

Royal assent for Martyn's Law: A guide for educational institutions

09 April 2025  Stephanie McGarry

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, commonly referred to as Martyn's Law, has been in development for eight years, following the tragic terrorist attack at an Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena on May 22, 2017.

This attack resulted in the loss of 22 lives, including Martyn Hett, after whom the law is named, and left over 1,000 individuals injured, many of whom were children. Recently, the Act received Royal Assent.

The Government intends for there to be an implementation period of at least 24 months before the Act comes into force.

Purpose of Martyn's Law

Martyn's Law aims to enhance security measures at publicly accessible locations across the UK to prevent future terrorist attacks. It mandates venues and events to prepare adequately for potential terrorist threats and respond effectively if such situations arise.

The law imposes duties on certain premises and events to assess their vulnerability to terrorist attacks and take appropriate actions to mitigate such risks.

New regulatory framework

For the first time, this legislation specifies who is accountable for identifying terrorism risks and formulating mitigation responses. It also introduces enforcement of these new regulations through a designated regulator, the Security Industry Authority (SIA).

Impact on higher education

Martyn's Law will significantly alter the security landscape within universities, which have traditionally prioritised open and accessible environments conducive to learning and collaboration.

The evolving threat of terrorism necessitates a fundamental shift in these institutions, compelling them to adopt unprecedented security measures and reconsider their longstanding operational models.

Security tiers defined by the Act

The Act introduces a two-tiered approach to security linked to the different uses of premises and the number of individuals it is reasonable to expect may be present at the same time at the particular premises or events:

1. Standard duty premises

Applies to "qualifying premises" with a capacity of 200-799 individuals, requiring the implementation of "public protection procedures." These are procedures that may be expected to reduce the risk of physical harm to individuals if an act of terrorism occurred at the premises or in the immediate vicinity.

The requirements for these smaller premises are focused on activities to enact policies and procedures that are expected to be simple and low cost. The aim of these requirements is to improve staff preparedness and responses. The Act does not require physical alterations to premises or the purchase of equipment for the purpose of having these procedures in place.

2. Enhanced duty premises

Targets venues hosting 800 or more individuals, demanding more stringent "public protection measures," which are proactive and preventative. These are measures that further the objectives of reducing the vulnerability of the premises or event to acts of terrorism or reducing the risk of physical harm to individuals. Procedures relating to evacuation, invacuation, lockdown and communication must be put in place.

Application of the Act to educational institutions

For premises to fall within the scope of the Act they must be wholly or mainly used for one or more of the uses that are set out in Schedule 1 to the Act. Uses include shops, food and drink, entertainment and leisure, libraries and education.

Parks, gardens, recreation grounds, sports grounds and other open-air premises used for recreation, or leisure are generally excluded from the Act's provisions. However, this exclusion only applies where they are generally open access. If such premises have measures in place to secure or check that access is restricted, they would not be excluded premises.

1. Schools and further education colleges

Regardless of size, these institutions will adhere to the standard requirements, focusing on the distinction between under-18 and over-18 education rather than capacity.

2. Universities

Treated similarly to other large premises, universities will generally fall under the enhanced tier due to their large student populations and extensive campus facilities.

They will be required to conduct comprehensive risk assessments, develop detailed response plans, and implement rigorous training programmes.

Responsibilities and compliance

The designated "responsible person" at each institution, will be tasked with estimating the number of individuals present at any given time using various methods. This role is crucial in ensuring compliance with the enhanced duty requirements, which include securing sensitive information and maintaining a detailed security plan to be shared with the SIA. The responsible person is the person who has control of the premises in connection with their Schedule 1 use.

Implementation timeline

Following Royal Assent on 3 April 2025, there will be a minimum 24-month period before the full implementation of the legislation. This timeframe is designed to allow for the establishment of the regulatory framework and to provide adequate preparation time for those responsible for premises and events covered by the law. This means that the measures do not need to be complied with until regulations bring them into force.

Training and procedures

Entities subject to the enhanced duty will need to provide terrorism protection training to relevant staff and appoint a designated senior officer to oversee compliance. They must also keep and regularly review a comprehensive security plan.

Challenges and considerations

The introduction of Martyn's Law comes at a time of financial strain for many [educational institutions](#). The spread of students and staff across multiple locations poses additional challenges in terms of communication and support during emergency situations. Potential solutions may include the use of campus-wide SMS alerts for emerging incidents.

Conclusion

Martyn's Law represents a significant addition to the security measures in place at UK universities. While it introduces new complexities, it is a crucial step in ensuring the safety and security of educational environments in the face of modern societal threats.

The law underscores the need for institutions to adapt and maintain a high standard of security to protect their communities and uphold their global reputation for academic excellence.

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