Radicalisation in UK Universities: Confronting Extremism at King's College London and Beyond

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Foreword

A university is not just an institution of learning; it is a sanctuary for the mind, a place where thought is free to roam, where dissent is sharpened by argument, and where the contest of ideas—not the menace of intimidation—determines the course of inquiry. It is in these spaces that societies define themselves, where the next generation is shaped, and where civilisation itself is refined through debate, scholarship, and the relentless pursuit of truth.

Yet today, in Britain, this sacred contract is being broken. A new force is sweeping through our universities, not one of knowledge and discovery, but of coercion and fear. This is not the student radicalism of old, where defiance was a matter of principle and rebellion was animated by the great ideals of liberty and justice. What we see now is something different, something darker: a campaign of ideological absolutism, in which intimidation replaces debate, and violence—not reason—draws the line between what may and may not be said.

At King's College London, one of the UK's most prestigious universities, the evidence is irrefutable. Lecturers distribute Hamas propaganda as teaching material, presenting terror as liberation, war crimes as resistance. Speakers are driven from campus, not by the force of argument, but by threats to their lives. Jewish students are vilified, their presence alone deemed an affront to the new ideological order that governs the university's corridors. Extremist mobs descend upon events, overturning chairs, smashing windows, silencing discussion not with words, but with fists. And through it all, the university itself stands by—paralysed, unwilling, or simply afraid to act.

There is a deeper betrayal at play here. British law is not silent on this matter. The *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015* makes it clear that universities have a duty to prevent radicalisation. The *Public Order Act 1986* leaves no doubt that intimidation, harassment, and threats of violence are criminal acts. The *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act* insists that universities must defend open discourse, that no individual should be silenced by the mob. And yet, these laws remain little more than words on a page when their enforcement is met with hesitation, when their principles are surrendered to the very forces they were meant to oppose.

What is happening in our universities is not a crisis of education alone; it is a crisis of authority, a collapse of institutional courage, and a dereliction of responsibility by those entrusted with upholding both the law and the fundamental tenets of democracy. It is a crisis that can no longer be ignored. Those who harass, who threaten, who incite violence must be held to account—not in empty statements of condemnation, but in courts of law, where their actions are treated as the crimes they are. The foreign funds that flow into radical student organisations, sustaining and enabling their activities, must be traced, exposed, and cut off, for no sovereign nation should allow its academic institutions to become proxies in ideological battles waged from abroad. And the universities themselves, the once-proud custodians of Britain's intellectual tradition, must be forced to choose: will they remain places of learning and reason, or will they

surrender their halls to the rule of intimidation? If they choose the latter, they must face the consequences of their failure—stripped of the public trust and public funds they no longer deserve.

This is not just a battle for the integrity of our universities; it is a battle for Britain itself. For if we allow intimidation to triumph over argument, if we allow fear to dictate the limits of speech, if we allow our institutions to be governed not by the principles of free thought but by the demands of ideological absolutism, then we will have lost far more than the sanctity of our campuses. We will have lost the very essence of what it means to be a free society.

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Executive Summary

British universities, long revered as bastions of free inquiry and rigorous debate, are under siege. Radicalisation and the hijacking of academic discourse by extremist groups have become urgent national security concerns[1], with campuses increasingly exploited as ideological battlegrounds. King's College London (KCL) serves as a stark case study, exposing the systematic infiltration of extremist ideologies into student organisations, curricula, and even faculty ranks—resulting in harassment, intimidation, and outright violence. This is not an isolated issue but a growing pattern across UK higher education, facilitated by university inaction, weak enforcement of existing laws, and the unchecked flow of foreign-linked funding into radical student groups.

Despite the legal obligations imposed by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Prevent duty[2]) and the Public Order Act 1986, UK universities have failed to respond adequately to this escalating crisis. Extremist actors have not only weaponised identity politics and political activism but have also turned academic institutions into platforms for indoctrination, disruption, and the suppression of dissenting voices. At KCL, students and staff have been silenced through death threats, violent protests, and the infiltration of Hamas propaganda into teaching materials. Meanwhile, student organisations—particularly Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and King's College London Stand for Justice (S4J)—have operated with impunity, receiving funding from opaque sources that warrant urgent government scrutiny.

The Government must act decisively to prevent Britain's universities from becoming breeding grounds for extremism and lawlessness. This policy paper lays out an immediate and robust framework for action, underpinned by British law and the principles of academic freedom. Specifically, we call on the UK Government to:

- **Launch a full-scale parliamentary inquiry** into radical infiltration at UK universities, investigating the role of foreign influence, extremist ideologies, and the failure of institutional governance.
- **Mandate swift and uncompromising prosecution** of individuals who harass, intimidate, or threaten students and faculty—ending the culture of impunity that allows extremism to thrive.
- **Investigate and expose funding networks** behind radical student groups, particularly those with links to foreign entities or proscribed organisations—no more secrecy, no more foreign interference.

