamicforumeurope.com/2008/12/30/we-are-the-resistance/>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: Ali, A.,

‘We are the Resistance II’, *Between the Lines*, 15 January 2009, available at:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20140824081833/http://blog.islamicforumeurope.com/2009/01/15/we-are-the-resistance-ii/>, last visited: 20 January 2018; Maher, S.,

‘Focus on Islamism: A reduction of reality at the Guardian?’, *Standpoint*, 5 August 2010, available at: <http://standpointmag.co.uk/node/3267>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>154</sup> Gilligan, A., ‘Great news: Islamists lose their Parliamentary foothold’, *Andrew Gilligan*, 8 December 2010, available at:

<https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/tag/anwar-al-awlaki/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>155</sup> Gilligan, A., ‘Mayor gives £30,000 of taxpayers’ money to Muslim group led by “extremist”’, *Evening Standard*, 12 March 2009, available at:

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/mayor-gives-30000-of-taxpayers-money-to-muslim-group-led-by-extremist-6938333.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>156</sup> Gilligan, A., “Britain’s Islamic republic”: full transcript of Channel 4 Dispatches programme on Lutfur Rahman, the IFE and Tower Hamlets’, *Andrew Gilligan*, 22 October 2015, available at: <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/2010/10/22/britains-islamic-republic-full-transcript-of-channel-4-dispatches-programme-on-lutfur-rahman-the-ife-and-tower-hamlets-the-full-transcript/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>157</sup> Tengely-Evans, T., ‘Exclusive – Moazzam Begg and Shelly Asquith defy smears – fight racist witch hunt’, *Socialist Worker*, 12 January 2016.

<sup>158</sup> Englert, S., ‘Preventing Prevent: Opposing Islamophobia on Campus’, *The Huffington Post*, 11 February 2016, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sai-englert/preventing-prevent-opposi\\_b\\_9209468.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sai-englert/preventing-prevent-opposi_b_9209468.html), last visited: 20 January 2018.

our [student] movement and policing who is or is not an ‘acceptable’ voice for Muslims in Britain”.<sup>159</sup> This became a central theme of Malia Bouattia’s campaign to become NUS President in the period leading up to the 2016 NUS National Conference. Drawing upon her record of organising ‘Students Not Suspects’ tours as well as her co-authorship of the ‘Preventing Prevent’ handbook,<sup>160</sup> Bouattia’s manifesto promised that she would “bring back traditions of NUS activism”, oppose the government’s “xenophobic agendas” and put the liberation of minority groups “at the heart of everything we do”.<sup>161</sup> She claimed: “We need a proactive president who encourages campaigns and self-organisation on the ground.”<sup>162</sup>

When the then Education Secretary Nicky Morgan visited the University of Cambridge in February 2016, a group of students from the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) protested her appearance alongside representatives from the NUT.<sup>163</sup> Their banners and placards included slogans such as “education not surveillance, students not suspects”.<sup>164</sup> A month later, the NUT passed a motion at its National Conference in support of the NUS’s opposition to Prevent.<sup>165</sup> This showed the extent to which grassroots anti-Prevent movements and trade unions had coalesced around the overarching ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign by this time.

On 8 February 2016, ‘Students Not Suspects’ launched its second tour with an event at Goldsmiths University entitled ‘What is Prevent and how can we oppose it?’. Organised by Goldsmiths UCU, Goldsmiths Students’ Union, Goldsmiths Feminist Society, Goldsmiths Palestine Campaign and Goldsmiths Islamic Society, the panel included Moazzam Begg, Malia Bouattia and Rahmaan Mohammadi, a secondary school student who they claimed was “questioned for Justice for Palestine activity” after wearing a badge featuring the Palestinian flag.<sup>166</sup> Mohammadi told them: “I need to talk about the reality of PREVENT, what actually happens in schools, colleges and campuses.”<sup>167</sup> He added: “As a Muslim, I fight for justice. The equality of freedom, and PREVENT itself is fighting that. It takes basic human rights away.”<sup>168</sup>

Like Farooq, Mohammadi’s case would be regularly referenced in the media and at other campus events.<sup>169</sup> In reality, Mohammadi had been found in breach of his school’s uniform policy and likely had been questioned by staff for distributing Friends of Al-Aqsa material in class.<sup>170</sup> The school confirmed to a local newspaper that they “were not concerned about the nature of the badges and wristbands” and

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<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> ‘Malia for NUS President’, available at: [http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/22754/5c1df61f7ec53a6b3d2feb0d10abc45e/Malia\\_Bouattia\\_Manifesto.pdf](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/22754/5c1df61f7ec53a6b3d2feb0d10abc45e/Malia_Bouattia_Manifesto.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>161</sup> Havergal, C., ‘Megan Dunn faces NUS leadership challenge’, *Times Higher Education*, 25 February 2016, available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/megan-dunn-faces-nus-leadership-challenge>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Care, A., ‘Cambridge student activists protest visit by Education Secretary Nicky Morgan’, *Stop the War Coalition*, 6 February 2016, available at: <http://stopwar.org.uk/index.php/news-comment/814-cambridge-student-activists-protest-visit-by-education-secretary-nicky-morgan>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 28 March 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/714417089235263488>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>166</sup> ‘STUDENTS NOT SUSPECTS – what is Prevent and how can we oppose it?’, *Goldsmiths UCU*, 8 February 2016, available at: <https://goldsmithsucu.wordpress.com/2016/01/14/students-not-suspects-what-is-prevent-and-how-can-we-oppose-it/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>167</sup> Lin, H., ‘Students NOT Suspects campaign visits Goldsmiths’, *East London Lines*, 11 February 2016, available at: <http://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2016/02/students-not-suspects-campaign-visits-goldsmiths/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Sherriff, L., ‘Anti-Terror Prevent Police Questioned Schoolboy Rahmaan Mohammadi For Wearing A Palestinian Badge’, *The Huffington Post*, 15 February 2016, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/02/15/prevent-police-questioned-schoolboy-wearing-palestinian-badge\\_n\\_9234968.html?1455535886](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/02/15/prevent-police-questioned-schoolboy-wearing-palestinian-badge_n_9234968.html?1455535886), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Anti-terror police question schoolboy for wearing pro-Palestine badge’, *The Independent*, 14 February 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/anti-terror-police-question-schoolboy-for-wearing-pro-palestine-badge-a6873656.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

that “at no point was the student told not to talk about Palestine in school”.<sup>171</sup> The officers eventually concluded he was not at risk and gave him advice and support.<sup>172</sup>

The staff involved were right to raise concerns about the material Mohammadi was handing out. Friends of Al-Aqsa have a record of publishing writers with a history of anti-Semitic views, such as Gilad Atzmon<sup>173</sup> and Israel Shamir,<sup>174</sup> as well as the Holocaust denier Paul Eisen.<sup>175</sup> The group’s founder, Ismail Patel, has claimed: “ Hamas is no terrorist organization ... we salute Hamas for standing up to Israel.”<sup>176</sup>

There were also attempts to emotionally manipulate the students into believing that they were being victimised by the UK government. Begg warned them: “Speaking out against Prevent also means you will be targeted by Prevent. It means you will be quoted as an extremist, a fanatic, a hate creature and the zealot.”<sup>177</sup> In doing so, Begg conflated legitimate criticism of the strategy with concerns that had been raised in good faith about his and other speakers’ extremist views. All five of the panellists at Goldsmiths spoke against Prevent, ensuring that there was no outlet for scrutiny of these false claims and exaggerated stories.<sup>178</sup>

Further events on this second tour took place at the University of Liverpool, the University of Manchester, Sheffield Hallam University, Leeds Beckett University, the University of East Anglia (UEA), the University of Brighton, the University of Exeter, UCL and the University of Oxford.<sup>179</sup>

On 10 March 2016, Malia Bouattia was invited to speak at a panel discussion of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, Switzerland.<sup>180</sup> The meeting considered UK counter-terror policy and its “effects on freedom of expression and civil liberties”. Bouattia testified that Prevent was “damaging both academic freedom and student-lecturer relations”, was “imposing a climate of fear and suspicion” and was “disproportionally target[ing]” Muslim students and staff.<sup>181</sup> She appeared alongside Raza Kazim from the IHRC,<sup>182</sup> who had previously shouted at members of the police when he attended the pro-Hezbollah<sup>183</sup> and Khomeini<sup>184</sup> inspired Al-Quds Day demonstration in 2010.<sup>185</sup>

This second tour would not go entirely unopposed. On 15 March 2016, Student Rights volunteers attended a ‘Students Not Suspects’ event at the University of Exeter, which featured Moazzam Begg,

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<sup>171</sup> Parris-Long, A., ‘Challney Boys denies claims student was referred to Prevent for wearing “Free Palestine” badge’, *Luton Today*, 17 February 2016, available at: <http://www.lutontoday.co.uk/news/education/challney-boys-denies-claims-student-was-referred-to-prevent-for-wearing-free-palestine-badge-1-7219114>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>172</sup> Sutton, R., ‘Myths and Misunderstandings: Understanding Opposition to The Prevent Strategy’, *Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism and The Henry Jackson Society*, September 2016, pp. 26-27.

<sup>173</sup> Dysch, M., ‘Report points to concern over speakers on campus’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 1 April 2016, available at:

<https://www.thejc.com/education/student/reportpoints-to-concern-over-speakers-on-campus-1.63153>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>174</sup> ‘Friends of Al-Aqsa publish Israel Shamir 2002’, *Student Rights*, available at:

<http://www.studentrights.org.uk/userfiles/files/Friends%20of%20Al%20Aqsa%20publish%20Israel%20Shamir%202002.png>, last visited: 29 November 2017.

<sup>175</sup> Dysch, M., ‘Report points to concern over speakers on campus’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 1 April 2016. See also: Eisen, P., ‘My Life as a Holocaust Denier’, *RighteousJews.org*, January 2008, available at: <http://www.righteousjews.org/article27a.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘Friends of Al-Aqsa publish Paul Eisen 2003’, available at: <http://www.studentrights.org.uk/userfiles/files/Friends%20of%20Al%20Aqsa%20publish%20Paul%20Eisen%202003.png>, last visited: 29 November 2017.

<sup>176</sup> ‘Ismail Patel | Stop the Gaza massacre Demonstration London 10 January 2009’, *YouTube*, 11 January 2009, available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCLNX9xyd6c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCLNX9xyd6c), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>177</sup> Lin, H., ‘Students NOT Suspects campaign visits Goldsmiths’, *East London Lines*, 11 February 2016.

<sup>178</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent at Goldsmiths’, *Student Rights*, 11 February 2016, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2350/preventing\\_prevent\\_at\\_goldsmiths](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2350/preventing_prevent_at_goldsmiths), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>179</sup> ‘FOSIS’, @fosischannel, *Twitter*, 9 February 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/fosischannel/status/697154724831879168>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>180</sup> ‘Malia Bouattia’, @MaliaBouattia, *Twitter*, 10 March 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/MaliaBouattia/status/707869761598787584>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>181</sup> ‘NUS Black Students’ Officer to speak at UN about effects of PREVENT’, *NUS Connect*, 9 March 2016, available at:

<https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/nus-black-students-officer-to-speak-at-un-about-effects-of-prevent>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> ‘Hezbollah lovers at Al Quds Day’, *YouTube*, 20 August 2011, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6HAK-eXTAE>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>184</sup> Ardalan, S., ‘Iran’s “Jerusalem Day”: Behind the rallies and rhetoric’, *BBC News*, 2 August 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23448932>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>185</sup> ‘Raza Kazim of the IHRC – “I am giving you an order!”’, *YouTube*, 20 August 2011, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1HRzwomBPc>, last visited: 20 January 2018.



