



**FSU**  
FREE SPEECH UNION

THE FREE SPEECH UNION  
85 GREAT PORTLAND ST.  
LONDON W1W 7LT

[FREESPEECHUNION.ORG](http://FREESPEECHUNION.ORG)

Professor Sir Rick Trainor  
Exeter College  
Oxford OX1 3DP

10<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Dear Professor Trainor,

Thank you for your letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

I am pleased that the College investigated the Free Speech Union's complaint about the no-platforming of Professor Selina Todd at an event held on its premises on 29<sup>th</sup> February and welcome the Complaint Panel's conclusion that Professor Todd's freedom of speech was infringed. I also welcome the fact that the Panel has asked the College to consider strengthening its procedures with respect to third party bookings to minimise the risk of something like this happening again and to do that in consultation with the University. I would be grateful if you could let me know the outcome of that process.

While generally satisfied by the College's response, I must register a number of residual concerns.

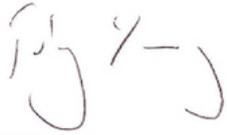
Firstly, you seem to frame the options open to the College in respect of the event as simply being between allowing the event to go ahead without Professor Todd speaking or to cancel the event. However, it would seem that there was a third option which was to engage with the organisers forcefully and insist that the freedom of speech of Professor Todd be upheld, perhaps threatening to withhold permission to use the College's facilities in future if they didn't comply. In light of the strong obligation in law on the College to uphold freedom of expression, that is an option which could have been pursued.

Secondly, you mention Professor Todd being allowed to attend the event and (perhaps inadvertently) give the impression that this was adequate compensation for the withdrawal of a speaking opportunity previously offered. For future reference, I would be grateful if you could confirm that you do not consider these to be equivalent and you accept that the withdrawal of the speaking opportunity to an individual at an event remains a significant interference with freedom of speech even if permission is given to that individual to attend.

Finally, the Complaints Panel appears to have taken at face value the claim by the organisers of the event that their decision to withdraw the invitation to Professor Todd to speak should not be characterised as "no platforming" on the grounds that the speech in question would have been brief and she was still welcome to attend. But the fact that Professor Todd's invitation to speak was withdrawn at the behest of some of the other panellists, because they disagreed with some of her views, is what is generally meant by "no platforming" and is a clear violation of the College's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

I appreciate that in the circumstances it would have been difficult for the College to cancel the event at such short notice without breaching the speech rights of the other speakers, but perhaps one of the ways your procedures could be strengthened is to make it clear to third parties that if they breach your Code of Practice then permission to hold an event on your premises will be withdrawn. In effect, they will be in breach of contract and if the event is then cancelled that will be on their heads, not the College's.

Yours sincerely,

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

Toby Young  
General Secretary  
The Free Speech Union  
[toby@freespeechunion.org](mailto:toby@freespeechunion.org)