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[1] Brandon, James. *British Universities Continue to Breed Extremists. CTC Sentinel*, Jan. 2011 – noting UK universities' longstanding failure to grasp the problem of student radicalisation
ctc.westpoint.edu

[2] Teesside University – Summary of the Prevent duty under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (universities must "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism or extremism")
tees.ac.uk

- **Hold universities accountable** for security failures, ensuring that institutions failing to meet their legal duties face regulatory penalties, funding consequences, and public scrutiny.

Failure to act now will only embolden those who seek to undermine Britain's democratic values from within. The time for complacency is over. Universities must not be left to manage this crisis alone; it is imperative that the Government takes the lead in safeguarding the future of British higher education. Only through immediate and coordinated action can we reclaim campuses as places of genuine learning, debate, and intellectual freedom—rather than arenas of fear, intimidation, and radicalisation.

Introduction

The British university has long stood as a beacon of intellectual freedom, where students and scholars engage in rigorous debate, challenge orthodoxy, and push the frontiers of human knowledge. It is a place where ideas—not threats—should prevail. Yet, an insidious and growing campaign of radicalisation threatens to dismantle this legacy, turning campuses into battlegrounds where intimidation silences dissent and extremism masquerades as activism.

In recent years, universities across the UK have become fertile ground for radical ideologies, from jihadist extremism and hard-line anti-Israel activism to far-right agitation. Exploiting the open nature of academia, extremist groups have infiltrated student societies, hijacked public discourse, and in some cases, even embedded their narratives into curricula. This is not merely an issue of student protest gone too far—it is a calculated attempt to subvert academic institutions, instill fear, and cultivate ideological conformity through coercion and harassment. The consequences are stark: speakers have been no-platformed through threats of violence, Jewish and pro-Israel students have been systematically targeted, and radical ideologies have been openly endorsed under the guise of academic discussion.

The Prevent strategy[3], enshrined in the *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015*[4], was designed to counter these very threats, requiring universities to safeguard students from being drawn into extremism. Yet, despite these legal obligations, universities have failed to meet the challenge. The case of King's College London (KCL) exemplifies these systemic failures:

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[3] HM Government, *Prevent Strategy*, Cm 8092 (London: The Stationery Office, 2011), 15, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78966aed915d07d35b0dcc/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.
[4] **UK Parliament**, *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015*, c. 6, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/contents.

- **Events have been violently disrupted**—with speakers and attendees forced to flee as extremist mobs smashed windows, overturned chairs, and created a climate of terror.[5]
- **Students and faculty have been threatened with physical harm**, their names circulated on social media alongside calls for attacks—while campus authorities stood by, unwilling or unable to intervene.
- **Radical propaganda has infiltrated classrooms**, with Hamas-produced materials being assigned as legitimate educational resources, glorifying terrorism while whitewashing atrocities.

King's College London is not an anomaly—it is a microcosm of a national crisis. Unless decisive action is taken, British universities risk becoming incubators for extremism, producing not critical thinkers but ideologically radicalised individuals primed for confrontation rather than discourse.

This policy paper examines the radicalisation crisis within UK universities, using the KCL case as a lens through which to expose the mechanisms of extremist infiltration, the failures of university governance, and the consequences of state inaction. It proposes an urgent and uncompromising legal and policy response, drawing upon the *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the Public Order Act 1986*[6]*,* and the forthcoming *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act*, to implement the following measures:

- **A full-scale parliamentary inquiry into extremist infiltration on UK campuses** to expose radical networks, identify security failures, and hold institutions accountable.
- **Strict enforcement of the law against intimidation, harassment, and incitement**—ensuring that those who engage in violence or threats face criminal prosecution.
- **An investigation into the funding sources of radical student groups** to uncover foreign interference and sever financial pipelines supporting campus extremism.
- **Tangible consequences for universities that fail to uphold security and free speech**, including regulatory sanctions and potential funding penalties.

The battle for the soul of Britain's universities has begun. Will these institutions remain places of scholarship and free expression, or will they become enclaves of radical indoctrination? The answer depends on the actions taken now. The Government, law enforcement, and university leadership must act decisively—before the tipping point is reached.

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[5] **Roar News**, "Breaking: Pro-Palestine Protestors Disrupt Talk with Pro-Israel Iranian Speaker," *Roar News*, [date of publication], https://roarnews.co.uk/2025/breaking-pro-palestine-protestors-disrupt-talk-with-pro-israel-iranian-speaker/
[6] **UK Parliament**, *Public Order Act 1986*, c. 64, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/64.