Shelly Asquith and Rahmaan Mohammadi.<sup>186</sup> The volunteers handed out leaflets which countered a number of myths about Prevent. These leaflets contained quotes condemning CAGE from NUS President Megan Dunn as well as Russell Langer, the then Campaigns Director at the Union of Jewish Students (UJS).<sup>187</sup> They also included a quote from Gita Sahgal, former Head of the Gender Unit at Amnesty International, who has called Begg “Britain’s most famous supporter of the Taliban”.<sup>188</sup>

One student questioned Begg over an interview he gave to Julian Assange alongside CAGE Research Director Asim Qureshi, in which Qureshi admitted that, in an ideal state, if all conditions were met, a woman could be stoned to death for adultery.<sup>189</sup> Shelly Asquith was also questioned about what alternatives she would put in place instead of Prevent. Tellingly, she admitted: “Don’t ask me, I’m not an expert on counter-terrorism policy.”<sup>190</sup>

Begg later responded to a *Daily Mail* investigation of this event, claiming that it was part of “a concerted attempt once again to smear those brave voices who challenge the growth of the surveillance State and the government attack on dissent”.<sup>191</sup>

On 14 April 2016, CAGE endorsed a ‘Students Not Suspects’ video entitled ‘What is the Prevent duty?’<sup>192</sup> featuring NUS activists such as Malia Bouattia, Samayya Afzal, Aadam Muuse and Sai Englert.<sup>193</sup> In it, the students assert that the CTSA “forces colleges and universities to spy on students”, creates “a climate of suspicion around students’ political and religious views”, and that black and Muslim students are “disproportionately targeted”.<sup>194</sup> They also claim that Prevent “destroys academic freedom” and “destroys the trust and openness needed for a learning environment”.<sup>195</sup>

CAGE’s legitimacy within the NUS was given an unhelpful boost on 20 April 2016 when Malia Bouattia was elected as the new NUS President at the NUS National Conference in Brighton, with a total of 372 votes to Megan Dunn’s 328.<sup>196</sup> She also addressed a fringe meeting held with FOSIS at the NUS Conference.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> ‘Moazzam Begg challenged at the University of Exeter’, *Student Rights*, 17 March 2016, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2367/moazzam\\_begg\\_challenged\\_at\\_the\\_university\\_of\\_exeter](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2367/moazzam_begg_challenged_at_the_university_of_exeter), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>187</sup> ‘Student Rights’, @Student\_Rights, *Twitter*, 16 March 2016, available at: [https://twitter.com/Student\\_Rights/status/710165969436540930](https://twitter.com/Student_Rights/status/710165969436540930), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> ‘Moazzam Begg fails to condemn stoning a women [sic] to death for adultery’, *YouTube*, 17 March 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ro73gmUr3pQ>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> Harding, E., ‘Ex-Guantanamo Bay prisoner Moazzam Begg REFUSES to condemn stoning of women in university talk’, *The Daily Mail*, 21 March 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3503079/Ex-Guantanamo-Bay-prisoner-Moazzam-Begg-REFUSES-condemn-stoning-women-university-talk.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>192</sup> ‘CAGE’, @UK\_CAGE, *Twitter*, 14 April 2016, available at: [https://twitter.com/UK\\_CAGE/status/720713252234248195](https://twitter.com/UK_CAGE/status/720713252234248195), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>193</sup> ‘NUS Black Students’, @nusBSC, *Twitter*, 14 April 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/nusBSC/status/720704095414145025>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> ‘Malia Bouattia elected as NUS National President’, *NUS*, 20 April 2016, available at: <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/malia-bouattia-elected-as-nus-national-president/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>197</sup> ‘Malia Bouattia’, @MaliaBouattia, *Twitter*, 19 April 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/MaliaBouattia/status/722474678435102721>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

## 7. The Legitimation of ‘Students Not Suspects’

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Given how closely Malia Bouattia was associated with the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign, her election as NUS President symbolised the extent of the alignment of the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign with official NUS policy.

After controversial comments made by Bouattia resurfaced in the media, more than 50 Jewish Society Presidents and representatives from across the UK signed an open letter, claiming that her previous remarks were “reminiscent of the age-old anti-Semitic idea[s] of Jewish power and Jewish control”.<sup>198</sup> These included her claim that the University of Birmingham is a “Zionist outpost” with “the largest JSoc in the country whose leadership is dominated by Zionist activists”,<sup>199</sup> as well as her characterisations of “Zionist lobbies” and a “Zionist-led media”.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, video footage emerged of Bouattia defending violent resistance at an anti-Israel event.<sup>201</sup> She was also questioned over her relationship with the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK (MPACUK), an organisation with a history of anti-Semitism that has been no-platformed by the NUS,<sup>202</sup> after she thanked its spokesperson Raza Nadim for endorsing her as a candidate.<sup>203</sup>

These past comments and activities showed that extremism, radicalism, anti-Semitism and the Israel-Palestine conflict had become key issues within the NUS political landscape. The UJS demanded an “urgent clarification” of Bouattia’s position.<sup>204</sup> Bouattia defended herself by saying: “I want to be clear that for me to take issue with Zionist politics, is not me taking issue with being Jewish.”<sup>205</sup> She added: “I am deeply concerned that my faith and political views are being misconstrued and used as an opportunity to falsely accuse me of anti-Semitism.”<sup>206</sup> She denied any knowledge of Raza Nadim’s affiliation to MPACUK and clarified that she had no relationship with the organisation.<sup>207</sup>

She did not, however, deal with the other substantive criticisms levelled against her in relation to her longstanding working relationship with Moazzam Begg and CAGE, nor her previous decision in 2014 to label an NUS motion which condemned ISIS as “Islamophobic” and “pro USA intervention”.<sup>208</sup> More recently, at a Middle East Monitor (MEMO) event held in February 2016, Bouattia had used phrases

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<sup>198</sup> ‘Questions that need to be answered’, *Google Docs*, available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1S2050lCKaTw2yaI2F74n9MbgqkdurIFLm-XmOjeFWM4/edit>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Response to Malia’s Reply’, *Google Docs*, available at: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1\\_K-w7OEzSnAB0E9G4\\_b2YNn2NzNjr1oSLEboTuYBS8/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_K-w7OEzSnAB0E9G4_b2YNn2NzNjr1oSLEboTuYBS8/edit), last visited: 20 January 2018; Khomami, N., ‘NUS president must address concerns over antisemitism, say Jewish students’, *The Guardian*, 21 April 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/apr/21/nus-president-malia-bouattia-must-redress-concerns-over-antisemitism-say-jewish-students>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>199</sup> Lindley, D. and Malia Bouattia, ‘University of Birmingham & Israeli Apartheid Week: Mock Israeli Checkpoint’, *The London School of Emancipation*, 28 March 2011, available at: <http://the-london-school-of-emancipation.blogspot.co.uk/2011/03/university-of-birmingham-israeli.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>200</sup> Gilligan, A., ‘Charity backing anti-Israel rallies no longer receives state funding’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 April 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/02/charity-backing-anti-israel-rallies-no-longer-receives-state-funding/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>201</sup> Lloyd, W., ‘Watch future NUS president Malia Bouattia endorse violent struggle’, *The Tab*, 19 April 2016, available at: <https://thetab.com/2016/04/19/watch-future-nus-president-malia-bouattia-endorse-violent-struggle-87052>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>202</sup> Rashly, S., ‘MPACUK spokesman hits out at “power of the Zio lobby” on UK campuses’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 16 April 2016, available at: <https://www.thejc.com/education/student/mpacuk-spokesman-hits-out-at-power-of-the-zio-lobby-on-uk-campuses-1.64182>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: Wahid, O. and Nick Craven, ‘Sinister links of cult of Corbyn: Hardline Left-wing group backing his leadership campaign has SECRET ties to anti-Semitic organisation to boost Muslim support’, *The Daily Mail*, 23 July 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3705063/Sinister-links-cult-Corbyn-Hardline-Left-wing-group-backing-leadership-campaign-secret-ties-anti-Semitic-group-boost-support-Muslims.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>203</sup> ‘Malia Bouattia faces questions over NUS leadership bid’, *Student Rights*, 14 April 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2385/malia\\_bouattia\\_faces\\_questions\\_over\\_nus\\_leadership\\_bid](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2385/malia_bouattia_faces_questions_over_nus_leadership_bid), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> ‘Response to Open Letter’, *Google Docs*, available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yyMf32rx4Ymu1YYgXMzaRP0ly8FWLrRzuYX8iFJ5pg/edit>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> ‘NUS ISIS vote highlights its warped priorities’, *Student Rights*, 15 October 2014, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2225/nus\\_isis\\_vote\\_highlights\\_its\\_warped\\_priorities](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2225/nus_isis_vote_highlights_its_warped_priorities), last visited: 20 January 2018.



such as “so-called terrorism” and “invisible terrorists”, and complained that “Palestinian resistance is derided as terrorism”, thus downplaying the high-level threat from Islamist terrorist organisations.<sup>209</sup>

Bouattia’s controversial past severely undermined the trust and credibility of the NUS. Fearing that she would continue to legitimise anti-Semitism and extremism, many students called for their student unions to disaffiliate from the NUS, including those from Oxford, Cambridge and other higher education institutions.<sup>210</sup>

Four NUS delegates from the University of Oxford justified their decision to support a referendum on disaffiliation by claiming that Bouattia’s election “clearly showed an NUS out of step with the views of ordinary students”.<sup>211</sup> They added: “The point of a union for students is to deliver real representation for all students, and what has occurred [at] this conference shows that this is no longer a priority for those who hold power in the NUS.”<sup>212</sup>

While Oxford and Cambridge voted to stay, universities that chose to disaffiliate from the NUS in the 2016–17 period included Lincoln,<sup>213</sup> Newcastle,<sup>214</sup> Loughborough,<sup>215</sup> Hull,<sup>216</sup> Essex<sup>217</sup> and Surrey.<sup>218</sup> These disaffiliations can only be understood in the context of Malia Bouattia’s tenure as President as well as wider disillusionment at the direction of the NUS. However, they must also be seen as a reaction to the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign with which she was so closely affiliated.

Malia Bouattia’s victory emboldened anti-Prevent activities across the UK. Merely days after her election as NUS President, student protestors at the University of Edinburgh held an overnight sit-in at the university library and called for staff and faculty members to oppose Prevent.<sup>219</sup> Students at Heriot-Watt University also produced a video which accused the policy of being “racist, discriminatory, [and] Islamophobic” as well as “breaking confidentiality between staff and students, destroying student activism, [and] censoring academic freedom to research and explore”.<sup>220</sup> A month earlier, student union officers at Heriot-Watt had walked out of a university presentation on Prevent, claiming that it was “sugar coated and failed to highlight Prevent for what it actually is [i.e. ‘racist’ and ‘Islamophobic’]”.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> ‘NUS officer speaks at MEMO event’, *Student Rights*, 3 February 2016, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2349/nus\\_officer\\_speaks\\_at\\_memo\\_event](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2349/nus_officer_speaks_at_memo_event), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>210</sup> ‘Students plan NUS disaffiliation over presidential vote (Update: Students at more universities raise issue)’, *Student Rights*, 21 April 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2387/students\\_plan\\_nus\\_disaffiliation\\_over\\_presidential\\_vote\\_update\\_students\\_at\\_more\\_universities\\_raise\\_issue](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2387/students_plan_nus_disaffiliation_over_presidential_vote_update_students_at_more_universities_raise_issue), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Oh Well, Alright Then for NUS Delegates’, *Facebook*, 21 April 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ohwellalrightthen/posts/1732262046989792>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Lynskey, D., ‘Trouble on campus: Is the NUS beyond repair?’, *The Guardian*, 18 May 2016, available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/may/18/trouble-on-campus-is-the-nus-is-beyond-repair>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> Ali, A., ‘Loughborough Students’ Union Latest To Disaffiliate From NUS In Surprising Decision’, *The Independent*, 9 June 2016, available at:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/loughborough-student-union-nus-malia-bouattia-disaffiliation-referendum-a7072706.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>216</sup> Ali, A., ‘Hull University Union Becomes Latest To Disaffiliate from National Union of Students’, *The Independent*, 24 May 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/hull-university-union-becomes-latest-to-disaffiliate-from-national-union-of-students-a7046696.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>217</sup> Crick, J., ‘Essex students vote to leave the NUS’, *The National Student*, 2 May 2017, available at:

[http://www.thenationalstudent.com/Student/2017\\_So\\_Far/2017-05-02/essex\\_students\\_vote\\_to\\_leave\\_the\\_nus.html](http://www.thenationalstudent.com/Student/2017_So_Far/2017-05-02/essex_students_vote_to_leave_the_nus.html), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>218</sup> Honha, T., ‘Surrey students vote to leave the NUS’, *The National Student*, 31 May 2017, available at: <http://www.thenationalstudent.com/Student/2017-05-30/suurey-university-vote-in-favour-of-dissaffiliation-from-nus.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>219</sup> Denholm, A., ‘Scottish students protest over legislation to prevent radicalisation of students’, *The Herald*, 26 April 2016, available at:

