



FSU
FREE SPEECH UNION

THE FREE SPEECH UNION
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The College Council
Gonville & Caius College
Trinity Street
Cambridge
CB2 1TA

28th October 2022

Dear members of the Council,

I am writing to you in my capacity as General Secretary of the Free Speech Union, a non-partisan, mass membership public interest body that stands up for the speech rights of its members and campaigns for free speech more widely.

This letter concerns the event hosted at Caius on 25 October 2022 featuring Dr Helen Joyce and Professor Partha Dasgupta.

As you will be aware, on 19 October the Master and Senior Tutor, claiming to act in a personal capacity but using official and reserved mailing lists, emailed the students of the College to register their distaste at Dr Joyce's views. The email read:

Freedom of expression is a fundamental principle which we wholeheartedly support. Individuals should be able to speak freely, within the law. Views should then be challenged by debate, key in academic freedom. This is the case no matter the subject or topic.

However, on some issues which affect our community we cannot stay neutral. The event featuring Helen Joyce is not a College event, although it is taking place at Caius. We do not condone or endorse views that Helen Joyce has expressed on transgender people, which we consider offensive, insulting and hateful to members of our community who live and work here.

Caius should be a place for the highest quality of research to be produced and discussed, rather than polemics.

We leave it to Dr Joyce, a member of the FSU's Advisory Council, to decide whether she will make any complaint regarding the mischaracterisation of her views as 'hateful' and 'polemical'. We register only our astonishment that two senior representatives of a respected higher education institution would treat a distinguished visitor, speaking free of charge to members of the College and at the invitation of a Fellow, in such a graceless and inhospitable manner.

Of more immediate concern is that the Master and Senior Tutor appear to have wholly disregarded the [College Statement on Freedom of Speech](#). The relevant section of the Statement reads as follows:

The College expects all Fellows, staff and students to engage with intellectual and ideological challenges in a constructive, questioning and peaceable way, even if they find the viewpoints expressed to be disagreeable, unwelcome or distasteful.

There was nothing “constructive” about mischaracterising Dr Joyce’s views as “offensive, insulting and hateful” and dismissing them as “polemics”. The Master and Senior Tutor, using official College channels, reacted to her disagreeable viewpoints with mere calumny. That reaction fell far below what the Statement demands, and below what any reasonable person would expect of two such senior officers of the College.

The Statement also says:

An active speaker programme is fundamental to the academic and other activities of the College and Fellows, staff and students are encouraged to invite a wide range of speakers and to engage critically but courteously with them.

The Master and Senior Tutor must have been aware that by mischaracterising Dr Joyce’s views in the way they did and declaring that they would not themselves be attending the event they would discourage others from engaging “courteously” with her – there was nothing “courteous” about *their* engagement, after all. In addition, they must have known it would also discourage other Fellows from inviting speakers who, like Dr Joyce, believe in that biological sex is ineradicable. We suggest that other fellows contemplating inviting gender-critical speakers are likely to refrain because of the risk that those speakers will be publicly denounced and defamed by the Master and Senior Tutor in a similar manner.

Finally, the Statement seeks to uphold academic freedom:

The College fosters an environment in which all of its Fellows, staff and students can participate fully in University and College life, and feel able to question and test received wisdom, and to express new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of intolerance or discrimination.

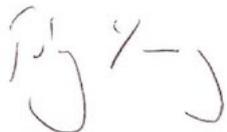
The freedom envisaged by the Master and Senior Tutor seems to be exclusively one-sided – a privilege confined to those with the ‘right’ views on sex and gender (and therefore no kind of freedom at all). For those with the ‘wrong’ views, such as Dr Joyce, the Master and Senior Tutor will do little to prevent “intolerance and discrimination”. Indeed, their email effectively licensed those who disagree with Dr Joyce to disrupt the talk, as they did, thereby creating an intolerant atmosphere in College during her visit.

We note also that Professor Arif Ahmed, who arranged the event, was denied use of the same College mailing list to promote the event. He therefore had no right of reply to the thinly veiled criticism of him for inviting someone to speak whose views are “offensive, insulting and hateful” nor any means of defending his guest against these serious and damaging accusations. The freedom to use the mailing lists in a ‘personal capacity’ is clearly not enjoyed equally, but reserved for those with official power in the College, or whose views they approve of. As such, their claim to have been speaking in a purely personal capacity is manifestly hollow.

The Master and Senior Tutor have not simply breached the requirements of the College Statement on Freedom of Speech – they have acted as though it simply does not exist. If the College believes that the Statement is in any way a meaningful commitment, and not mere verbiage, it must take action to put right the wrong done by the Master and Senior Tutor. Fellows thinking of inviting speakers with contentious views, and those speakers, need some assurance that speakers will not be denounced and defamed by the Master and Senior Tutor if they accept an invitation.

The inhospitable reception of Dr Joyce has turned the attention of the world on the College. Its governing body must now decide whether the College supports freedom of speech, or whether it is merely play-acting at being an institution of learning.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Toby Young'.

Toby Young
General Secretary
The Free Speech Union
toby@freespeechunion.org

Cc: The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education
The Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP, Minister for Equalities
Lord Wharton, Chair, Office for Students
Ms Susan Lapworth, CEO, Office for Students
Mr Daniel El Gamry, Special Advisor to Ms Badenoch