Factors Contributing to Campus Radicalisation and Hijacked Discourse

Several interlocking factors explain how and why radicalisation takes root in universities and how extremists manage to commandeer campus discourse:

Global Conflicts and Identity Politics: International conflicts (such as the Israel–Palestine conflict or wars involving Islamist extremists) have direct reverberations on campus. Students who strongly identify with one side may form groups that, while purporting to champion human rights or justice, in fact echo the narratives of extremist organisations. In the KCL case, pro-Palestinian student groups, angered by events abroad, adopted rhetoric and tactics verging on extremism – including defending terrorist violence and targeting Jewish students or Israeli speakers with abuse. The emotional pull of identity-based struggles can make young people susceptible to black-and-white extremist narratives that cast other students as enemies. Academic discourse gets hijacked when complex geopolitical issues are reduced to absolutist propaganda on campus.

Extremist Networks Exploiting Student Groups: There is evidence that some ostensibly student-led activist groups are supported or influenced by extremist networks beyond the university. For example, *Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)*[7], which has chapters on many campuses (including KCL), coordinates closely with national and international organisations. Reports in the United States have revealed that SJP's national structure is financially and ideologically supported by groups tied to extremism – notably, SJP is fiscally sponsored by American Muslims for Palestine, an organisation linked by researchers to Hamas. While UK chapters of SJP and similar groups (like KCL's *Stand For Justice (S4J)*)[8] are student-run, the *scope and sophistication of their activities* often suggest external guidance or funding. Indeed, most SJP branches rely on student union funds, yet this barely accounts for the scale of their campaigns, indicating undisclosed funding streams and overseas links might be at play. Such external influences facilitate the spread of radical ideas on campus under the cover of student activism.

Inadequate Oversight and Prevent Implementation: Universities and student unions have sometimes been reluctant to crack down on radical activities, due to a mix of complacency, a misplaced zeal for unfettered student politics, or fear of being accused of stifling free speech or of discrimination (especially when Islamist extremism is involved, given sensitivities around Islamophobia). The Prevent duty, mandated by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, requires higher education institutions to "*have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".* In practice, however, implementation of Prevent on campus has been patchy. Some academics and student leaders openly oppose Prevent, claiming it chills debate

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[7] **Anti-Defamation League (ADL)**, *Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)*, last modified [date if available], https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/students-justice-palestine-sjp.

[8] **Stand for Justice (S4J)**, *Stand for Justice*, accessed [date of access], https://www.stand4justice.org.

or unfairly targets Muslim students. This backlash has sometimes led to a lack of vigilance: problematic speakers may be invited without proper screening, and warning signs (like a student's extremist social media posts or a lecturer promoting terrorist propaganda) might be downplayed. The UCL inquiry into Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab[9] (the "Underwear Bomber" who had been president of the Islamic Society at UCL) infamously concluded there were no issues at UCL – while ignoring clear evidence that he had promoted extremist views and hosted hardline speakers as a student. Such institutional denialism or naivety, as observed across multiple cases, means universities *"are still failing to understand, let alone seriously grapple with, the problem of radicalisation of students"*.

Echo Chambers and Suppression of Dissent: Extremist groups thrive in environments where they can shut down opposing viewpoints. On campus, this often takes the form of aggressive protest to no-platform speakers they dislike, or social ostracism and harassment of students who disagree. The incidents at KCL – from the mob violence in 2016[10] to the death threats in 2024[11] – demonstrate a deliberate strategy of silencing through intimidation. When such tactics succeed (e.g. an event is cancelled or a student refrains from voicing a contrary opinion out of fear), it reinforces the extremists' power and discourages moderate voices. Over time, this creates an echo chamber effect in certain campus circles or departments, where only the radical viewpoint is heard loudly and others are cowed into silence. Academic discourse is thus hijacked: seminars or panel discussions on contentious topics become one-sided or are shouted down. The presence of even a few highly vocal extremists can chill free expression campus-wide if not countered.

Institutional Failures and Mixed Signals: Universities have a duty of care toward their students and also a responsibility to uphold academic freedom. When institutions send mixed signals – for instance, by failing to discipline students who engage in harassment, or by not supporting faculty who face intimidation – they inadvertently embolden radical actors. At KCL, despite repeated disruptions and even criminal acts, punishments have been lenient or nonexistent (no arrests in 2016; no public expulsions or lasting sanctions in later incidents). Furthermore, when a lecturer propagated extremist content in class, it fell to a student whistle-blower to trigger action – indicating the university did not proactively detect such alarming behavior. This lack of a firm response creates a culture of impunity. Extremist groups interpret the university's inaction as tacit tolerance. In contrast, a swift and forceful response to early warning signs – for example, disciplining those who smashed windows in 2016 or robustly defending the right of speakers to be heard in 2024 – would signal that the university

[9] **University College London (UCL)**, "Review of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's Time at UCL," *UCL News*, January 28, 2010, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2010/jan/review-umar-farouk-abdulmutallabs-time-ucl.