[http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14451330.Scottish\\_students\\_protest\\_over\\_legislation\\_to\\_prevent\\_radicalisation\\_of\\_students/?ref=twtr](http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14451330.Scottish_students_protest_over_legislation_to_prevent_radicalisation_of_students/?ref=twtr), last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 25 April 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/724625982695591937>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>220</sup> ‘Heriot-Watt University Student Union’, *Facebook*, 21 April 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/HWUUnion/videos/1151185891600931/?pnref=story>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>221</sup> ‘Rah Singh’, *Facebook*, 2 March 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/RouwRouw/posts/10154329287534123?pnref=story>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 2 March 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/705079678034382848>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

During May 2016, a ‘Students Not Suspects’ event featuring Shelly Asquith took place at the University of Oxford,<sup>222</sup> while Reading University Students’ Union adopted a motion entitled ‘Preventing Prevent: Students Not Suspects’ as official policy.<sup>223</sup> This mandated the union to “openly accept [that] the Prevent agenda is a catalyst for Racism and Islamophobia” and to “adopt a policy of active opposition”.<sup>224</sup>

Student activists spread awareness of the campaign through social media, with the President of Canterbury Christ Church University Students’ Union tweeting a photo of himself with a ‘Students Not Suspects’ sign which read: “I am International, I am B.M.E, I am a bearded student, I study politics and religious studies. Am I a suspect?”<sup>225</sup> He also produced a satirical poster advertising “Bearded Students Against Prevent”.<sup>226</sup>

On 4 June 2016, the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign hosted a national conference on ‘Prevent, Islamophobia and Civil Liberties’ at Goldsmiths College, University of London.<sup>227</sup> A ‘Students Not Suspects’ Twitter account offered live updates throughout the proceedings. One of the speakers, Yasser Louati, the spokesperson of the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF),<sup>228</sup> justified violent extremism and terrorism, claiming that “you cannot export bombs abroad and expect flowers in return”.<sup>229</sup> Louati would repeat this provocative remark at a ‘Students Not Suspects’ event held at UCL on 30 November 2016.<sup>230</sup> Louati also remarked that “nobody asked about the governments [sic] shortcomings in allowing terrorist attacks on French soil. Instead it became the burden & fault of Muslims.”<sup>231</sup>

As well as featuring Malia Bouattia, Shelly Asquith and CAGE Outreach Director Moazzam Begg, the conference at Goldsmiths featured speakers and attendees from a number of extremist-linked organisations, including MEND,<sup>232</sup> IHRC<sup>233</sup> and Friends of Al-Aqsa.<sup>234</sup>

Hannah Dee, an activist involved in both ‘Students Not Suspects’ and ‘Defend the Right To Protest’, introduced Begg by stating that she was “absolutely proud to be sharing a platform” with him.<sup>235</sup> She concealed the histories of the organisations present and claimed that criticism of the conference was motivated by a “disgusting Islamophobic witch-hunt against really important organisations like CAGE [and] the Islamic Human Rights Commission [IHRC]”, both of which she said played a “vital role” in resisting Prevent.<sup>236</sup> Friends of Al-Aqsa promoted literature and ‘Free Palestine’ badges at the

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<sup>222</sup> ‘Bruno Leipold’, @BrunoLeipold, *Twitter*, 24 May 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/BrunoLeipold/status/735183310947635200>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>223</sup> ‘Student campaign continues to undermine Prevent’, *Student Rights*, 3 June 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2395/student\\_campaign\\_continues\\_to\\_undermine\\_prevent](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2395/student_campaign_continues_to_undermine_prevent), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 27 May 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/736195672408481792>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>226</sup> ‘Krum Tashev’, @krum\_tashev, *Twitter*, 27 May 2016, available at: [https://twitter.com/krum\\_tashev/status/736207336193335296](https://twitter.com/krum_tashev/status/736207336193335296), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>227</sup> ‘Student campaign continues to undermine Prevent’, *Student Rights*, 3 June 2016.

<sup>228</sup> ‘StudentsNotSuspects’, @StudentsNotSus, *Twitter*, 4 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/StudentsNotSus/status/739121684666560514>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>229</sup> ‘StudentsNotSuspects’, @StudentsNotSus, *Twitter*, 4 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/StudentsNotSus/status/739126617566552065>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>230</sup> ‘Tehmoor Khalid’, @TehmoorKhalid, *Twitter*, 30 November 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/TehmoorKhalid/status/804063626449604617>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>231</sup> ‘StudentsNotSuspects’, @StudentsNotSus, *Twitter*, 4 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/StudentsNotSus/status/739124838858665984>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>232</sup> ‘Student campaign continues to undermine Prevent’, *Student Rights*, 3 June 2016. See also: ‘Siema Iqbal’, @siemaiqbal, *Twitter*, 4 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/siemaiqbal/status/739194793738264577>, last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘Azad Ali’, @azadaliCCM, *Twitter*, 4 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/azadaliCCM/status/739130686666379264>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>233</sup> ‘Student campaign continues to undermine Prevent’, *Student Rights*, 3 June 2016.

<sup>234</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects Conference: Campaigning with Extremists’, *Student Rights*, 9 June 2016, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2397/students\\_not\\_suspects\\_conference\\_campaigning\\_with\\_extremists](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2397/students_not_suspects_conference_campaigning_with_extremists), last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Friends of Al-Aqsa’, @FriendsOfAlAqsa, *Twitter*, 4 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/FriendsofAlAqsa/status/739196889409703936>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>235</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects Conference: Campaigning with Extremists’, *Student Rights*, 9 June 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2397/students\\_not\\_suspects\\_conference\\_campaigning\\_with\\_extremists](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2397/students_not_suspects_conference_campaigning_with_extremists), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>236</sup> *ibid.*

conference.<sup>237</sup> CAGE had a stall outside the main conference room where it attempted to raise money for future campaigns.<sup>238</sup>

The event also saw the distribution of the IHRC’s 2016 newsletter, which carried the headline “Challenging the Zionist Prevent Agenda”.<sup>239</sup> This included a number of dubious claims. The IHRC asserted that opposing homosexuality would see people referred to the police.<sup>240</sup> The newsletter also drew upon anti-Semitic conspiracies of Jewish influence; it labelled Prevent “Zionist” and claimed that the policy “is predicated on the Zionist/neo-con trope that Islam is the primary cause of terrorism”.<sup>241</sup> The IHRC also argued that the recent suspensions of Naz Shah MP<sup>242</sup> and former London mayor Ken Livingstone<sup>243</sup> from the Labour Party had little to do with anti-Semitism but were “in the service of a pro-Israel agenda”.<sup>244</sup>

Dr. Siema Iqbal, a GP who serves as MEND’s Manchester Working Group Coordinator,<sup>245</sup> spoke at one of the panel sessions.<sup>246</sup> Other speakers spread misinformation and characterised Prevent as racist and Islamophobic. Activists belonging to Prevent Watch, the NUT, the UCU, STWC and Spinwatch spoke at the conference’s panel sessions.<sup>247</sup> Echoing Hannah Dee’s comments, University of Liverpool lecturer Dr. Rizwaan Sabir said that Prevent was part of a “top-down state-led campaign of Islamophobia”.<sup>248</sup>

Another academic, Arun Kundnani, claimed that Prevent officers had “been located in universities and colleges to monitor Muslim student associations”.<sup>249</sup> Audience members were told sensational stories, with claims that a student who “mispronounces cucumber or misspells terraced house ... ends up being reported to or questioned by Prevent officers and police”.<sup>250</sup>

Prevent Watch activist Ifhat Smith, whose son had been introduced by ‘Students Not Suspects’ posters as the “14yr old schoolchild interrogated on his views on ISIS after using the word eco-terrorism in a French class”,<sup>251</sup> spoke at the conference.<sup>252</sup> She had challenged her son’s school and the government in court, but the judge dismissed her claim as “totally without merit” and ordered her to pay legal costs for wasting the court’s time.<sup>253</sup>

Rahmaan Mohammadi, the student involved in the ‘Palestine badge’ incident, was also present. Despite the facts of his case being well known by now, he misinformed the audience by saying: “I can

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<sup>237</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> *ibid.* See also: ‘Challenging the Zionist Prevent Agenda’, *Islamic Human Rights Commission, Annual Newsletter*, June 2016, available at: <http://www.ihr.org.uk/attachments/article/11692/Final%20version%20for%20website.pdf>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>240</sup> ‘Challenging the Zionist Prevent Agenda’, *Islamic Human Rights Commission, Annual Newsletter*, June 2016, available at: <http://www.ihr.org.uk/attachments/article/11692/Final%20version%20for%20website.pdf>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>241</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> Stewart, H., ‘Naz Shah suspended by Labour party amid antisemitism row’, *The Guardian*, 27 April 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/27/naz-shah-suspended-labour-party-antisemitism-row>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>243</sup> Asthana, A. and Rowena Mason, ‘Ken Livingstone suspended from Labour after Hitler remarks’, *The Guardian*, 28 April 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/28/ken-livingstone-suspended-from-labour-after-hitler-remarks>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>244</sup> ‘Challenging the Zionist Prevent Agenda’, *Islamic Human Rights Commission, Annual Newsletter*, June 2016.

<sup>245</sup> ‘Manchester’, *MEND*, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/working-groups/manchester/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>246</sup> ‘Conference Programme’, *Prevent, Islamophobia & Civil Liberties*, 11 June 2016, available at: <https://challengingprevent.com/conference-programme/>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Siema Iqbal’, @siemaiqbal, *Twitter*, 4 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/siemaiqbal/status/739194793738264377>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>247</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects Conference: Myths and Scaremongering’, *Student Rights*, 10 June 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2398/students\\_not\\_suspects\\_conference\\_myths\\_and\\_scaremongering\\_](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2398/students_not_suspects_conference_myths_and_scaremongering_), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>248</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> ‘Darshna Soni’, @darshnasoni, *Twitter*, 14 October 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/darshnasoni/status/654247021474390016>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>252</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects Conference: Myths and Scaremongering’, *Student Rights*, 10 June 2016.

<sup>253</sup> Gilligan, A., ‘Ifhat Smith and Prevent Watch: the facts’, *Andrew Gilligan*, 30 October 2016, available at: <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/2016/10/30/ifhat-smith-and-prevent-watch-the-facts/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

confidently say that being Muslim was one of the reasons I was targeted.”<sup>254</sup> He added: “The issue wasn’t wholly about Palestine – the issue was that a Muslim person was supporting Palestine.”<sup>255</sup>

Not every event on this tour was unbalanced. On 15 June 2016, the UCL Law Society and the law firm Bindmans co-hosted an event entitled ‘The Prevent Guidance: Preventing extremism or promoting prejudice?’<sup>256</sup> David Anderson QC, the then Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, served as the impartial chair; the panel also featured NUS President Malia Bouattia, Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) Miqdaad Versi, Chief Constable of Leicestershire Police Simon Cole, and Director of Collaborative Ventures and former Prevent lead Anjum Khan.<sup>257</sup> This was a rare opportunity for advocates of Prevent and counter-extremism to present their case at an event held on campus.

Versi claimed that Prevent “stigmatises religion as a precursor to terrorism” and argued that it is “policing our thought”.<sup>258</sup> Bouattia backed Versi by making her usual argument that Prevent is “targeting and demonising Muslims”.<sup>259</sup> A member of the audience challenged Bouattia to identify what she believed the causes of radicalisation to be, as well as to outline what policies should be implemented. Bouattia’s response revealed a fundamental lack of understanding about extremist ideology as well as the multiple pathways to radicalisation. She said that “we have to look at mass unemployment, the fact that education is being privatised and rendered ever inaccessible, youth centres have been closed down, every service available to support young people to allow space for critical thought and development has been shut down by the state”.<sup>260</sup> There was no mention of the role of ideology, social networks or psychological factors such as the search for “identity, meaning and community”.<sup>261</sup>

These beliefs would be repeated in an interview with *The Guardian* that September, in which she recommended “looking at the state of our foreign policy” as well as cuts to youth centres and the cost of debt from student loans.<sup>262</sup>

In response, Cole and Khan described the reality of the work they do with Prevent, including the voluntary nature of the programme, their efforts to safeguard vulnerable young people and Prevent’s role in challenging far-right extremism.<sup>263</sup> They emphasised the necessity of Prevent in light of the UK’s severe threat level and recent terrorist attacks in Orlando and Paris.<sup>264</sup>

The proximity between ‘Students Not Suspects’ activists and extremist groups was evident in July 2016 when NUS Black Students’ Officer Aadam Muuse appeared at the IHRC’s annual Al-Quds Day protest in London.<sup>265</sup> Protestors carried Hezbollah flags<sup>266</sup> and held placards stating, “We are all Hezbollah”,<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects Conference: Myths and Scaremongering’, *Student Rights*, 10 June 2016.

