



FSU
FREE SPEECH UNION

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Dr Anthony Freeling
University of Cambridge
The Old Schools
Trinity Lane
Cambridge CB2 1TN

28th October 2022

Dear Dr Freeling,

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.

This letter concerns the event hosted at Gonville & Caius College on 25 October 2022 featuring Dr Helen Joyce and Professor Partha Dasgupta. We are concerned that the Master of the College, Professor Pippa Rogerson, has failed to act in accordance with the law and with the University Statement on Freedom of Speech.

Dr Joyce holds and expresses beliefs that some people disagree with – she believes that biological sex is real, and that erasure of the difference between sex and gender endangers women's rights. Professor Arif Ahmed, a Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge and a Fellow of the College, invited Dr Joyce to discuss her views with Professor Dasgupta before an audience of College members.

On 19 October the Master and Senior Tutor, claiming to be acting in a personal capacity but using official and reserved mailing lists as well as their Cambridge University email addresses, emailed the students of the College to register their distaste at Dr Joyce's views. The email read:

Freedom of expression is a fundamental principle which we wholeheartedly support. Individuals should be able to speak freely, within the law. Views should then be challenged by debate, key in academic freedom. This is the case no matter the subject or topic.

However, on some issues which affect our community we cannot stay neutral. The event featuring Helen Joyce is not a College event, although it is taking place at Caius. We do not condone or endorse views that Helen Joyce has expressed on transgender people, which we consider offensive, insulting and hateful to members of our community who live and work here.

Caius should be a place for the highest quality of research to be produced and discussed, rather than polemics.

The Master holds high office in the University. She is not only a head of house, but also a member of the University Council and, at the time of writing, Deputy Chair of the Committee of Colleges. It is therefore particularly important that Professor Rogerson should uphold the values embodied in the [University Statement on Freedom of Speech](#). We believe she has failed to do so.

The Statement reads:

The University fosters an environment in which all of its staff and students can participate fully in University life, and feel able to question and test received wisdom, and to express new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of intolerance or discrimination. In exercising their right to freedom of expression, the University expects its staff, students and visitors to be tolerant of the differing opinions of others, in line with the University's core value of freedom of expression. ...

An active speaker programme is fundamental to the academic and other activities of the University and staff and students are encouraged to invite a wide range of speakers and to engage critically but courteously with them.

The mischaracterisation of Dr Joyce's views as "offensive, insulting and hateful" – she is a former Britain editor of the *Economist* and her recent book, *Trans*, was named as one of the books of the year by the *Times* – was intolerant and discourteous. The Master's response to the proposed event fell far below what the Statement demands, and below what any reasonable person would expect of a senior officer of the University.

The Master and Senior Tutor must have been aware that by mischaracterising Dr Joyce's views in this way and declaring that they would not themselves be attending the event they would discourage others from engaging "courteously" with her – there was nothing "courteous" about *their* engagement, after all. In addition, it would discourage other Fellows from inviting speakers who, like Dr Joyce, believe in the reality of biological sex. Indeed, they must bear some responsibility for the intolerant and discourteous way in which Dr Joyce was received at the College, with her talk being noisily disrupted by protestors outside, rendering her words inaudible at times. Other members of Caius who are contemplating inviting gender-critical speakers might reasonably decide not to risk it. External guests with contentious views are unlikely to accept invitations to speak at the College if they believe there is a risk they will be denounced and defamed by a senior leader of the University. It would be foolhardy even to invite someone to undergo such humiliation.

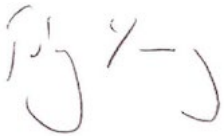
In short, contrary to the University Statement on Freedom of Speech, Professor Rogerson's email served to create a hostile environment at Caius for those who, entirely lawfully, believe that biological sex is binary and immutable. Indeed, the Employment Appeals Tribunal recently determined that this is a legitimate belief, deserving of the protections provided to a wide range of philosophical beliefs by the Equality Act 2010. This was a grave mistake.

By virtue of Professor Rogerson's senior position in the University, she also owes duties under section 43 of the Education (No 2) Act 1986. That provision obliges every individual and body of persons concerned in the government of a university to take reasonably practicable steps to secure freedom of speech within the law at that university. Such steps have been carefully set out in the Statement on Freedom of Speech and were disregarded by Professor Rogerson. It is quite clear that she did not take all steps that she reasonably could to facilitate the speaking event – on the contrary, she ostensibly sought to undermine it.

The University's Statement on Freedom of Speech was a considerable achievement. It demonstrated Cambridge's willingness to lead on an important and difficult issue that affects the entire higher education sector. This achievement will be empty if, through inaction, the Statement is allowed to become a dead letter.

We therefore invite you, as the person with the ultimate responsibility for upholding the Statement, to issue a suitable response to the recent events at Caius, which asserts the commitment of the University and its senior leaders, to freedom of speech and academic freedom. Fellows of all colleges thinking of inviting speakers with contentious views, and those speakers, need some assurance that speakers will not be denounced and defamed by senior leaders of the University if they accept an invitation.

Yours sincerely,

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

Toby Young
General Secretary
The Free Speech Union
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Cc: The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education
The Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP, Minister for Equalities
Lord Wharton, Chair, Office for Students
Ms Susan Lapworth, CEO, Office for Students
Mr Daniel El Gamry, Special Advisor, Ms Badenoch