[10] **Greg Wilford**, "KCL's Student Israel Society Attacked by Demonstrators," *The Telegraph*, January 15, 2016, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/12110578/KCLs-Student-Israel-society-attacked-by-demonstrators.html.

[11] *The Jewish Chronicle* – Report on KCL event cancellation due to death threats (speaker received violent threats and withdrew; KCL SJP celebrated the "victory" over the event) thejc.com

will not allow intimidation or indoctrination. Unfortunately, at KCL and elsewhere, university leadership often appears reactive and hesitant, rather than proactive and resolute, in the face of campus extremism.

Security Lapses and the Role of Universities in Prevention

Universities must serve as the first line of defence against campus radicalisation, but the KCL case study exposes critical security and policy lapses:

Insufficient Event Security and Planning: Freedom of speech on campus includes the freedom to invite external speakers – a right that extremist protesters have repeatedly trampled at KCL. Universities are expected to perform risk assessments for high-profile or controversial events (indeed, under Prevent guidance and their own policies). Yet, despite prior incidents, arrangements at times proved inadequate. In the Dan Meridor lecture of 2018 at KCL[12], even with stringent entry rules, protesters managed to disrupt the event with sustained shouting for 90 minutes. In 2024, an event had to be abandoned entirely due to threats. These examples suggest that either proper risk mitigation measures were not in place or not effective – e.g. insufficient security personnel, failure to screen attendees for weapons, or lack of coordination with police. A robust approach could include liaising with law enforcement in advance, barring known troublemakers, and swiftly removing anyone who crosses the line from peaceful protest to intimidation. By failing to ensure such measures, KCL and other universities have at times left students and invited guests vulnerable.

Lack of Accountability for Threats and Harassment: When harassment and threats occur, universities often rely on police investigation and internal disciplinary processes. However, there is a perception that consequences for perpetrators have been minimal. As noted, the violent disruption in 2016 saw no arrests, and it's unclear if the student ringleaders faced university sanctions. In the 2024 incident, while death threats were reported to police, at the time of writing there has been little publicised outcome in terms of prosecutions or university discipline. The Public Order Act 1986 provides that using *"threatening or abusive… behaviour"* likely to cause harassment or fear is a criminal offence. By law, those making violent threats or engaging in physically intimidating conduct should be investigated and prosecuted. A failure to apply the law rigorously on campus – treating these incidents as mere student misbehaviour rather than crimes – amounts to a security failure. It not only leaves victims without justice, but also fails to deter future offenders. Universities should be actively assisting police by identifying culprits (through CCTV, sign-in lists, etc.) and pursuing disciplinary action in parallel, yet it appears such follow-up has been inconsistent at best.

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[12] **Times of Israel Staff**, "Dan Meridor Welcomed with Shouts of 'Shame' at London University Event," *Times of Israel*, January 30, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/dan-meridor-welcomed-with-shouts-of-shame-protests-at-london-university-event/.

Gaps in Monitoring and Reporting Extremism: An effective prevention approach requires that universities monitor for signs of radicalisation and have clear reporting channels. KCL's case shows gaps in this area: it was a student's recording that revealed the extremist seminar content in 2024, raising questions about how a lecturer could circulate terrorist propaganda without earlier detection. This suggests insufficient oversight of curriculum content in sensitive subjects, and possibly a lack of student awareness on how to report concerns. While academic freedom is paramount, it does not shield the promotion of terrorist ideology. University departments should be alert to any staff member or guest speaker introducing material that crosses from academic analysis into advocacy for violence. Likewise, student services and campus security should track patterns – for instance, if a particular society frequently hosts extreme speakers or if complaints are lodged about intimidation at events. The *Prevent duty* requires institutions to train staff to recognise and refer signs of radicalisation. Any lapses in training or awareness can result in missed opportunities to intervene early, before extremist influence leads to harm.

