



FSU
FREE SPEECH UNION

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

John Robins
Chief Constable
West Yorkshire Police

25th March 2021

Dear Mr Robins,

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.

I am concerned to learn about the condemnation of a Religious Studies teacher at Batley Grammar School for showing his pupils cartoons of Mohammed in a lesson about the *Charlie Hebdo* controversy. In particular, a Muslim charity called The Purpose of Life wrote a letter to the headteacher this morning in which it described the images in question as “insulting caricatures”, demanded that the teacher be “permanently removed” from the school, and identified him by name. The charity then went on to publish the letter on [Twitter](#). Naming the teacher on social media is quite breath-takingly irresponsible in light of last year’s brutal murder by an Islamist terrorist of [Samuel Paty](#), a French teacher who, like the teacher at Batley Grammar, was accused of showing his pupils the same *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons.

I am writing to ask for your assurance that every effort will be made by West Yorkshire Police to protect this teacher from violent reprisals. According to the [Telegraph](#), a message was posted on Facebook yesterday evening which said: “It is imperative that all of us turn up to demand the resignation of this teacher *as an absolute minimum* and fulfil our duty of defending the honour of RasoolAllah” [my emphasis]. Such messages are extremely sinister in light of the fact that similar demands on social media led directly to the beheading of Samuel Paty. I would urge you to take such threats very seriously and provide the suspended teacher with round-the-clock police protection until this controversy has subsided.

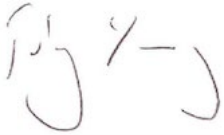
I am sure I do not need to remind you that you have a legal obligation to safeguard freedom of expression, no matter how offensive religious groups find a person’s particular words. Free Speech should not be curtailed by a prohibition against blasphemy, whether of the Muslim or Christian faith. Blasphemy laws were abolished in England and Wales in 2008. Nor is it against the law in England and Wales to speak “insulting words” or engage in “insulting behaviour”. That prohibition was removed from Section 5 of the Public Order Act in 2013.

As Lord Justice Sedley said in *Redmon-Bate v DPP* [1999]:

“Free speech includes not only the inoffensive but the irritating, the contentious, the eccentric, the heretical, the unwelcome and the provocative provided it does not tend to provoke violence. Freedom only to speak inoffensively is not worth having.”

I look forward to your prompt reply.

Yours sincerely,

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

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

Cc: Mark Burns-Williamson, Police and Crime Commissioner, West Yorkshire
The Rt Hon Priti Patel, Home Secretary