<sup>255</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> ‘The Prevent Guidance: Preventing extremism or promoting prejudice?’, *Student Rights*, 17 June 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2402/the\\_prevent\\_guidance\\_preventing\\_extremism\\_or\\_promoting\\_prejudice\\_](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2402/the_prevent_guidance_preventing_extremism_or_promoting_prejudice_), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>257</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> Bowden, G., ‘Malia Bouattia, NUS President-Elect, Links Government Cuts To Terror Group Recruitment’, *The Huffington Post*, 16 June 2016, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/malia-bouattia-nus-president-elect-links-government-cuts-to-terror-group-recruitment\\_uk\\_57629269e4b08b9c3abdd0b2?edition=uk&ir=UK+Universities+%26+Education&section=uk\\_young-voices&utm\\_hp\\_ref=uk-universities-education](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/malia-bouattia-nus-president-elect-links-government-cuts-to-terror-group-recruitment_uk_57629269e4b08b9c3abdd0b2?edition=uk&ir=UK+Universities+%26+Education&section=uk_young-voices&utm_hp_ref=uk-universities-education), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>261</sup> ‘Prevent Strategy’, *HM Government*, June 2011, pp. 17-19.

<sup>262</sup> Aitkenhead, D., ‘NUS president Malia Bouattia: “Political activists are being demonised”’, *The Guardian*, 18 September 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/sep/18/nus-president-malia-bouattia-political-activists-are-being-demonised>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>263</sup> ‘The Prevent Guidance: Preventing extremism or promoting prejudice?’, *Student Rights*, 17 June 2016.

<sup>264</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> ‘IHRC’, @ihrc, *Twitter*, 3 July 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ihrc/status/749644518127968258>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Pro-Palestinian Activists March Through London to Mark al-Quds Day’, *IHRC*, 4 July 2016, available at: <http://www.ilrc.org.uk/news/ilrc-in-media/11711-pro-palestinian-activists-march-through-london-to-mark-al-quds-day>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>266</sup> Jackman, J., ‘Anti-Israel protesters fly Hizbollah flag at Al-Quds Day march in London’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 3 July 2016, available at: <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/anti-israel-protesters-fly-hizbollah-flag-at-al-quds-day-march-in-london-1.60090>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

despite the group’s history of terrorism and the proscription of its military wing by the UK government.<sup>268</sup>

Muuse was actively involved in ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaigns. He spoke at an anti-Prevent workshop on 6 August 2016 alongside Muslim student officers and ‘Students Not Suspects’ activists from across the UK.<sup>269</sup> He also spoke at the conference held at Goldsmiths College in June,<sup>270</sup> which had hosted Arzu Merali, an IHRC speaker,<sup>271</sup> and where a stand had promoted a newsletter which featured anti-Semitic and homophobic tropes.<sup>272</sup>

NUS officials continued throughout the summer of 2016 to call publicly for the scrapping of Prevent. Shelly Asquith wrote that “if the government continues to enforce this policy on our members, we would do everything in our power to make it unworkable”.<sup>273</sup> She said that Prevent was “a serious threat to countering terrorism itself” by “causing isolation amongst the very communities it seeks to work with”.<sup>274</sup>

On 25 August 2016, the NUS welcomed a Home Affairs Select Committee report which it claimed “reveals the communities most affected by extremism are most likely to regard the Prevent brand as toxic”.<sup>275</sup> It endorsed its “clear call for a review of the training given to educational professionals, the value of the statutory duty on educational institutions, and the number of institutions subject to the duty”.<sup>276</sup> The NUS also disclosed that it had given “oral evidence” to the committee.<sup>277</sup>

On the subject of the Prevent duty’s requirement to reduce the risk of individuals being drawn into terrorism, NUS President Megan Dunn told the committee that “while we are all working towards that aim, how can that possibly be proven?”<sup>278</sup> Dunn also claimed there had been “a breakdown in trust” and that “black and Muslim students feel that they are more likely to be referred to Prevent because of the use of profiling”.<sup>279</sup>

In September 2016, Malia Bouattia gave an interview to *The Guardian* in which she once again denied being anti-Semitic and argued that legitimate criticism of her views was motivated by hostility towards “Palestine solidarity efforts” as well as the radicalism of her left-wing politics.<sup>280</sup> When asked if she regretted previous comments that had caused offence, Bouattia replied: “It’s not about not saying it again, it’s about just breaking them down to explain what I meant.”<sup>281</sup> Remarkably, she also blamed the Prevent strategy for low turnouts in NUS elections, claiming Prevent is “hunting down students that choose to be politicised”.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> ‘Yiftah Curiel’, @yiftahc, *Twitter*, 3 July 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/yiftahc/status/749636131084468225>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>268</sup> ‘Proscribed Terrorist Organisations’, *HM Government*, available at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/648405/Proscription\\_website.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/648405/Proscription_website.pdf), last visited: 20 January 2018, p. 10.

<sup>269</sup> @AdamMuuse, *Twitter*, 6 August 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/AdamMuuse/status/761923870718844932>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>270</sup> ‘NUS Black Students’ Officer attends Al-Quds Day march’, *Student Rights*, 4 July 2016, available at:

[http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2407/nus\\_black\\_students\\_officer\\_attends\\_al\\_quds\\_day\\_march](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2407/nus_black_students_officer_attends_al_quds_day_march), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>271</sup> ‘Conference Programme’, *Prevent, Islamophobia & Civil Liberties*, 11 June 2016.

<sup>272</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects Conference: Campaigning with Extremists’, *Student Rights*, 9 June 2016.

<sup>273</sup> Asquith, S., ‘The question now is not if, but when Prevent will be repealed’, *NUS Connect*, 25 July 2016, available at: <http://linkis.com/nusconnect.org.uk/wtjQV>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>274</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> ‘NUS calls for Prevent to be scrapped following report on countering extremism’, *NUS*, 25 August 2016, available at: <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/nus-calls-for-prevent-to-be-scrapped-following-report-on-countering-extremism/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>276</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> ‘Radicalisation: the counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point. Eighth Report of Session 2016–17’, *HM Government, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee*, 25 August 2016, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhome/135/135.pdf>, last visited: 20 January 2018, p. 22.

<sup>279</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> Aitkenhead, D., ‘NUS president Malia Bouattia: “Political activists are being demonised”’, *The Guardian*, 18 September 2016.

<sup>281</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> *ibid.*

Josh Nagli, the Campaigns Director at UJS, commented that “her poor attempts to clarify her past rhetoric are clumsy and do not remotely hold with Jewish students”, adding that there were concerns “which she is still yet to adequately acknowledge, let alone appropriately address”.<sup>283</sup> Bouattia was later condemned for “outright racism” by a cross-party report published by the Home Affairs Select Committee, which concluded that she “does not appear to take sufficiently seriously the issue of anti-Semitism on campus”.<sup>284</sup>

Shortly after the beginning of the academic year, on 22 September 2016, Queen Mary University Students’ Union co-hosted a ‘Students Not Suspects’ event which featured Shelly Asquith. A student who would later serve as a Student Rights intern wrote on the Student Rights website that she and the other panel speakers referred to “so-called radicalisation”, “so-called violent extremism” and “so-called Islamism” throughout their speeches.<sup>285</sup>

Like Bouattia before her, Asquith listed “poverty”, “racism”, “foreign policy” and “a lack of access to education for certain communities in this country” as potential factors causing radicalisation.<sup>286</sup> She clarified: “I think it’s about thousands of cameras being put into highly Muslim populated areas and making people feel like they’re not welcome in this country. I don’t think it’s about people’s faith and I don’t think it’s about ‘so called’ Islamism.”<sup>287</sup>

Having argued that Prevent was not a legal requirement for student unions, Asquith once again encouraged student union staff to refuse Prevent training.<sup>288</sup> As was the case at an event held at the University of Exeter earlier that year, she was unable to properly answer a question about a meaningful replacement for Prevent.<sup>289</sup>

Around this time, the NUS received support from the Trade Union Congress (TUC), which passed a motion to endorse the NUS and UCU’s boycott on 13 September 2016.<sup>290</sup> Malia Bouattia then spoke at a session entitled ‘Challenging Prevent: how the Prevent duty demonises students and communities’ at the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool on 27 September 2016.<sup>291</sup> Fellow speakers included Rahmaan Mohammadi and UCU President Rob Goodfellow.<sup>292</sup>

The event was chaired by Assed Baig,<sup>293</sup> a broadcast journalist who was later sacked from Channel 4 for promoting an Islamist activist in a news feature.<sup>294</sup> Baig has called Muslims who collaborate with the government “House Muslims”, “uncle Toms” and “coconuts”;<sup>295</sup> refused to recognise Ahmadiyya Muslims;<sup>296</sup> attacked British soldiers in Afghanistan as “occupiers” while praising the “rag-tag resistance”

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<sup>283</sup> Nagli, J., ‘Jewish students failed once again by NUS National President’, *Medium*, 20 September 2016, available at: <https://medium.com/@joshnagli/jewish-students-failed-once-again-by-nus-national-president-fb4dd9dff800>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>284</sup> Pells, R., ‘NUS leader Malia Bouattia condemned by MPs for “outright racism”’, *The Independent*, 15 October 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/nus-president-malia-bouattia-anti-semitism-parliament-home-affairs-select-committee-israel-a7363591.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>285</sup> Kishere, J., ‘Student Voice: Prevent and the NUS’ credibility gap on tackling extremism’, *Student Rights*, 13 October 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2426/student\\_voice\\_prevent\\_and\\_the\\_nus\\_credibility\\_gap\\_on\\_tackling\\_extremism](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2426/student_voice_prevent_and_the_nus_credibility_gap_on_tackling_extremism), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>286</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> “‘Students not Suspects’ at Queen Mary”, *Student Rights*, 23 September 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2423/\\_students\\_not\\_suspects\\_at\\_queen\\_mary](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2423/_students_not_suspects_at_queen_mary), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>289</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 13 September 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/775723012742057984>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>291</sup> ‘Nope’, @Get2Noha, *Twitter*, 27 September 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/Get2Noha/status/780713641989509120/photo/1>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>292</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> ‘Channel 4’s Assed Baig Out Amid Promoting Terror-Supporting Islamist’, *Guido Fawkes*, 29 August 2017, available at: <https://order-order.com/2017/08/29/channel-4s-assed-baig-out-after-promoting-terror-supporting-islamist/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>295</sup> ‘Race Row Channel 4 News Reporter’s Non-Apology’, *Guido Fawkes*, 13 April 2016, available at: <https://order-order.com/2016/04/13/race-row-channel-4-news-reporters-non-apology/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>296</sup> *ibid.*



as “real heroes”;<sup>297</sup> and promoted conspiracy theories about the death of Osama bin Laden.<sup>298</sup> He also previously wrote a blog on the IHRC website.<sup>299</sup> The anti-Prevent activists who spoke at this event clearly did not believe that these extreme views disqualified Baig from serving as a professional chairperson.

Shelly Asquith spoke at an anti-Prevent conference held at the University of Warwick on 15 October 2016. She repeated her determination to boycott Prevent, urging: “We need staff to refuse to comply, and students to support them in doing so.”<sup>300</sup>

The President of the Warwick Atheists, Secularists and Humanist Society later wrote on the Student Rights website that she was repeatedly ignored by the organisers when she tried to ask a question.<sup>301</sup> When she was eventually given the chance to speak, she recalled that her “argument about challenging bigoted narratives instead of silencing them was met with legions of shaking heads, tutting, and a retort about how it is ‘easy’ for me to promote free speech because I have ‘white privilege’”.<sup>302</sup> She reported that she was mocked by members of the audience when she referenced the scale of Islamist extremism, with reference to two school students from Cardiff who had joined ISIS.<sup>303</sup>

She reported that attendees criticised her society as “Islamophobic” because of its opposition towards Islamist terrorism, as well as her previous decision to host the human rights campaigner Maryam Namazie.<sup>304</sup> She also noted how speakers singled out the Quilliam Foundation, an anti-extremism charity, for its “neo-con agenda” and its supposedly “divisive” #Right2Debate policy.<sup>305</sup> These exchanges indicated the readiness of ‘Students Not Suspects’ activists to smear their critics as racists and Islamophobes, as well as their unwillingness to engage in respectful debate.