Balancing Free Speech and Preventing Extremism: Universities face the challenge of maintaining an open forum for debate while filtering out genuine incitement to violence or unlawful extremist activity. The new *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023* underscores the importance of free expression, even for controversial views, by requiring universities and student unions to protect freedom of speech and establishing enforcement mechanisms. At the same time, *Prevent* and public order laws demand vigilance against those who would use speech to radicalise or threaten. The KCL experience shows that these goals are not contradictory but complementary: had KCL more robustly defended free speech (for instance by stopping hecklers or insisting events go on with adequate security), it would have also sent a strong message marginalising the extremist fringe. Conversely, by yielding to the hecklers and threats, the university undermined free speech and emboldened radicals. Going forward, universities must realise that proactively preventing extremist intimidation is a prerequisite for genuine freedom of speech on campus. This means working within legal frameworks to ban or prosecute speech that is not merely controversial but actively unlawful (such as threats or terrorist propaganda), while staunchly protecting the right to express lawful opinions, however unpopular. The law is on their side in this regard: incitement to violence and harassment are criminal, whereas merely "offensive" political speech is not. Clear policies and leadership are needed to navigate this balance.

In summary, UK universities bear significant responsibility in countering campus radicalisation. KCL's failures – in security preparedness, accountability, and vigilance – highlight what can go wrong. However, these are *remediable problems*: with stronger policies, better training, and the will to enforce rules, universities can turn the tide against extremist influence. The next section outlines legal and policy tools that can be leveraged to this end.

Legal and Policy Framework

A trio of legal instruments in the UK provide the foundation for addressing radicalisation and extremist activities at universities: the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the Public Order Act 1986, and the forthcoming Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill/Act. Effectively using these laws, alongside university regulations, is key to solving the problem.

Prevent Duty (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015): Section 26 of the 2015 Act enshrines the *Prevent duty*, making universities and other bodies legally obliged to "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism." For higher education, this has meant implementing policies to safeguard students from extremist influence. The government issues guidance (updated in 2023) on how universities should carry out this duty – including vetting external speakers, training staff to notice signs of radicalisation, partnering with local Prevent coordinators, and establishing referral mechanisms for at-risk individuals. KCL and all UK universities are subject to inspection or monitoring (by the Office for Students and potentially Ofsted for some colleges) for compliance. However, enforcement of Prevent in universities has been inconsistent. This policy paper urges that the Prevent duty be reinvigorated: universities must treat it not as a box-ticking exercise but as a core part of their mission to provide a safe learning environment. The Office for Students should utilize its powers to ensure compliance – if a university repeatedly fails to address on-campus extremism, there should be regulatory consequences (such as enhanced monitoring or even financial penalties). The KCL case, where a lecturer was found distributing terrorist propaganda, indicates a lapse in compliance that should prompt scrutiny from regulators. Strengthening the Prevent duty's application might include clearer benchmarks (e.g. all staff in relevant roles to receive Prevent training, mandatory reporting of any hate-incidents related to extremism, etc.) and transparency (publishing annual summaries of incidents and actions taken, for example). While respecting academic freedom, the law draws a line: advocating terrorism is not acceptable in any classroom, and universities have a duty to uphold that line.

Public Order Act 1986 and Other Criminal Laws: The Public Order Act is a key tool for tackling harassment, threats, or violence on campus. Under Section 4 and 4A of this Act, it is a criminal offence to use or threaten "violence" or "threatening, abusive or insulting" words or behaviour with intent to cause a person to fear violence or to cause them harassment, alarm or distress. This means that students (or outsiders) who issue death threats, chant genocidal slogans, intimidate others physically, or vandalise property during protests are not merely breaching university rules – they are breaking the law. Likewise, incitement to racial or religious hatred (Part III of the Act) would cover any extremist who, for example, shouts antisemitic slurs under the guise of political protest. Universities should closely cooperate with police to ensure that such offences on campus are investigated and prosecuted. Additionally, the Protection from

