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University of Abertay Refers Student Who Said Women Aren't as Strong as Men to Disciplinary Board

The Student Disciplinary Panel at Abertay has referred Lisa Keogh, a fourth-year law student who said men are stronger than women, to the university's Student Disciplinary Board.

Ms Keogh, a 29 year-old mother-of-two, has been under investigation by the university since 16 April after classmates complained that her comments during a seminar on gender, feminism and the law were "discriminatory" and "offensive".

Ms Keogh's comments included saying women are born with female genitals and transwomen should not be able to compete against women in mixed martial arts because of their superior strength.

Ms Keogh has been backed by Joanna Cherry QC, the SNP MP for Edinburgh South West and Deputy Chairwoman of the Lords and Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights, who described the investigation as farcical.

Instead of dismissing the complaints, the Student Disciplinary Panel has referred them to the Student Disciplinary Board "to consider the alleged misconduct". The potential sanctions Ms Keogh is facing range from "written or oral reprimand" to "recommendation the student be expelled from the University".

Commenting on the Panel outcome, Free Speech Union member **Lisa Keogh** said:

"I am frustrated and disappointed that Abertay has decided to escalate this matter to a formal disciplinary hearing. This has been hanging over me for over a month and it's been extremely stressful, particularly as it's coincided with my final law exams.

"My comments in class weren't intended to offend or discriminate against anyone – I was just expressing what I thought of as a mainstream point of view and ultimately my opinion.

"Abertay says it believes in free speech and defends the right of students to express their views on a range of controversial issues without being penalised. Why, then, have I been put through this ordeal simply for stating my opinion?

"Regrettably, there is an increasingly rigid intellectual orthodoxy at universities and if you stray from it some students will claim they've been harmed by your views and the authorities then feel obliged to investigate those complaints. Pointing out that women are born with reproductive organs is now something you cannot say because it's thought to be discriminatory against men who identify as women.

"I understand that Abertay felt it had no choice but to investigate these complaints, but I thought the university would exercise a bit of common sense and conclude there was no case to answer. Instead, it has decided to extend the investigation. Even if I'm exonerated, that won't mean free speech is alive and well at Abertay. What people who haven't been through one of these investigations don't understand is that the process is the punishment."

"I'm hopeful that I will be awarded the law degree that I've worked so hard for at the end of this ordeal, but the fact that it's been allowed to drag on for such a long time sends a chilling message to other women who don't go along with the prevailing campus orthodoxy.

"If you think transwomen shouldn't be allowed to compete against biological women because of their superior physical strength, or that transwomen shouldn't be able to share women's safe areas, you better keep your opinion to yourself. Saying that in class – even a class on gender, feminism and the law – may land you in hot water."

Joanna Cherry QC MP, who sits on the Joint Committee on Human Rights at Westminster, and who raised Lisa's case in the House of Commons, said:

"Given the evidence of which I have been made aware I am surprised that the university authorities have not dismissed these allegations rather than escalating matters to a full hearing. A university seminar, particularly in a law school, should be a place where ideas, opinions and beliefs can be freely debated. Ms Keogh appears to be under investigation for exercising her right to freedom of speech and freedom of belief which are protected by Articles 9 and 10 of the ECHR.

"All universities including Abertay are bound by the terms of the Equality Act not to discriminate against, harass or victimise students by reason of protected characteristics which include belief. They are also bound to foster good relations between groups with different protected characteristics.

"I trust the university will be mindful of these duties."

Free Speech Union General Secretary **Toby Young** said:

"Many of our members are women who've got into trouble for expressing gender critical views and we always defend them to the hilt, but this case is particularly egregious. Lisa is a mature student from a disadvantaged background who has worked extremely hard to put herself through university and obtain a law degree. You would hope that the University of Abertay would be doing everything it could to support a woman like Lisa, not making her life more difficult. The fact that she's been put through this ordeal while sitting her final exams is inexcusable.

"Universities like Abertay often say they believe passionately in free speech, but that it has to be balanced against the right of students to feel safe and not discriminated against. The problem is, very little 'balancing' ever takes place – they nearly always prioritise emotional safety over intellectual freedom. The student activists know this, so if someone challenges their woke ideology they make a complaint, saying it has made them feel unsafe, and the dissenter is then placed under investigation. That creates a chilling atmosphere, with students no longer able to engage in discussion and debate about hot-button issues like transgenderism.

"I hope the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will send a signal to English universities that they should tolerate a broad spectrum of opinion, with students told that if being intellectually challenged makes them feel unsafe then a university probably isn't the right environment for them.

"The Scottish government should think seriously about introducing a similar bill so students like Lisa aren't punished for expressing views that some of their classmates find disagreeable. That's why I'm delighted that Joanna Cherry, the SNP MP, has taken up Lisa's case.

"We will continue to defend Lisa's right to free speech and support her throughout this ordeal. If Abertay decides to withhold her law degree, I expect this will end up in court and we will be backing Lisa all the way."

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