Shelly Asquith spoke alongside Moazzam Begg and Rahmaan Mohammadi at a ‘Students Not Suspects’ event held as part of Islamophobia Awareness Month at Brunel University on 10 November 2016.<sup>306</sup> Later that month, the NUS announced that it would set up a helpline for students “negatively impacted” by Prevent.<sup>307</sup> Asquith said that the NUS would ensure that students and student unions “have somewhere to turn for immediate help if they are unfairly targeted”.<sup>308</sup> She justified this by claiming that Prevent’s implementation “relies on racial profiling, making Muslim students in particular a common suspect”, and that it is “stifling students’ ability to organise politically, or practise their faith, for fear of referral”.<sup>309</sup>

That same evening, on 30 November 2016, ‘Students Not Suspects’ held an event entitled ‘Challenging Prevent’ at UCL which featured NUS President Malia Bouattia, General Secretary of the NUT Kevin

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<sup>297</sup> ‘Channel 4 News Reporter: Afghans Fighting British “Occupiers” “The Real Heroes”’, *Guido Fawkes*, 11 April 2016, available at: <https://order-order.com/2016/04/11/channel-4-news-reporter-afghans-fighting-british-occupiers-the-real-heroes/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>298</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> ‘Assed Baig’s Blog’, *IHRC*, available at: <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/blogs/assedbaig>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>300</sup> Lupupa, G., “Preventing Prevent”: Anti-Prevent Conference held at Warwick’, *The Boar*, 20 October 2016, available at: <https://theboar.org/2016/10/preventing-prevent-prevent-conference-held-warwick/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>301</sup> Davies-Owen, P., ‘Student Voice: Let’s have an honest discussion about Prevent’, *Student Rights*, 11 November 2016, available at: [http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2435/student\\_voice\\_let\\_s\\_have\\_an\\_honest\\_discussion\\_about\\_prevent](http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2435/student_voice_let_s_have_an_honest_discussion_about_prevent), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>302</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> *ibid.* See also: ‘Cardiff jihadist Reyaad Khan, 21, killed by RAF drone’, *BBC News*, 7 September 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-34176790>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>304</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> ‘Students not Suspects Brunel University’, *CAGE*, 31 October 2016, available at: <https://cage.ngo/event/students-not-suspects-brunel-university/>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Students Not Suspects: Staff Student Meeting’, *Union of Brunel Students*, 10 November 2017, available at: <https://brunelstudents.com/ents/event/2647/>, last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘Brunel Islamic Society’, *Facebook*, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/BruneliSoc/posts/962925117162863>, last visited: 20 January 2018; ‘Elisabeth Mahase’, @emahase95, *Twitter*, 10 November 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/emahase95/status/796830338781736960>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>307</sup> Gray, J., ‘NUS Launches Helpline For Students Affected By “Racist” And “Ineffective” Prevent Strategy’, *The Huffington Post*, 30 November 2016, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/nus-launches-helpline-for-students-affected-by-racist-and-ineffective-prevent-strategy\\_uk\\_583ec1e2e4b005cb990132ce?](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/nus-launches-helpline-for-students-affected-by-racist-and-ineffective-prevent-strategy_uk_583ec1e2e4b005cb990132ce?), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>308</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>309</sup> *ibid.*

Courtney, and Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott.<sup>310</sup> Citing the case of a 12-year-old boy whose parents had approached her after he had been referred under Prevent, Abbott announced at the meeting that she would be “calling for a major review of the strategy and a fundamental rethink from the government”.<sup>311</sup> This revealed that the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign had begun to directly influence policymakers about their opposition to Prevent.

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<sup>310</sup> ‘Challenging Prevent’, *Facebook*, 30 November 2016, available at: [https://www.facebook.com/events/573309986196094/?active\\_tab=about](https://www.facebook.com/events/573309986196094/?active_tab=about), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>311</sup> ‘Diane Abbott calls for “major review” and “fundamental rethink” of Prevent strategy’, *Left Futures*, 1 December 2017, available at: <http://www.leftfutures.org/2016/12/diane-abbott-calls-for-major-review-and-fundamental-rethink-of-prevent-strategy/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.



## 8. ‘Students Not Suspects’ in the 2017 Academic Year

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The Prevent strategy was further criticised in January 2017 when students at KCL were informed that their email activities on university computer systems were monitored and recorded in order to prevent radicalisation. KCL claimed that it was “following best practice for the sector” as well as its legal obligations and “usual security process”.<sup>312</sup> HEFCE clarified that while KCL’s approach was “consistent with the Prevent guidance”, providers have been given the freedom “to decide what approach works for them. Some have gone down the route of filtering, some monitoring and some neither of these”.<sup>313</sup>

This nuance was lost on NUS President Malia Bouattia. She argued that this was “yet another example of how the Prevent agenda turns our educational institutions against their own students” and added that the policy “perpetuates a culture of fear, restricts academic freedoms and normalises Islamophobia”.<sup>314</sup>

This served as the basis for another series of ‘Students Not Suspects’ talks, with an event entitled ‘Is it Ethical to Monitor Students?’ which took place at the University of East Anglia on 21 February 2017. The panel discussion featured Malia Bouattia and Moazzam Begg.<sup>315</sup> Bouattia also spoke on a panel on “racial and religious discrimination in the UK”, hosted by the organisation One World Week at Canterbury Christ Church University, where she spoke about the impact of Prevent on campuses.<sup>316</sup> This was followed soon after by ‘Students Not Suspects’ events at Strathclyde University on 28 February<sup>317</sup> and the University of Edinburgh on 1 March 2017.<sup>318</sup>

In addition, the UCL BME Students’ Network held a ‘Dissent from Prevent’ week in January,<sup>319</sup> while students at Queen Mary University organised a ‘Students Not Suspects’ demonstration “against the racist Prevent policy” on 14 February 2017.<sup>320</sup>

Shortly afterwards, Shelly Asquith tweeted that Prevent had directly “caused” the installation of CCTV cameras in prayer rooms and even the destruction of Qurans at the University of Westminster.<sup>321</sup> The University of Westminster later clarified that the prayer room was being converted into “a multi-faith and contemplation room”, and that, following several months of notice, “unused copies of the Quran were disposed of after consultation with room users, including staff and students, and the students’ union”.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Murdock, J., ‘Spying on campus: King’s College student emails “monitored” under UK anti-terror law’, *International Business Times*, 23 January 2017, available at: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/spying-campus-kings-college-student-emails-monitored-under-uk-anti-terror-law-1602576>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>313</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> Frank-Keyes, J., ‘Moazzam Begg to speak at Union event’, *Concrete*, 1 February 2017, available at: <http://www.concrete-online.co.uk/moazzam-begg-speak-sur-event/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>316</sup> ‘Krum Tashev’, @krum\_tashev, *Twitter*, 26 January 2017, available at: [https://twitter.com/krum\\_tashev/status/824650157002256385](https://twitter.com/krum_tashev/status/824650157002256385), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>317</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects Scotland Tour – Glasgow’, *Eventbrite*, 28 February 2017, available at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/students-not-suspects-scotland-tour-glasgow-tickets-32055049516#>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>318</sup> ‘Students Not suspects Tour – Edinburgh’, *Facebook*, 1 March 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1459249660775395/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>319</sup> ‘samayya’, @SamayyaAfzal, *Twitter*, 31 January 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/SamayyaAfzal/status/826561026850226176>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

See also: ‘Justine Women’s’, @JustineWomens, *Twitter*, 31 January 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/JustineWomens/status/826423600412557312>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>320</sup> ‘Against Fees and Cuts’, @NCAFC\_UK, *Twitter*, 15 February 2017, available at: [https://twitter.com/NCAFC\\_UK/status/831827678273609729](https://twitter.com/NCAFC_UK/status/831827678273609729), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>321</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 11 April 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/851888945973604352>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 11 April 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/851894087691231238>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>322</sup> ‘The University of Westminster clarify allegations of Qur’an shredding’, *Tell Mama*, 13 April 2017, available at: <https://tellmamauk.org/the-university-of-westminster-clarify-allegations-of-quran-shredding/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

An internal report carried out by the NUS in February 2017 found that on one occasion Bouattia made remarks about “Zionists and neo-con lobbies” that “could be reasonably capable of being interpreted as anti-Semitic”, although it did not recommend that she be punished.<sup>323</sup> Subsequently, the President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews requested that she apologise for those comments.<sup>324</sup>

In addition, *The Independent* revealed in the lead-up to the 2017 NUS Conference that the President of the Union of Brunel Students<sup>325</sup> and future NUS Vice President of Union Development<sup>326</sup> Ali Milani had previously tweeted that Israel had “no right to exist” and that it was “a land built on ethnic cleansing and colonialism”.<sup>327</sup> Stereotyping Jews as stingy, Milani told another Twitter user: “Nah u won’t mate, it’ll cost you a pound. #Jew”.<sup>328</sup> He appeared to support Hamas rocket attacks against Israel, writing: “Oh fuck off! Hamas firing into southern Israel was a retaliation!”<sup>329</sup> Milani also tweeted that he wanted to “punch in the throat” a supporter of Israel who said that Palestine was now “what they used to call Israel”.<sup>330</sup> After he was condemned by the Campaigns Director of UJS<sup>331</sup> and other NUS officials and delegates,<sup>332</sup> Milani said that he “apologised unreservedly” and clarified that those comments from 2012 and 2013 “do not reflect how I see the world today”.<sup>333</sup>

In the course of these investigations, *The Independent* also discovered that Malia Bouattia, while a student at the University of Birmingham, had been involved in hosting a play by Caryl Churchill entitled ‘Seven Jewish Children’,<sup>334</sup> which has been widely condemned as anti-Semitic.<sup>335</sup> Bouattia had called the play “powerful” and “very relevant”.<sup>336</sup> Although she had explicitly written on Facebook that she was “directing this with my friend”, she later claimed that she had merely been involved in promoting it.<sup>337</sup>

Malia Bouattia would ultimately lose her re-election campaign as NUS President that April.<sup>338</sup> She was replaced by Shakira Martin, the then Vice-President for Further Education, who received 402 votes to Bouattia’s 272.<sup>339</sup> Martin had once signed an open letter that attacked previous NUS President Megan Dunn for her opposition to CAGE<sup>340</sup> and had previously made a speech supporting the work of ‘Students Not Suspects’ at a Stand Up To Racism event.<sup>341</sup> Ali Milani, a student representative who had

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<sup>323</sup> Yorke, H., ‘NUS in turmoil after internal report rules its President should not be punished despite making anti-Semitic remarks’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/02/17/nus-turmoil-internal-report-rules-president-should-not-punished/>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>324</sup> Firsht, N., ‘Board of Deputies calls on NUS leader to apologise over “antisemitic” remarks’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 19 February 2017, available at: <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/board-of-deputies-calls-on-nus-leader-to-apologise-over-antisemitic-remarks-1.432904>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>325</sup> ‘Preventing “Prevent”: Anti-terrorism Measures or a Reinforcement of Institutionalised Racial Profiling’, *le nurb*, 12 November 2015, available at: <http://lenurb.co.uk/preventing-prevent-anti-terrorism-measures-or-a-reinforcement-of-institutionalised-racial-profiling/>, last visited: 20 January 2018. See also: ‘Statement on NUS President Megan Dunn’s announcement on CAGE and the Students not Suspects tour’, *Medium*, 7 October 2015.