Harassment Act 1997[13] and the Malicious Communications Act 1988 can apply to repeated harassment or threatening communications (including online) targeting students or staff. The legal framework to punish campus hate crimes and politically motivated intimidation already exists; the challenge is enforcement. This paper advocates a policy of zero tolerance, where any individual – student or external – who engages in threatening or harassing conduct at a university event should be referred to the police and, where evidence suffices, prosecuted under the relevant laws. In tandem, universities should use internal disciplinary codes (which usually classify harassment or violence as major offences) to suspend or expel students who participate in such acts, independent of criminal proceedings. The message must be clear: campuses are not havens exempt from the rule of law. The *Public Order Act 1986* is as applicable on university property as it is on public streets, and its provisions should be invoked to deter and punish campus extremism.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill/Act: In recognition of growing concerns about free speech being stifled in academia, the UK Parliament has advanced the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill – now enacted as the *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023*. This law, once fully in force, will bolster the duty of universities and student unions to uphold free speech and academic freedom. Crucially, it creates new mechanisms to hold institutions accountable. Universities (and their student unions) could face sanctions including fines, and a new complaints system will allow speakers or students whose free speech rights were infringed to seek redress (even the possibility of compensation via a statutory tort for being no-platformed). The Act also establishes a "Free Speech Champion" at the Office for Students – essentially an ombudsman to monitor and investigate breaches of campus free speech rights. How does this connect to combating radicalisation? It targets one side of the coin: ensuring that the heckler's veto or the bully's veto does not prevail. For example, if a student group invites a speaker and extremists mobilise to intimidate the event into cancellation, the affected parties (the society or speaker) could complain under this Act, potentially leading to penalties for the university if it failed to take reasonably practicable steps to protect the event. In essence, the Free Speech Act pushes universities to proactively counter the kinds of disruptive tactics we saw at KCL. By legally requiring protection of speech, it indirectly forces universities to clamp down on those who would unlawfully interfere – i.e. the radical disruptors. However, the Act also has provisions to ensure that speech that is unlawful (e.g. genuine incitement or harassment) is not protected – it does not shield extremist hate speech, for instance. The interplay of this Act with Prevent and public order laws means universities are expected to simultaneously *safeguard open debate* and *suppress criminal extremism*. In policy terms, the government should ensure this Act is brought into force promptly and with clear guidance that universities must both promote free exchange of ideas and use their powers to discipline or exclude those who attempt to shut down others through intimidation. Universities that fail to do so should face consequences from the regulator.

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[13] **UK Parliament**, *Protection from Harassment Act 1997*, c. 40, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/40/contents.

University Codes of Conduct and Responsibilities: Beyond national laws, each university has its own regulations governing student conduct, staff conduct, and visiting speakers. Typically, these include a code of ethics or conduct that prohibits discrimination, harassment, and activities likely to bring the university into disrepute or to endanger others. Many universities also have a *Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech* (as encouraged by the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 and now reinforced by the 2023 Act) which sets out the conditions under which events can take place and the expectations of behavior. KCL, for instance, has such policies – but enforcement is the crux. This policy paper recommends that universities review their codes to ensure they explicitly address the issue of extremism: e.g., participation in or support for a proscribed terrorist organisation, or dissemination of terrorist propaganda, should be a grave disciplinary offence. Likewise, physical interference with the free speech of others should carry heavy penalties. Universities might consider mandating that student societies sign an undertaking to uphold principles of tolerance and lawful conduct as a condition for affiliation and funding, with revocation if breached. Ultimately, robust university policies complement the law by enabling swift internal action (which is often faster than criminal proceedings) to suspend those inciting hatred or violence. Clear internal policies also empower staff: a lecturer who feels a class is being used for extremist propaganda should know how to report it and trust that management will respond decisively. The legal framework thus extends inside the university via these governance tools, and it is vital to ensure they are up to date and rigorously applied.

In summary, the UK already has a substantial legal architecture to counter campus extremism and protect students. The challenge lies in execution. The following section translates these legal provisions into concrete policy actions that the government and universities should take immediately to address the issue of radicalisation in higher education.

Catalyst for Action: The Disruption at King's College London

On 27 February, 2025 King's Geopolitics Forum (KGF) hosted an event titled *"From Conflict to Connection: Israelis and Iranians in Dialogue"* at King's College London (KCL), featuring Iranian activist Faezeh Alavi.

Approximately 25 minutes into the talk[14], a group of pro-Palestine protesters interrupted the proceedings, accusing Alavi of promoting Zionist behavior and questioning her stance on recent Middle East events. Security personnel were summoned, leading to Alavi's departure from the venue. Following her exit, protesters chanted slogans such as *"Shame!"* and *"Free Palestine,"* prompting attendees to leave the event prematurely. Alavi later expressed that the disruption made her feel as if she were under oppressive regime occupation again.

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[14] **Faezeh Alavi (@SFaeze_Alavi)**, "[Exact quote from the tweet]," *X (formerly Twitter)*, [Date of tweet], https://x.com/SFaeze_Alavi/status/1896602625405292933.

The King's Geopolitics Forum condemned the incident, labeling it as antisemitic and reaffirming their commitment to safety and open dialogue. Conversely, the President of KCL Students for Justice for Palestine (SJP) criticised the disruption, stating that the hecklers were primarily external individuals not affiliated with KCL SJP.

This incident has intensified discussions about free speech and the potential for radicalisation on university campuses, highlighting the challenges academic institutions face in balancing open dialogue with campus safety.

