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FREE SPEECH UNION

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Professor Judith Squires
Vice-Chancellor and Provost
University of Bristol
Beacon House
Queen's Road
Bristol BS8 1QU

10 September 2021

By email to pa-provost@bristol.ac.uk

Dear Professor Squires,

Re. Professor Steven Greer

I am writing to you in my capacity 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.

We are getting in touch to express our concern about the way in which the University of Bristol has mishandled a complaint of Islamophobia, lodged in October 2020 by the University's Islamic Society (BRISOC), against Professor Steven Greer, a human rights scholar with an outstanding international reputation. Needless to say, we have consulted Professor Greer about contacting you and checked key facts with him. Although you will be familiar with these, let me remind you of them.

Key facts

On 30 October 2020 a formal complaint was lodged with the University by the then President of BRISOC, a medical student with no expertise in law or social science. He claimed to be acting on behalf of other anonymous Bristol students. It was alleged that Professor Greer's teaching in the degree unit Human Rights in Law, Politics and Society (HRLPS), and other relevant public output, is riddled with Islamophobia. BRISOC demanded that he apologise 'to all Muslim students', undertake not to reoffend, be suspended from his job pending consideration of dismissal, and that the module be scrapped.

Professor Greer did not, however, find out any details until February 2021 when, in the first of many breaches of the confidentiality of the University's investigation, BRISOC launched a hostile social media campaign against both him and the University. The latter was accused of complicity in Professor Greer's alleged offences for having failed to resolve the matter to the Society's satisfaction. Accompanied by his photo, the still ongoing campaign features amongst other things, an online petition supporting BRISOC's demands, including many from Muslim and other organizations connected with the University, the Law School, and elsewhere. This currently stands at 3,700 signatures. The controversy was also covered by two University of Bristol student newspapers, *Epigram* and *The Bristol Tablet*, and the media organization, *Al Jazeera*.

At the end of July the University's investigator unequivocally cleared Professor Greer of all charges of Islamophobia. However, the University declined to make this public until a joint statement between itself, the complainant and Professor Greer had been drafted. Professor Greer has expressed his willingness to cooperate on the drafting of this statement, but the University and the complainant have not responded.

On Monday, 6 September the University of Bristol Law School decided to remove the 'Islam, China and the Far East' module taught by Professor Greer from the syllabus of HRLPS to avoid upsetting and 'othering' Muslims, and to prevent a recurrence of complaints from this quarter. This was in spite of the fact that the University's inquiry into the complaints about Professor Greer and his teaching of this module concluded they were groundless. This is how we would have expected the Law School to respond if the complaints had been upheld, not dismissed. It has effectively proceeded as if the inquiry concluded Professor Greer was at fault.

In spite of all this, to date there has also been no let-up in BRISOC's vicious campaign of vilification, intimidation and harassment against Professor Greer. On the contrary, it has increased. For example, its Instagram account shares a recently uploaded TikTok video, which not only breaches confidentiality by leaking the inquiry's verdict; it also retails fresh and even more dangerous allegations, which Professor Greer believes to be false. A link to the campaign, which ignores his exoneration, is also presented alongside BRISOC's Fresher's Guide. The police have been informed.

Although BRISOC has failed to end Professor Greer's career at the University as intended, his reputation has nevertheless been severely damaged. Its vicious campaign has also put both him and his family under intolerable stress, and potentially exposed him to the risk of violent retribution. In the social media storm which BRISOC's campaign triggered, he was, for example, compared to Samuel Paty, the French school teacher beheaded in October 2020 by an Islamist militant who believed that illustrating a class discussion about blasphemy and freedom of expression with the Charlie Hebdo cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed justified his beheading. In light of this, a suspicious incident outside Professor Greer's home in February prompted him and his wife to seek

refuge somewhere safer for several days. The police, who were informed, took the matter very seriously.

At no point has Professor Greer apologised to BRISOC. Nor has he acceded to their demand to modify his future academic activities in accordance with their stipulations. The University has not required him to do any of these things either. He has not been disciplined, reprimanded, warned, cautioned, or been referred for 'awareness training'. A police investigation conducted earlier in the year into Professor Greer at the behest of BRISOC was also soon wound up due to lack of evidence. And, until this week, he was working for the University as normal. The removal of the 'Islam, China and the Far East' topic from the HRLPS syllabus undercuts all of this.

Questions to be answered

BRISOC has a serious case to answer with respect to a number of possible legal wrongs. But other questions, some of which concern the deeper background to Professor Greer's case, also require a response from the University, the Law School, and others. The most important of these are as follows.

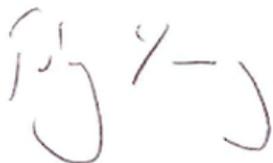
1. Why has the 'Islam, China and the Far East' topic been dropped from the syllabus in HRLPS for the reasons stated above even though Professor Greer was completely exonerated by the University's own investigation into BRISOC's complaints about him and the module in question?
2. How is this consistent with the University's statutory obligation to secure freedom of speech and academic freedom?
3. Why was nothing effective been done about a Twitter storm three years ago which foreshadowed the current crisis? Professor Greer and a colleague were denounced as racist and Islamophobic, and accused of suffering from 'white psychosis', simply for having pointed out that Prevent is neither racist nor Islamophobic. One of those involved was a Bristol colleague of Professor Greer's, since promoted.
4. Why did the University take almost nine months to acquit Professor Greer of BRISOC's groundless allegations? In sharp contrast, within days of the launch of the public campaign in February a similar conclusion was reached online by several independent parties including two Bristol law students.
5. Why was the complainant not officially warned by the University about disciplinary consequences when he threatened, in December 2020, to go public if his case was not swiftly resolved?

6. Why was there no attempt to stop BRISOC's social media campaign when it started in February 2021 and why has the University made no attempt to protect Professor Greer from this campaign of vilification, harassment and intimidation?
7. Why have those involved, including one of the University's own student anti-racism advisers, not been required to stop harassing Professor Greer, publicly retract the false accusations about him, and to apologise to him and his family for the harm caused?
8. Why has Professor Greer been silenced twice – once during the inquiry and then while awaiting a draft joint public statement about the result which never materialised?

You should by now have received a letter from Professor Greer's solicitor, Michelle Landy, who specialises in employment law. The police are also conducting an investigation into BRISOC's campaign of harassment, victimisation and intimidation. To help ensure justice for Professor Greer our Chief Legal Counsel is also working with Ms Landy.

We look forward to receiving some answers to our questions shortly.

Yours sincerely,



Toby Young
General Secretary, The Free Speech Union
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cc Professor Ken Olifant, Head of School, University of Bristol Law School

cc The Rt Hon Michelle Donelan, Universities Minister

cc Lord Wharton, Chair, Office for Students

cc Nicola Dandridge, CEO, Office for Students

cc Iain Mansfield, Special Advisor, Department for Education

cc David Smy, Office for Students