<sup>326</sup> ‘Ali Milani elected as NUS Vice President (Union Development)’, *NUS Connect*, 26 April 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/ali-milani-elected-as-nus-vice-president-union-development>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>327</sup> Kentish, B., ‘National Union of Students in new anti-Semitism row after series of offensive tweets’, *The Independent*, 24 April 2017, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/nus-anti-semitism-national-union-students-offensive-tweets-jews-racism-adolf-hitler-israel-executive-a7696566.html>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>328</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> ‘Yet another NUS candidate found to have made antisemitic remarks’, *UJS*, 12 April 2017, available at: [http://www.ujis.org.uk/yet\\_another\\_nus\\_candidate\\_found\\_to\\_have\\_made\\_antisemitic\\_remarks](http://www.ujis.org.uk/yet_another_nus_candidate_found_to_have_made_antisemitic_remarks), last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>332</sup> Barradale, G., ‘NUS officials call for Ali Milani to withdraw after he tweeted that Jews are stingy’, *The Tab*, 12 April 2017, available at: <https://thetab.com/uk/2017/04/12/nus-officials-call-ali-milani-withdraw-tweeted-jews-stingy-37560>, last visited: 20 January 2018.

<sup>333</sup> Kentish, B., ‘National Union of Students in new anti-Semitism row after series of offensive tweets’, *The Independent*, 24 April 2017.

<sup>334</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> ‘Lincoln’s blood libel and Seven Jewish Children’, *CST*, 20 January 2011, available at: <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2011/01/20/lincolns-blood-libel-and-seven-jewish-children>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>336</sup> Kentish, B., ‘National Union of Students in new anti-Semitism row after series of offensive tweets’, *The Independent*, 24 April 2017.

<sup>337</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> Topping, A. and Sarah Marsh, ‘Divisive NUS president Malia Bouattia defeated in election’, *The Guardian*, 26 April 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/apr/26/malia-bouattia-shakira-martin-nus-national-union-of-students-president-election>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>339</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>340</sup> ‘Statement on NUS President Megan Dunn’s announcement on CAGE and the Students not Suspects tour’, *Medium*, 7 October 2015.

<sup>341</sup> ‘Unjum Mirza’, @Unjum\_Mirza, *Twitter*, 10 February 2016, available at: [https://twitter.com/Unjum\\_Mirza/status/697519642097672192](https://twitter.com/Unjum_Mirza/status/697519642097672192), last visited: 21 January 2018.

previously been active in opposing Prevent<sup>342</sup> and had been widely condemned for anti-Semitism,<sup>343</sup> was elected as NUS Vice-President of Union Development.<sup>344</sup>

Bouattia travelled to the United States in June 2017, where she addressed a meeting of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California about the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign in the UK.<sup>345</sup> Both Bouattia and Asquith were influenced by the similar ‘Students Not Suspects’ movement that had grown in Los Angeles in protest against metal detector searches in schools.<sup>346</sup> Asquith tweeted in support of the movement,<sup>347</sup> adding that “the Students Not Suspects campaign in the US speaks volumes as to why we must resist police presence in schools here, too”.<sup>348</sup>

While ‘Students Not Suspects’ had largely succeeded in distorting the national debate surrounding Prevent over the previous couple of years, the campaign received negative press attention following the Manchester Arena bombing on 22 May 2017.<sup>349</sup> It was revealed that activists at the University of Salford had lobbied the Salford Students’ Union to pass a motion in 2016 to “not engage with the Prevent strategy” and “educate” undergraduates about its supposed “dangers”.<sup>350</sup>

Minutes from the meeting showed that student union officers warned at the time that Prevent “demonised” and “criminalised” Muslim students.<sup>351</sup> Students were also recorded “holding protests around campus using ‘Students not Suspects’ placards to encourage their peers and staff not to comply”.<sup>352</sup> This campus was attended by suicide bomber Salman Abedi between 2014 and 2016.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Milani, A., ‘Dear Owen Smith – Backing the Racist Prevent Strategy Won’t Win You This Election, It’ll Lose Labour Votes’, *The Huffington Post*, 12 August 2016 (updated 13 August 2016), available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ali-milani/owen-smith-prevent-strategy\\_b\\_11468406.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ali-milani/owen-smith-prevent-strategy_b_11468406.html), last visited: 21 January 2018. See also: ‘Ali Milani’, @ARMilani\_, *Twitter*, 26 April 2017, available at: [https://twitter.com/ARMilani\\_/status/857218491648274432](https://twitter.com/ARMilani_/status/857218491648274432), last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>343</sup> Kentish, B., ‘National Union of Students in new anti-Semitism row after series of offensive tweets’, *The Independent*, 24 April 2017.

<sup>344</sup> ‘Ali Milani elected as NUS Vice President (Union Development)’, *NUS Connect*, 26 April 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/ali-milani-elected-as-nus-vice-president-union-development>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>345</sup> ‘Malia Bouattia’, @MaliaBouattia, *Twitter*, 29 June 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/MaliaBouattia/status/880497835900248065>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>346</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects’, *ACLU of Southern California*, available at: <https://www.aclusocal.org/en/studentsnotsuspects>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>347</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 26 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/747193391721680896>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>348</sup> ‘Shelly Asquith’, @ShellyAsquith, *Twitter*, 27 June 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/ShellyAsquith/status/747219649763356673>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>349</sup> Harding, E. and Katherine Faulkner, ‘Students at bomber’s university tried to sabotage Prevent anti-terror scheme because it “demonises Muslims”’, *The Daily Mail*, 25 May 2017, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4539656/Bomber-s-university-tried-bar-anti-terror-scheme.html>, last visited: 21 January 2018. See also: Murray, D., ‘Does Andy Burnham regret his opposition to the “Prevent” strategy?’, *The Spectator*, 27 May 2017, available at: <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/05/andy-burnham-regret-opposition-prevent-strategy/>, last visited: 21 January 2018; Walker, H., ‘Students at Manchester bomber’s university “tried to BLOCK Government anti-terror scheme”’, *The Daily Express*, 25 May 2017, available at: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/809029/manchester-bombing-salman-abedi-salford-university-prevent-anti-terror-scheme>, last visited: 21 January 2018; Grove, J., ‘Manchester bombing spotlights universities’ anti-terror role’, *Times Higher Education*, 26 May 2017, available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/manchester-bombing-spotlights-universities-anti-terror-role>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>350</sup> Harding, E. and Katherine Faulkner, ‘Students at bomber’s university tried to sabotage Prevent anti-terror scheme because it “demonises Muslims”’, *The Daily Mail*, 25 May 2017, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4539656/Bomber-s-university-tried-bar-anti-terror-scheme.html>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>351</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> *ibid.*

## 9. The Current Status of ‘Students Not Suspects’ and the NUS

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In late 2016, Salman Butt brought a case of judicial review against the Prevent duty guidance on the basis of freedom of speech as well as the processes for identifying individuals as extremists. He also accused the Prime Minister’s office of issuing a “defamatory” press release.<sup>354</sup> This high-profile legal challenge to Prevent was defeated at the High Court on 26 July 2017.<sup>355</sup> Although the NUS acknowledged the overall judgement, it claimed that the ruling “emphasised flaws” in the Prevent duty, namely “that it is vague”, “open to interpretation” and that “over-zealous institutions can misinterpret the guidance with disastrous results”.<sup>356</sup>

This wording was not present at all in the final judgement. The judge plainly stated that “in so far as any issue of clarity or vagueness in the [Prevent Duty guidance] gives rise to a *vires* issue ... I see nothing in them to make the guidance *ultra vires* on that ground”.<sup>357</sup> He also said that “there is no need for a more specific definition of ‘extremism’; the guidance left it to [relevant higher education bodies] to reach conclusions on the risk of an event drawing people into terrorism”, and that there was “no assumption that all terrorism began with non-violent extremism, or that non-violent extremism necessarily led to terrorism”.<sup>358</sup>

The judge dismissed the case on all counts. He concluded that “understanding why people are drawn into terrorist-related activity, and seeking to prevent them from being drawn into that activity, is a proper and necessary activity of the state”.<sup>359</sup> He clearly found that the Prevent duty guidance is not only lawful but that it also successfully balances freedom of expression with concerns about safeguarding in higher education.

Without giving precise recommendations, NUS Black Students’ Officer Ilyas Nagdee erroneously commented that the judgement showed that universities should “review and amend all policies and procedures”, especially with regard to their speaker policies and their relations with student unions.<sup>360</sup> He claimed that the NUS would continue “to call for the Prevent agenda to be scrapped with our #StudentsNotSuspects campaign”.<sup>361</sup>

The NUS has attempted to address its critics on the question of anti-Semitism. Shakira Martin’s election as NUS President was warmly welcomed by UJS, which saw her victory “as a rejection of the divisive rhetoric” and “past anti-Semitic comments” made by Malia Bouattia.<sup>362</sup> Martin has pledged to work closely with UJS and the Holocaust Educational Trust.<sup>363</sup> She has expressed the need for better relations

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<sup>354</sup> Talwar, D., “‘Prevent’ counter-extremism strategy faces legal challenge”, *BBC News*, 6 December 2016, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38209567>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>355</sup> Rumney, E., ‘British judge rejects legal challenge to counter-terrorism strategy’, *Reuters*, 26 July 2017, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-security-extremism/british-judge-rejects-legal-challenge-to-counter-terrorism-strategy-idUSKBN1AB2FP>, last visited: 23 November 2017.

<sup>356</sup> ‘NUS responds to High Court ruling on Prevent Duty guidance’, *NUS*, 26 July 2017, available at: <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/nus-responds-to-high-court-ruling-on-prevent-duty-guidance/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>357</sup> ‘Butt v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2017]’, *England and Wales High Court (Administrative Court)*, 26 July 2017, available at: <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2017/1930.html>, last visited: 21 January 2018, A(1) 31.

<sup>358</sup> *ibid.*, A(3) 100.

<sup>359</sup> *ibid.*, A(3) 116.

<sup>360</sup> ‘NUS responds to High Court ruling on Prevent Duty guidance’, *NUS*, 26 July 2017.

<sup>361</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>362</sup> ‘Shakira Martin is NUS President-elect’, *UJS*, 24 June 2017, available at: [http://www.ujis.org.uk/shakira\\_martin\\_is\\_nus\\_president\\_elect](http://www.ujis.org.uk/shakira_martin_is_nus_president_elect), last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>363</sup> ‘Announcing Our Living Memory, our latest campaign’, *UJS*, 24 October 2017, available at: [http://www.ujis.org.uk/announcing\\_our\\_living\\_memory\\_our\\_latest\\_campaign](http://www.ujis.org.uk/announcing_our_living_memory_our_latest_campaign), last visited: 21 January 2018.

with Jewish students<sup>364</sup> as well as “a systemic change to the culture of the organisation” so that anti-Semitism among NUS members is robustly challenged.<sup>365</sup> She has also said: “I hope my contributions will show that NUS is serious about combatting hate and prejudice in all its forms.”<sup>366</sup>

In its determination to oppose all forms of discrimination, the NUS has also emphasised its role in challenging Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. Regrettably, it has aligned itself with MEND in pursuit of this objective.

