



FSU
FREE SPEECH UNION

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Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

The FSU welcomes the inclusion of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill in the Queens Speech.

We have intervened in over 100 campus free speech cases since our launch in February of last year, acting for students and academics alike. About two-thirds of those have been in England and in almost every one of those cases the individual in jeopardy would have been in a stronger position if this law was already on the statute books.

Some examples of cases we've intervened in are: the no-platforming of Selina Todd, Oxford's Professor of Modern History, at Exeter College, Oxford; the no-platforming of Amber Rudd by the UN Women Oxford UK society; the no-platforming of Caroline Farrow, the Catholic campaigner, by Exeter University Debating Society; the no-platforming of Chris Williamson, the former Labour MP, by the Royal Holloway Debating Society; the banning of the Durham University Conservative Association and the Durham University Free Market Association by Durham Students' Union; the suspension of all the debates organised by the Exeter University Debating Society pending a review of speaker vetting procedures by Exeter University and the Exeter Students' Guild; the attempt by LGBT activists to get a porter fired from Clare College, Cambridge for refusing to vote for a Cambridge Council motion, in his capacity as Cambridge City Councillor, which began: "Trans women are women..."; the attempt by Somerville College, Oxford to force all its students to undergo mandatory Unconscious Bias Training and its insistence that they score 100% in the course assessment; the investigation of Mike McCulloch, a lecturer in Geomatics at the University of Plymouth, for saying "All Lives Matter" on Twitter; the attempt to expel a student at the University of Falmouth from the Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union for replying to an email from the Union inviting him to various events connected to Black History Month by saying he'd rather "jump down a mineshaft"; the investigation of a student at the University of Leeds for comparing BLM to the KKK; and the investigation of a first year politics student at the University of Kent for questioning whether George Floyd deserved martyrdom status, given his string of criminal convictions.

Toby Young, General Secretary of the Free Speech Union, said: "It's great to see that the Government is following through on its pledge to better protect free speech in English universities. In the past year the Free Speech Union has dealt with over 100 campus free speech cases, an average of almost two cases a week. Anyone who thinks speech protections in universities don't need strengthening hasn't been paying attention.

"Cancel culture has spread like a virus across university campuses in the past few years and this Bill will act like a vaccine to protect at-risk students and academics."