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FREE SPEECH UNION

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FreeSpeechUnion.org

Helen Stephenson CBE
Charity Commission
PO Box 211
Bootle
L20 7YX

25th March 2021

Dear Ms Stephenson,

Complaint about Purpose of Life (charity number: 1165627)

I am writing to you 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 sets out the complaint of the Free Speech Union against Purpose of Life (charity number: 1165627). The complaint has been registered with the Commission using its online complaint function.

The facts

At 12.19pm on 25 March 2021, Purpose of Life tweeted an image of a letter it had sent to Batley Grammar School. A screenshot of the tweet and a copy of the letter are attached to this letter. Purpose of Life wrote of its disappointment that a teacher at the school had allegedly shown students “insulting caricatures” of Muhammad.

The letter accused the teacher of “insulting Islam”, of “hatred”, “sadistic behaviour” and “terrorism”. It requested that the teacher be “permanently removed” from the school, and warned that “the fallout from [sc. will?] be far reaching”.

Our complaint turns on one simple fact: in addition to accusing this teacher of hatred, sadism and terrorism against British Muslims, the letter named him.

Protests outside the school had begun around five hours prior to the Purpose of Life tweet. They were being reported nationally about three hours prior to the tweet (for instance in the [Daily Express](#)). It should have been clear to the trustee who signed the letter – and indeed to any reasonable person – that merely naming the teacher could endanger his personal safety. Naming him as a sadistic abuser of Islam, in the wake of the murder of Samuel Paty in Paris, was unforgivably reckless.

We make no accusation whatsoever that Purpose of Life deliberately encouraged extremism, or has any extremist intent or involvement. We point out only that calling for

the permanent removal of the teacher, in these terms and in this context, was not consistent with the care and prudence that the law demands of a charitable trustee.

Our complaint

As a free speech organisation, we are concerned that the actions of Purpose of Life could expose the teacher to serious disrepute and physical harm as a result of teaching his students about a controversial topic. The exercise and promotion of the right to free expression should not have such potentially dire consequences in this country.

We therefore ask that the Commission investigate Purpose of Life's letter as a serious incident. We believe it has breached its obligations as a charity in the following ways.

Failure to pursue its charitable object

One of the charitable objects of Purpose of Life is to "advance education for the public benefit". We believe that Purpose of Life has exposed a teacher to serious danger simply because he complied with the school's legal obligation to present political issues in a balanced manner. This quite clearly harms the goal which the charity is obliged to pursue in order to benefit the public.

We suggest it would be impossible for the members of the public reasonably to trust that this charity will use its resources to promote education in the true sense of the word.

Failure to comply with Commission guidance

The Commission's guidance on [*Protecting charities from abuse for extremist purposes*](#) states that trustees must take especial care that their charity is not abused for extremist purposes:

- 7.2 If you know that your charity's name is, or is likely to be, associated with extremist activity but do nothing about it, you'll be failing in your duty to ensure that your charity is complying with the law, in particular adequately protecting its assets and carrying out its purposes for the public benefit.

We have no evidence that Purpose of Life's letter has been associated with extremist activity. We very much hope it will not be. It is possible, however, that extremists will use its letter – and its prestige and respectability as a registered charity – as justification or cover for extreme and possibly unlawful activity. The widespread dissemination of the teacher's name by the charity might also directly enable the commission of an extremist crime, by making known a name, and target, that might otherwise have remained obscure.

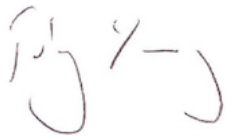
Failure to act with reasonable care and skill

The public disclosure of the teacher's name, in this context, was quite simply reckless. No one exercising reasonable care and skill, whether a trustee or not, would have acted in this way.

Failure to comply with the duty of prudence

The trustees of Purpose of Life have a fiduciary duty under the common law to protect its assets, which include its reputation and goodwill. We suggest that, as a result of its conduct, members of the public are unlikely to bestow on Purpose of Life any credibility as an organisation that advances education in the public benefit, or acts with reasonable care and skill.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toby Young', written in a cursive style.

Toby Young
General Secretary
The Free Speech Union

Cc: Ian Karet, Interim Chair