



Executive summary

Whose campus, whose security?

Students' views on and experiences of security services and police on university campuses

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Executive summary

In recent years, high-profile incidents and student activism have raised questions about how securitisation on university campuses is experienced by students, yet there is a stark absence of academic research on the topic. *Whose campus, whose security?* draws on three datasets: a national survey of 635 students, regional interviews with 30 students and data obtained through Freedom of Information requests. The study provides the first empirical account of students' views on, and experiences of, security services and police on UK university campuses. In doing so, it deliberately centres student views and experiences to provide an evidence base for higher education institutions as they operationalise their commitments to the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda. As detailed below, the report offers key statistics, highlights six key areas of concern, and considers student responses and suggestions for alternatives to the status quo.

Key statistics

Campus security

- More than one third of respondents reported seeing campus security daily.
- Only 30.8% of students thought that security services keep students safe on campus. This figure was significantly lower for those with protected characteristics (29.3%) than it was for those without protected characteristics (47.6%).
- Almost three quarters of respondents felt that some students were more likely than others to have encounters with security personnel (73.8%) on campus. Over three quarters of those (78.6%) identified race as a determining factor in affecting the likelihood that someone would encounter campus security.
- Gender (61.7%), social class (54.8%), migrant status (47.9%), nationality (44.9%) and sex worker status (41.6%) were the next most frequently cited factors affecting the perceived likelihood of an encounter with security.

- In 2020/21 the combined budget for campus security services at the three Greater Manchester case study universities¹ was over £8 million compared to just £3 million for counselling and mental health services.

Police on campus

- Only 16.4% of students with protected characteristics thought that police keep students safe on campus, compared with 31.6% of those without protected characteristics.
- Almost three quarters of respondents felt that some students were more likely than others to have encounters with police on campus (73.1%), and 88.9% of those participants felt that race affected the likelihood of someone encountering police on campus. This was followed by gender (66.7%), social class (66.4%), migrant status (62.3%), nationality (57.1%) and sex worker status (56.2%) as the most cited factors.

Key areas of concern

Alongside general concern about the increased securitisation of campus, and the expansive and conflicting roles that security personnel are now expected to fulfil, the report raises the following concerns:

Racism and boundary policing

- Securitisation is an underdiscussed way through which institutional racism operates in higher education.
- Racially minoritised students are subject to racial profiling and face disproportionately harsh treatment from security personnel and police on campuses, often shaped by efforts to keep (assumed) 'non-students' off campuses.

Gender-based violence

- Students have experienced direct transphobia and misogyny from campus security.
- Just 29.3% of women feel that security services keep students safe, and even

fewer (17.8%) think that the police keep students safe.

- Only 22.6% of students who identify as trans, non-binary or an 'other' gender identity said that security services keep students safe. Just 7.7% of the same group think that police keep students safe.
- The responses of campus security to sexual violence and drink spiking are often perceived by students as inadequate, and sometimes exacerbate already traumatic experiences.

Policing of student activism

- Student activists are particularly vulnerable to negative encounters with campus security, with respondents involved in activism reporting physical, verbal and online abuse.
- The policing of student activists is a key driver in bringing police onto campuses, and student activists are particularly vulnerable to negative encounters with police and campus security.

Mental health

- Many students question the suitability of campus security to perform the role of first responders to student mental health crises. In some cases, security personnel have worsened mental health crises.
- The general presence of police and security personnel on campus can have a negative impact on the mental health of some students.

Covid as a time of crisis

- An increased police presence on university campuses during the pandemic was experienced by some students as hostile and intimidating.
- Students raised concerns about the way security staff and police worked together during this period, including security staff granting police access to student accommodation.
- While the pandemic meant that a wider

cross-section of students experienced the securitisation of campus, racially minoritised students were disproportionately impacted.

- There is some concern that the changes to securitisation in the pandemic will endure beyond the Covid period, as evidenced by recent high-profile events.

University complaint processes and anti-democratic structures

- Existing university complaint processes neither confront the risks, nor repair the harms associated with the securitisation of campuses.
- Students reported frustration and dissatisfaction arising from difficulties in accessing complaint processes, experiencing significant delays in the handling of their complaints and a lack of accountability.

Responses and alternatives

- Various student-led responses have emerged to resist the harms of securitisation, most notably the UoM Cops Off Campus student group.
- Respondents had a range of ideas for reform, including redefining the role of security to centre student welfare.
- Many students felt that investment should be shifted away from security services to non-punitive interventions for student wellbeing.

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Whose campus, whose security?

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The Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) is the UK's leading research centre pioneering theoretically informed, empirically grounded and policy relevant research on ethnic inequalities in the UK. CoDE is led by the University of Manchester with researchers based at partner institutions across England and Scotland. The Centre brings together expertise from a range of disciplines including sociology, demography, economics, history, geography, political science, cultural studies and seeks to communicate their research to a wide range of audiences.

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