Policy Recommendations and Solutions

Addressing radicalisation in UK universities requires a multi-faceted approach, combining government action, legal enforcement, and university governance reforms. Based on the analysis and the KCL case study, this paper proposes the following urgent measures:

1. Launch a Parliamentary Inquiry into Campus Extremism:

The UK Government should commission a comprehensive parliamentary inquiry (through a select committee or a special commission) to investigate the extent of radical infiltration and extremist activities in universities. This inquiry should collect evidence from across the country – including testimony from affected students and staff – to map how groups promoting violence or hatred have gained a foothold in campus settings. It would examine cases like King's College London as well as other institutions where concerns have arisen, in order to identify patterns of failure. The inquiry should scrutinise university compliance with the Prevent duty, their handling of incidents (like speaker disruptions or dissemination of extremist literature), and any links between campus groups and foreign or extremist organisations. The goal is to produce recommendations for systemic improvements. A high-profile inquiry will also signal to universities that the Government treats this issue with utmost seriousness, pressing them to introspect and act even before the inquiry concludes. Parliamentary scrutiny can shine a light on any complacency or obstacles (such as whether university leaders feel constrained in acting against certain groups) and will generate informed debate on balancing academic freedom with security. The end result should be a published report to Parliament outlining findings and recommended policy changes, potentially leading to new guidelines or legislation if necessary.

2. Strict Enforcement and Prosecution of Campus Harassment and Threats:

The Government should direct law enforcement agencies and encourage university authorities to adopt a zero-tolerance stance on harassment, intimidation, and violence linked to campus extremism. This means that individuals who threaten or attack others in the university context must be investigated and prosecuted under the relevant laws (such as the Public Order Act 1986) without exception. Currently, too many incidents

have gone unpunished – for example, no arrests were made after the KCL violence in 2016 despite clear offences. This culture of impunity must end. Police forces should treat a report of a death threat or an assault at a university event as seriously as they would if it occurred in any public venue. To support this, the Crown Prosecution Service should be prepared to bring charges when evidence meets the threshold, sending a strong message through the courts that campus extremists will face legal consequences. The Government could facilitate better coordination by establishing a liaison mechanism between universities and local police specifically for hate crimes and extremism on campus. Additionally, ministers should publicly remind universities of their duty of care – that failing to report egregious incidents to police or not cooperating fully is unacceptable. By making examples of those who engage in criminal intimidation (for instance, securing convictions for individuals who issued violent antisemitic threats at KCL in 2024), authorities will deter others and reassure students that their safety is a priority. Universities, for their part, should be mandated to refer serious incidents to police and not hide them to protect reputation. If necessary, legislation or regulation could be introduced to require reporting of certain categories of campus crime (much like schools must report serious safeguarding incidents). The overarching principle is that there must be real accountability for anyone who harasses, bullies or menaces members of the university community – no political cause can exempt one from the law.

3. Investigate and Expose Funding of Radical Student Groups:

The Government should task relevant bodies (such as the Charity Commission, the Office for Students, and even intelligence agencies where appropriate) to investigate the funding sources and outside influence of student societies that are identified as extremist or frequently linked to radical activity. Groups like *Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)* and *KCL Stand For Justice (S4J)* have been at the center of multiple contentious incidents. While advocating for political causes is legitimate, there are concerns that some of these groups may be receiving undeclared financial or material support from organisations with extremist ties – effectively facilitating foreign or extremist interference in UK campus affairs. As noted earlier, SJP in the US has known links to organisations connected to Hamas. An inquiry in the UK context should determine if any domestic student groups have connections to proscribed organisations (like Hamas or Hezbollah, both outlawed under UK terror laws) or hostile foreign states. This might involve scrutinising donations, affiliations, or the backgrounds of guest speakers. The Charity Commission could audit student unions to ensure that money flowing to affiliated societies is not being misused for extremist purposes. Similarly, universities should be pressed to enforce transparency: any student society should annually report external donations or partnerships. If a group like S4J raised funds from an overseas "charity" that is a front for extremists, this must be exposed and stopped. The Government might establish a special task force to "follow the money" for campus extremism, coordinating financial investigators and counter-terrorism experts. The results of such investigations should be made public where possible, to shine sunlight on any hidden agendas. Where improper funding or links are found, appropriate action should be taken – this could include proscription of an organisation if legal criteria are

met, closing loopholes (for instance, ensuring no student visa route is abused to plant agitators in universities), or simply empowering university administrators to ban or disband a society that is proven to be a proxy for extremists rather than a genuine student-led group. The message is that UK academia must not become a back-door channel for extremist financing or propaganda. By exposing networks and naming those responsible, the Government can undermine the credibility and operations of these radical groups.