On 1 November 2017, both Shakira Martin and NUS Women’s Officer Hareem Ghani delivered speeches at MEND’s parliamentary launch of ‘Islamophobia Awareness Month’ (IAM) 2017.<sup>367</sup> IAM was originally co-founded in 2012 by MEND (when it was called iEngage),<sup>368</sup> the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and the Enough Coalition Against Islamophobia.<sup>369</sup>

In the course of her speech, Ghani said that there was “a witch hunt against Muslim student activists and for that matter Muslim organisations as a whole”.<sup>370</sup> A few days later, she declared that she would continue to work closely with Malia Bouattia, whom she described as “our National President”, on a programme for Muslim women leaders.<sup>371</sup>

Coinciding with IAM 2017, the NUS announced that a new ‘Students Not Suspects’ tour would bring workshops and panel discussions to campuses across the UK.<sup>372</sup> This evidence of cooperation between IAM and ‘Students Not Suspects’ conferred even more legitimacy on a controversial group like MEND. Moreover, this campaign was sponsored and co-hosted with the NUS Black Students’ Campaign, the NUS Women’s Campaign and the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), as well as local ‘Students Not Suspects’ and ‘Educators Not Informants’ activists.<sup>373</sup>

Ilyas Nagdee, Hareem Ghani and Ali Milani were all listed as organisers.<sup>374</sup> Their campaign aimed to address anti-Muslim discrimination and threats to civil liberties, whether in the form of “state censorship under the guise of counter-terrorism” or “the verbal and physical harassment experienced by Muslims in public spaces”.<sup>375</sup> In doing so, they treated the Prevent policy as connected to wider societal Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime, seeing the two as inseparable and mutually reinforcing. The latest ‘Students Not Suspects’ tour also encouraged student unions to pass more motions boycotting the government’s Prevent policy.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> ‘Jewish students now “back on the same page” as NUS after meeting’, *The Jewish News*, 14 August 2017, available at: <http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/jewish-students-now-back-on-same-page-with-nus-after-meeting/>, last visited: 21 January 2018. See also: Sugarman, D., ‘NUS seeks to mend relations with Jewish students’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 10 August 2017, available at: <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/nus-mending-relations-with-jewish-students-1.442750>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>365</sup> Sugarman, D., ‘National Union of Students head Shakira Martin head [sic] pledges to beat hate’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 November 2017, available at: <https://www.thejc.com/national-union-of-students-head-shakira-martin-head-pledges-to-beat-hate-1.448282>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>366</sup> ‘New NUS president vows to rebuild relations with Jewish students’, *The Jewish News*, 20 November 2017, available at: <http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/nus-president-vows-to-rebuild-relations-with-jewish-students/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>367</sup> ‘Jeremy Corbyn launches Islamophobia Awareness Month 2017 in Parliament with MEND’, *MEND*, 3 November 2017, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/jeremy-corbyn-launches-islamophobia-awareness-month-2017-parliament-mend/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>368</sup> ‘Islamophobia Awareness Month #IAM2017’, *MEND*, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/iam2017/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>369</sup> ‘Students not Suspects: join us to up the fight against Prevent’, *NUS Connect*, 8 November 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/students-not-suspects-join-us-to-up-the-fight-against-prevent>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>370</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>371</sup> ‘Islamophobia Awareness Month’, *NUS Connect*, 7 November 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/islamophobia-awareness-month>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>372</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects tour: Prevent & Civil Liberties’, *Facebook*, 15-28 November 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/523275914694032/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>373</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>374</sup> ‘Islamophobia Awareness Month: what NUS is up to’, *NUS Connect*, 1 November 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/islamophobia-awareness-month-what-nus-is-up-to>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>375</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> ‘Ten things students’ unions can do to support #IAM2017’, *NUS Connect*, 13 November 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/ten-things-students-unions-can-to-do-support-iam2017>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

The first ‘Students Not Suspects’ event was hosted by the UCL students’ union on 15 November 2017. This panel discussion featured CAGE’s International Director Muhammad Rabbani.<sup>377</sup>

Only a couple of months previously, Rabbani was arrested and convicted of an offence under the Terrorism Act for withholding information on his phone and laptop from counter-terror police.<sup>378</sup> He was found guilty of one count of wilfully obstructing a stop-and-search under Section 7 of the Terrorism Act at Westminster Magistrates’ Court.<sup>379</sup> Rabbani was handed a conditional discharge, ordered to pay £600 costs and a £20 victim surcharge.<sup>380</sup>

Rabbani spoke at UCL alongside FOSIS Vice-President Saffa Mir, Ilyas Nagdee and Alia Malak from the student Palestine Solidarity UK project.<sup>381</sup> The event received further endorsements from student unions at City University, Brunel University, Royal Holloway, KCL, Goldsmiths, SOAS, Birkbeck, Kingston University, Queen Mary University, the University of the Arts London (UAL) and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.<sup>382</sup>

Other ‘Students Not Suspects’ events took place in Sussex (21 November), Bristol (22 November), Leicester (27 November) and Manchester (28 November).<sup>383</sup> The event at the University of West England (UWE) in Bristol was openly promoted by MEND.<sup>384</sup>

On the same day as the UCL event, the NUS Black Students’ Campaign published a “fully revised and expanded edition” of the *‘Preventing Prevent’* handbook, with updated information on developments since the CTSA had passed into law in 2015.<sup>385</sup> This handbook was edited by Ilyas Nagdee and Hareem Ghani, and it acknowledged the assistance of Malia Bouattia and other NUS officials.<sup>386</sup> It claimed that more than 50 student unions had passed “anti-Prevent policy” by 2017.<sup>387</sup>

There was scepticism about the sincerity of the government’s attitude towards all forms of extremism. Ilyas Nagdee argued in the handbook that recent government attempts to publicise its work in challenging far-right extremism were cynically motivated to “quell concerns that it is only targeting Muslims”.<sup>388</sup> He added that “an unjust strategy, broadly applied, is no less unjust. We cannot accept the scope of surveillance ... being widened to other communities, like working class whites.”<sup>389</sup>

This line of argument rests on the assumption that Prevent is a function of structural oppression directed against white as well as Muslim working-class communities. In other words, Prevent supposedly “provides a state-sanctioned, intellectual veneer to the blunt racism of the far-right” while tokenistically referring to the threat of the far right in order to demonise Muslim and white working-class individuals

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<sup>377</sup> ‘CAGE’, UK\_CAGE, *Twitter*, 13 November 2017, available at: [https://twitter.com/UK\\_CAGE/status/930020513396740101](https://twitter.com/UK_CAGE/status/930020513396740101), last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>378</sup> ‘Cage director who refused to hand over mobile pin number at Heathrow is convicted of terrorism offence’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 September 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/25/cage-director-refused-hand-mobile-pin-number-heathrow-convicted/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>379</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>380</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> ‘Ayo Kalil’, AyoOlatunji96, *Twitter*, 10 November 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/AyoOlatunji96/status/929066000259125250>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>382</sup> ‘Ilyas Nagdee’, @ilyas\_nagdee, *Twitter*, 12 November 2017, available at: [https://twitter.com/ilyas\\_nagdee/status/929747778498105345](https://twitter.com/ilyas_nagdee/status/929747778498105345), last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>383</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects tour: Prevent & Civil Liberties’, *Facebook*, 15-28 November 2017.

<sup>384</sup> ‘Student Not Suspects’, MEND, 22 November 2017, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/event/student-not-suspects/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>385</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent: an updated handbook’, NUS Connect, 15 November 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/preventing-prevent-an-updated-handbook>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>386</sup> ‘Preventing Prevent Handbook 2017’, NUS Black Students, 15 November 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/preventing-prevent-handbook-2017>, last visited: 22 November 2017, p. 2.

<sup>387</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>388</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>389</sup> *ibid.*



alike.<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, Hareem Ghani claimed that Prevent treats Muslim women as “vessels for counter-extremism measures” and plays “Muslim women off against Muslim men and their families”.<sup>391</sup>

Like the previous edition, the narrative was influenced by extremist organisations. The authors endorsed CAGE’s ‘The “Science” of Pre-Crime’<sup>392</sup>, ‘The Prevent Strategy: A Cradle to Grave Police-State’<sup>393</sup> and ‘Good Muslim, Bad Muslim’<sup>394</sup> reports, as well as the IHRC’s ‘Whose Hearts and Minds?’ briefing.<sup>395</sup> The handbook positively quoted CAGE and IHRC as organisations opposing Prevent<sup>396</sup> and recommended them as contacts in case students were approached by Prevent officers.<sup>397</sup> Conversely, it singled out Student Rights, The Henry Jackson Society and the Quilliam Foundation as “Pro-Prevent groups to watch out for when campaigning”.<sup>398</sup>

The updated version of ‘Preventing Prevent’ attempted to deal with the question of what programme should replace Prevent. Like Shelly Asquith and Malia Bouattia before them, the authors envisaged that the abolition of Prevent would have to be accompanied by “a process of reconfiguring the way the state engages with its citizens, and how the people in society engage with one another”.<sup>399</sup> This would include “grappling with the social and political issues that [are] ... the roots of political violence”, such as “combatting social deprivation and poverty, a more ethical foreign policy, and instituting proper equality among citizens in Britain and civil space to critique and challenge government”.<sup>400</sup>

This approach overlooks the role of religious and political motivations, reducing them to factors that are wholly dependent on material and social conditions. It incorrectly infers that Prevent relies upon a simplistic “conveyor belt” or “escalator” theory of radicalisation, in which there is a linear trajectory between extremist rhetoric and acts of violence.<sup>401</sup>

‘Educate Against Hate’, a government web-based resource designed to give practical advice and support to teachers and parents concerned about extremism, clearly states that there is “no single pathway to radicalisation”.<sup>402</sup> Although it is true that the Channel Vulnerability Assessment highlights the importance of extreme political and religious ideologies in the process of radicalisation, it does not suggest that individuals who have extreme beliefs will inevitably commit acts of terrorism.

Predictably, this latest ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign was accompanied by the same disingenuous arguments used in previous tours. The NUS Black Students’ Campaign claimed Prevent was “based on discredited ‘science’ and models”, “fuelled by Islamophobia” and deployed an “elastic definition of ‘extremism’” in order to target and delegitimise “anti-fracking, anti-war, Pro-Palestine and Free Education activism”.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>391</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>392</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19. See also: Qureshi, A., ‘The “science” of pre-crime: The secret “radicalisation” study underpinning PREVENT’, *CAGE*, 2016, available at: <https://cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CAGE-Science-Pre-Crime-Report.pdf>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>393</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47. See also: Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqui, ‘The prevent strategy: a cradle to grave police-state’, *CAGE*, 2013, available at: [https://cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/A4\\_PREVENT\\_CAGE\\_REPORT\\_WEB.pdf](https://cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/A4_PREVENT_CAGE_REPORT_WEB.pdf), last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>394</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36. See also: Mohammed, J. and Adnan Siddiqui, ‘Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A response to the revised *Prevent* strategy’, *CAGE*, 2011.

<sup>395</sup> *ibid.* See also: ‘Briefing: UK / Anti-terrorism - Whose Hearts and Minds? Contest 2 in Context’, *IHRC*, 28 September 2009, available at: <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/publications/briefings/9085-briefing-uk-anti-terrorism-whose-hearts-and-minds-contest-2-in-context>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>396</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>397</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 62, 91.

<sup>398</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>399</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>400</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>402</sup> ‘Spotting the signs of radicalisation: a guide for educators’, *Educate against Hate*, available at: <https://educateagainsthate.com/blog/posts/spot-the-signs-radicalisation-educators/>, last visited: 25 January 2018.

<sup>403</sup> ‘Students Not Suspects tour: Prevent & Civil Liberties’, *Facebook*, 15-28 November 2017.

If Prevent was genuinely attempting to censor and shut down ideas and activism, it is surprising that so much criticism of Prevent has been allowed to take place and that so many controversial speakers have spoken to students at universities across the UK.

These logical inconsistencies have not been addressed by the main representatives of ‘Students Not Suspects’. In an opinion piece for *The Huffington Post*, Ilyas Nagdee inaccurately characterised Prevent as a policy that is racist and Islamophobic in both intent and outcome.<sup>404</sup>

In addition, the NUS website has claimed that the policy has “limited the window for dissent”, “physically shut down spaces” and exposed “politically active and vocal individuals – especially Muslims ... to deeply damaging accusations and smears of “extremism””.<sup>405</sup> It further lamented the rise in Channel referrals announced in November 2017 and doubted that Prevent was “really about safeguarding children”.<sup>406</sup>

These campaigners have deliberately downplayed the threat of terrorism and extremism,<sup>407</sup> with the partial exception of the far right, which the NUS argues has been emboldened by Prevent.<sup>408</sup>

The latest statistics surrounding Channel referrals<sup>409</sup> certainly do not show, in the words of Ilyas Nagdee, that Prevent is “a failed policy ... that must be abolished”.<sup>410</sup> Rather, they demonstrate the scale of radicalisation across sectors of British society. The fact that only 5% of the recent channel referrals (381) received specialised support does not mean that 95% of referrals have been “unnecessary”.<sup>411</sup> Many vulnerable individuals continued to receive support through teachers, workshops, projects and other social services.

In total, 36% of participants (2,766) left Prevent requiring no further action, while 50% were “signposted to alternative services” such as education or mental health.<sup>412</sup> Of the 381 individuals who received Channel support, 302 were judged to have been successfully drawn away from terrorism, while 63 who pulled out of the voluntary process continued to receive other forms of support.<sup>413</sup>

Moreover, in August 2017 HEFCE reported that there have been signs of “significant progress” within the higher education sector since the Prevent duty became a statutory requirement.<sup>414</sup> In total, 313 higher education providers submitted annual reports to HEFCE covering activity in the 2015–16 period. HEFCE reported that 95% of these providers had demonstrated “due regard” to the Prevent duty, with a further 5% needing to provide “further evidence” of having done so. No university was assessed as “not demonstrating due regard to the duty”.<sup>415</sup>

Equally, there is little evidence that the Prevent duty threatens academic freedom. Since the CTSA was brought into force in 2015, no university events have been cancelled as a direct consequence of the

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<sup>404</sup> Nagdee, I., ‘The Stats Make It Clear: Prevent Is Targeting Our Youth To Manufacture A Compliant Generation’, *The Huffington Post*, 13 November 2017, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ilyas-nagdee/prevent\\_b\\_18521752.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ilyas-nagdee/prevent_b_18521752.html), last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>405</sup> ‘Students not Suspects: join us to up the fight against Prevent’, *NUS Connect*, 8 November 2017, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/students-not-suspects-join-us-to-up-the-fight-against-prevent>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>406</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>407</sup> Nagdee, I., ‘The Stats Make It Clear: Prevent Is Targeting Our Youth To Manufacture A Compliant Generation’, *The Huffington Post*, 13 November 2017.

