

Professor Sally Mapstone FRSE
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

StA/SLM/law/young031121

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Toby Young
General Secretary
The Free Speech Union
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Dear Mr Young,

Thank you for your letter of 21 October concerning pre-matriculation modules at the University of St Andrews.

The questions with which you take issue are a small part of a suite of materials which are intentionally provocative and designed to encourage students to consider complex issues in the round and to question their own assumptions, because that is what good academic institutions do.

Our students recognise the value of these courses, and the reading and self-reflection they require, not least because they campaigned for them, and co-designed them with the University. The modules help develop skills and awareness which students believe are valuable to life at university, and beyond. We have encountered very few complainers in the past 5 years, have never penalised a student for failing to undertake the modules, and have a process which allows students to request to opt-out of the modules on personal grounds if they wish. Very few do. Someone would have to take the questions in our modules deliberately and wholly out of context to argue that they in any way restrict free speech or are authoritarian.

We credit our students with recognising that the world they are inheriting is one in which gender based violence is endemic, racism and unconscious bias continue to trouble the most attentive organisations and institutions, and we are self-evidently wrestling with a climate crisis. For our students, the status quo isn't, and hasn't been, working for a considerable time, and the fact that there is a commitment to address these issues, and to try different approaches, is a positive reflection on this generation.

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Your views have, however, been noted, and I should add that we continuously review these courses to ensure they are fit for purpose. For the record, we do not accept that we are in breach of either the European Convention on Human Rights or the Equality Act (2010).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sally Mapstone, FRSE
Principal and Vice-Chancellor