4. Strengthen University Accountability and Sanction Non-Compliance:

Universities that fail to uphold their responsibilities in preventing radicalisation and protecting students should face real consequences. The implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 will already allow the Office for Students (OfS) to levy fines for breaches of free speech duties– this power should be employed if, for example, it's shown that a university repeatedly allowed mobs to shut down lawful speech. Additionally, the OfS (or the Department for Education) could incorporate metrics on safety and Prevent duty compliance into university performance assessments. If a university has multiple incidents of extremist disruptions or is found by the planned parliamentary inquiry to have systemic failings, targeted intervention is warranted. This might mean requiring an action plan with strict deadlines, and monitoring progress. University leadership must be made to understand that *security failures are not merely internal matters, but of national concern*. Government could consider tying a portion of university funding or access to research grants to compliance in the area of safeguarding and free speech – analogous to how some funding is contingent on equality, diversity and inclusion benchmarks. Another lever is the appointment (under the Free Speech Act) of the Free Speech Champion at OfS: this official should actively investigate cases like KCL's and recommend sanctions or remediation. In egregious cases, where a university administration is willfully negligent (for instance, if an inquiry found they ignored clear warnings about an extremist recruiter on campus), the Government should not shy away from public censure or even personnel consequences (such as advising that the governing body replace certain administrators). Holding universities accountable also means empowering them: the Government should ensure universities have the legal support needed to, say, bar specific external extremists from campus or to share information with police without fear of litigation. If current laws impede information-sharing or decisive action, they should be reformed. Ultimately, universities must internalise that academic freedom and student safety go hand in hand – a failure in one is a failure in their core mission. Accountability measures, backed by the force of law and regulation, will drive home that message.

5. Support Campus Initiatives that Counter Extremism:

(In addition to the four primary calls to action above, it is worth noting a complementary measure.) The Government and universities should also invest in positive programme to counter extremist narratives and support students. This includes funding for interfaith

and inter-community dialogue on campuses, so that polarising issues can be discussed in a civil and informed manner rather than descending into hostility. Academic discourse can be reclaimed by encouraging debates, panel discussions, and research that critically examines extremist ideologies and exposes their falsehoods – effectively arming students with knowledge to challenge extremist propaganda. Universities could expand pastoral support and confidential reporting systems for students concerned about peer radicalisation or intimidation. The Government's Prevent strategy includes supporting "Channel" interventions for individuals at risk; ensuring that this extends to university students in a sensitive way (perhaps via campus-based referral officers) is crucial. By improving the campus climate – empowering moderate voices and providing outlets for grievances that do not involve extremist ideology – the allure of radical groups may diminish. While this point goes beyond enforcement, it is an important part of a holistic policy response and thus is included as a recommendation.

Each of these recommendations reinforces the others. Together, they form a comprehensive approach: investigate and understand the problem (through an inquiry), enforce the law to punish wrongdoing, disrupt the enablers of extremism (funding and networks), and compel institutions to perform their duties, all while fostering a healthier campus discourse. Implementing these measures would significantly reduce the space in which extremist actors currently operate at universities like King's College London.

Conclusion

Radicalisation within UK universities is a threat not only to the students and staff directly involved, but to academic freedom, campus harmony, and national security as a whole. The case of King's College London demonstrates how quickly the situation can deteriorate: extremist elements took advantage of the college's open environment, turning scholarly events into battlegrounds of ideology, and even infiltrating teaching to spread propaganda. For too long, universities and authorities have *reacted* to these incidents rather than proactively preventing them, often underestimating the degree of coordination and malice behind such extremist activities. The time for half-measures has passed. The UK Government must show leadership by swiftly implementing the policy solutions outlined: launching a high-level inquiry, empowering law enforcement to act decisively on campus crimes, tracing and choking off extremist funding to student groups, and holding universities to account using the full spectrum of legal tools available. At the same time, universities must remember their fundamental purpose – to educate and to encourage debate. They should welcome the Government's firm stance as an aid in restoring an environment where students can engage with challenging ideas *without fear of violence or harassment*.

If these steps are taken, we can envision a near future in which incidents like those at KCL become relics of a darker time. A Jewish student will be able to host a speaker on Middle Eastern politics without requiring bodyguards; a Muslim student will be able to voice dissent from a hardline position without being ostracised by peers; and contentious issues will be hashed out in lecture halls through reasoned argument, not decided by who can shout the loudest or scare others into silence. Achieving this vision

will require courage and vigilance. It demands that the Government, Parliament, law enforcement, and academic institutions work in concert, refusing to allow extremists – be they Islamists, far-right agitators, or any other breed – to undermine the values of free inquiry and mutual respect that define higher education. The recommendations of this policy paper provide a roadmap. It is now incumbent upon policymakers to act. In doing so, they will reinforce the principle that British universities must be places of learning and enlightenment, not incubators of hate – a principle that is essential for the wellbeing of students, the integrity of academia, and the security of our society.