<sup>408</sup> ‘Prevent’, *NUS Connect*, available at: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/liberation/black-students/anti-racism-and-anti-fascism/prevent>, 21 January 2018.

<sup>409</sup> McCann, K., ‘More than 2,000 children referred to Government’s counter-terror programme in a year – including 500 girls’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 November 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/09/2000-children-referred-governments-counter-terror-programme/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>410</sup> Nagdee, I., ‘The Stats Make It Clear: Prevent Is Targeting Our Youth To Manufacture A Compliant Generation’, *The Huffington Post*, 13 November 2017.

<sup>411</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>412</sup> Travis, A., ‘Only 5% of people referred to Prevent extremism scheme get specialist help’, *The Guardian*, 9 November 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/09/only-5-of-people-referred-to-prevent-extremism-scheme-get-specialist-help>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>413</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>414</sup> ‘Analysis of Prevent annual reports from higher education providers for activity in 2015–16’, *HEFCE*, 1 August 2017, available at: <http://www.hfcoe.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/201711/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>415</sup> *ibid.*



Prevent duty, which is balanced by these institutions’ statutory obligation towards protecting freedom of expression.<sup>416</sup> To the contrary, the statistics surrounding Channel referrals,<sup>417</sup> as well as the overwhelming compliance of the higher education sector with the Prevent duty,<sup>418</sup> indicate that there is increasing trust and understanding of Prevent across communities and public services, with more staff willing to report their concerns to the relevant authorities.

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<sup>416</sup> ‘Six myths about the “Prevent duty” in universities’, *HEFCE*, 11 December 2017, available at: <http://blog.hefce.ac.uk/2017/12/11/six-myths-about-the-prevent-duty-in-universities/>, last visited: 21 January 2018.

<sup>417</sup> Travis, A., ‘Only 5% of people referred to Prevent extremism scheme get specialist help’, *The Guardian*, 9 November 2017.

<sup>418</sup> ‘Analysis of Prevent annual reports from higher education providers for activity in 2015-16’, *HEFCE*, 1 August 2017.

## 10. Conclusion

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This report has charted the genesis and growth of the ‘Students Not Suspects’ movement. It has demonstrated how it organised itself in the aftermath of the 2015 CTSA, how it went from being the side project of a minority of activists into a national movement that effectively determined the NUS’s official stance. ‘Students Not Suspects’ has formed coalitions and support networks with trade unions, civil liberties campaigners and full-time political activists.

As demonstrated by Malia Bouattia’s election as NUS President, a gradual process of institutionalisation and legitimisation of ‘Students Not Suspects’ within the NUS has clearly taken place. Its influence has been built on the back of effective publicity campaigns involving panel discussions, workshops, protests and social media content.

While it has not succeeded in its overall aim of “scrapping” Prevent, it has encouraged numerous student unions to pass motions boycotting the policy and has toured speakers across the UK to audiences comprising thousands of students. The movement has spread misinformation about government policy and misrepresented the facts surrounding complex cases. It has divided opinion and undermined trust between students, staff and local authorities.

On top of numerous other examples, the disputed facts surrounding the cases involving Ifhat Smith and Rahmaan Mohammadi reveal a determined effort by ‘Students Not Suspects’ volunteers to mislead their audiences with one-sided and inaccurate accounts of Prevent’s supposed failures. This strategy of misinformation was present throughout all of the ‘Students Not Suspects’ tours.

Far from moderating its message, ‘Students Not Suspects’ has been emboldened by the outrage of politicians, the media and some student unions, and has been developing ever closer links to extremist organisations such as CAGE, IHRC, MEND and Friends of Al-Aqsa. While criticising Prevent is a perfectly legitimate political position and is far from extreme in theory, ‘Students Not Suspects’ has effectively become a vehicle for extremist interests. It advances extremist tropes, extremist speakers and extremist narratives – all the while attacking anybody, NUS officials or otherwise, who distance themselves from its position.

‘Students Not Suspects’ reached the peak of its activity in late 2015 and 2016 under the NUS leadership of Malia Bouattia and Shelly Asquith. The NUS’s approval of the latest 2017 tour shows that there is little sign that the campaign will disappear in the near future. It remains to be seen whether the current leadership will fully emulate the confrontational tactics and intensity of events that were present during Bouattia and Asquith’s terms of office. In the meantime, this divisive campaign continues to alienate moderate students and further undermines the credibility and legitimacy of the NUS among government, policymakers and wider civil society. More worryingly, if left unchecked, it threatens to undermine the work of Prevent coordinators and leaves vulnerable students exposed to extremist speakers and organisations targeting campuses.

## 11. Policy Recommendations

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Prevent has clearly pioneered important work in tackling extremism. It is also the case that since openly aligning themselves with extremists, both the ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign and the NUS have been widely discredited on this issue. Nevertheless, active attempts to distort and undermine Prevent continue to be a concerning problem on university campuses.

As recent history demonstrates, students and young people in general are a notable demographic when it comes to extremist and terrorist recruiters. In order to build resilience throughout the higher education sector, it is vital that good relations exist between university staff, student officials and local Prevent officers.

This campaign of boycotting the policy and hosting extremist speakers – endorsed by the NUS as well as student unions, trade unions and others – complicates universities’ attempts to adhere to their statutory duty towards challenging extremism. It negatively affects their ability to manage external speakers and the behaviour of student societies. Ignoring this problem would mean surrendering universities to an increasingly toxic echo chamber divorced from mainstream student and public opinion.

The government must play a greater role in successful advocacy and communication of the policy. There are pertinent facts present on the ‘Educate Against Hate’ website, as well as in the released figures surrounding Channel referrals. But Prevent is up against a well-organised campaign that runs multiple events nationwide and receives the support of influential academics, politicians and civil society activists. The Home Office and Department for Education need to understand their opponents’ chief arguments and formulate a compelling and well-funded PR and communications strategy to counter them. This demands a series of well-publicised speaker events featuring Prevent practitioners.

In turn, universities should endeavour to guarantee hosting as many Prevent workshops as possible in order to adhere to more than the minimal requirements of the Prevent duty. In partnership with the Department for Education and local Prevent coordinators, they should actively encourage students to attend these, framing them as opportunities to relay concerns about the policy and its impact on them. This transparent approach would run completely counter to the perception that the Prevent policy is a secretive mechanism of state surveillance and discrimination.

Government and universities also have a duty to partner and build relations with organisations in civil society that are campaigning against extremism and the anti-Prevent lobby. This would include interfaith organisations and secular groups as well as anti-extremism charities. They should jointly host events that highlight the findings of their work and collaborate on campus-based activities. This would confirm the existence of mainstream grassroots support for the chief aims of Prevent.

If Prevent continues to impact higher education without satisfactory explanation, campaigns such as ‘Students Not Suspects’ will continue to delegitimise the work of Prevent coordinators and make it increasingly difficult for them to work alongside students, academics and university staff. This would undermine the entire rationale for Prevent and would hinder essential support for students at risk of radicalisation.

## 12. Appendix – Timeline of Events

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- 26 November 2014 – The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act is introduced to Parliament.
- 12 February 2015 – The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act receives Royal Assent.
- 12 March 2015 – The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act is published.
- 21–23 April 2015 – NUS National Conference held in Brighton. It passes a motion against Prevent.
- 26 May 2015 – The University and College Union (UCU) announces its opposition to Prevent.
- 1 July 2015 – The Prevent Duty comes into force.
- 10 July 2015 – Hundreds of academics and activists write an open letter in *The Independent* which claims that Prevent will have a “chilling effect” on free speech.
- 20 July 2015 – Prime Minister David Cameron condemns the National Union of Students (NUS) for working with CAGE.
- 13 August 2015 – NUS Vice President (Welfare) Shelly Asquith announces that she will boycott Prevent.
- 1 September 2015 – The NUS calls for a boycott of Prevent and announces its ‘Students Not Suspects’ tour.
- 17 September 2015 – Higher Education Minister Jo Johnson writes a letter to NUS President Megan Dunn and condemns the NUS for opposing Prevent.
- 18 September 2015 – The revised Prevent Duty guidance comes into force for Higher and Further Education Institutions.
- 7 October 2015 – NUS President Megan Dunn is condemned in an open letter by other NUS officers for distancing herself from CAGE.
- 12 October 2015 – The first ‘Students Not Suspects’ event is held at the University of Bristol.
- 14 October 2015 – ‘Students Not Suspects’ holds its first tour with CAGE founder Moazzam Begg. Its first event is at KCL.
- 2 December 2015 – The NUS publishes a ‘Preventing Prevent’ handbook.
- 7 December 2015 – ‘Students Not Suspects’ holds a nationwide ‘Day of Action’. There are events and activities in London, Bristol, Swansea, Glasgow, Norwich, Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds.
- 6 January 2016 – Six universities (Manchester, Birmingham, KCL, SOAS, Bradford and UEL) are investigated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) after they host events with CAGE.
- 4 February 2016 – The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) announces an inquiry into the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act.
- 6 February 2016 – Protest against Education Secretary Nicky Morgan at the University of Cambridge.

8 February 2016 – ‘Students Not Suspects’ begins its second tour at Goldsmiths University.

10 March 2016 – NUS Black Students’ Officer Malia Bouattia testifies about Prevent at a side panel meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

28 March 2016 – The National Union of Teachers (NUT) passes a motion to work with the NUS against Prevent.

19–21 April 2016 – NUS National Conference held in Brighton. Malia Bouattia is elected NUS President.

4 June 2016 – ‘Students Not Suspects’ ‘Prevent, Islamophobia and Civil Liberties’ National Conference takes place at Goldsmiths University.

3 July 2016 – NUS Black Students’ Officer Aadam Muuse is advertised as a speaker at the anti-Israel Al-Quds Day rally in London.

25 August 2016 – NUS responds to Home Affairs Select Committee report on countering extremism and calls for Prevent to be scrapped.

13 September 2016 – The Trades Union Congress (TUC) passes a motion to work with the NUS against Prevent.

18 September 2016 – Malia Bouattia is interviewed by *The Guardian*.

25–28 September 2016 – Labour Party Conference is held in Liverpool. ‘Students Not Suspects’ holds a fringe event.

30 November 2016 – Event at UCL. Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott announces that she is calling for a major review of Prevent. The NUS launches a Prevent helpline for students.

10 April 2017 – NUS Vice-President (Union Development) Ali Milani apologises for previous anti-Semitic tweets.

25–27 April 2017 – NUS National Conference held in Brighton. ‘Students Not Suspects’ holds a fringe event. Malia Bouattia loses the election; Shakira Martin is elected NUS President.

29 June 2017 – Malia Bouattia speaks at an event with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California as part of a ‘Bridges Not Walls’ tour in Los Angeles.

26 July 2017 – The UK High Court rules that Prevent is legal in *Butt v. Secretary of State for the Home Department*.

3 August 2017 – The NUS responds to the High Court ruling and announce that it is continuing its ‘Students Not Suspects’ campaign.

1 November 2017 – NUS President Shakira Martin and NUS Women’s Officer Hareem Ghani deliver speeches at MEND’s parliamentary launch of ‘Islamophobia Awareness Month’ (IAM) 2017.

15 November 2017 – ‘Students Not Suspects’ begins its third tour at UCL. It features CAGE’s International Director Muhammad Rabbani. The NUS Black Students’ Campaign publishes an updated version of the ‘Preventing Prevent’ handbook.

## About the Author

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### About Student Rights

Student Rights is a non-partisan group dedicated to supporting equality, democracy and freedom from extremism on university campuses. We were set up in June 2009 as a reaction to increasing political extremism and the marginalisation of vulnerable students on campus.



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