



**FSU**  
FREE SPEECH UNION

THE FREE SPEECH UNION  
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Ms Kate Roberts  
President  
Royal Holloway Students' Union  
University of London  
Egham  
Surrey TW20 0EX

22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020

By email to: [president@su.rhul.ac.uk](mailto:president@su.rhul.ac.uk)

Dear Ms Roberts,

Thank you for your letter dated October 13<sup>th</sup>. I am disappointed that you failed to address any of my concerns, including the fact that Mr Williamson's past remarks fall well short of the Students' Union's definition of "hate speech", and further that in no-platforming Mr Williamson you may be acting unlawfully.

In your letter, you say that the Students' Union did not no-platform Mr Williamson. Rather, the Debating Society rescinded the invitation. But the Free Speech Union has had sight of the decision taken by the Society concerning these events and at no point did it rescind Mr Williamson's invitation. As you correctly point out, the Society resolved to "postpone the event until a later date". However, in a press release issued by the Students' Union on 5<sup>th</sup> October, the Union makes clear that Mr Williamson "contravened our Guest Speaker Policy – a policy introduced following the October 2019 referendum on No Platform for Hate Speech". This strongly implies that Mr Williamson was, in fact, no-platformed by the Students' Union because allowing him to speak would have contravened its No Platform for Hate Speech policy. Otherwise why make reference to it? This was also a point made in your letter, where you say in the final paragraph that it is incumbent upon on you, as President of the Students' Union, to ensure that policy is respected. Again, the strong implication is that the Students' Union rescinded Mr Williamson's invitation because of its concern that things he has said in the past constitute "hate speech".

Indeed, this was made clear by you when you met with a representative of the Society on the 5<sup>th</sup> October and explained that the Students' Union would regard having Mr Williamson to speak at any event on campus as be a breach of its No Platform for Hate Speech policy.

In addition to reiterating this position in the final paragraph of your letter, you also retreat from it, saying that the sole reason for the Students' Union's intervention is that the correct paperwork hadn't been submitted by the Debating Society in connection with Mr Williamson's visit. Does this mean that if he is reinvited and the correct paperwork submitted you would have no objection to him speaking?

You say in your letter that the Students' Union received two letters of resignation from committee members of the Society, claiming they "never supported the event". Can you please confirm who you received

resignations from? As I understand it, only one resignation was received – the Public Relations and Communications Secretary. Further, we have been told that when the idea of inviting Mr Williamson to speak was initially floated in the Society no objections were made by any of the committee members. It wasn't, as you suggest, the decision of one rogue committee member, but a collective one.

I am aware that the Students' Union is a registered charity, but fail to see how allowing Mr Williamson to speak contravenes any of the regulations you are obliged to legally adhere to. On the contrary, Charity Law, as well as the Education (N<sup>o</sup>. 2) Act 1986 mean the University – and, by extension, the Students' Union – has a legal obligation to uphold the right to free speech of anyone invited to speak on campus.

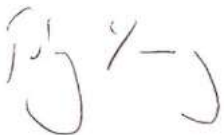
I hope that the above has addressed some of the "inaccuracies" in my original letter. Could I now ask you to respond to the issues raised in my letter? In case they were unclear, I repeat them below:

1. There has been a clear breach of the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech;
2. There has been a clear breach of the University's procedure for inviting external speakers;
3. None of Mr Williamson's comments constitute "hate speech", as defined by the Students' Union;
4. The University is in breach of its legal duty under s.43(a) of the Education (N<sup>o</sup>. 2) Act 1986, as well as its obligations under Charity Law; and
5. Mr Williamson has been 'no-platformed', which is contrary to the advice issued last year by the Equality and Human Rights Commission with respect to external speakers.

Please confirm this has been lodged as a formal complaint.

I look forward to your reply to the questions and concerns raised.

Yours sincerely,



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cc Professor Paul Layzell, Royal Holloway