

'Cancelled' lecturer backs free speech law



TARGET: Dr Thin said open-minded discussion was essential for students

AN ACADEMIC at the centre of a freedom of speech row has welcomed plans for a new law to protect it on university campuses.

Dr Neil Thin, 60, a senior lecturer in social anthropology who has become the latest target for woke students, is being investigated after being branded racist and 'problematic' for criticising the University of Edinburgh's move to rename a tower honouring philosopher David Hume over his links to slavery.

Two years ago, he accused an anti-racism event called Resisting Whiteness of segregation because it had an area only for ethnic minorities.

Last night, he said the planned Higher Education (Freedom of Speech Bill), which was announced

By **Patricia Kane**

in the Queen's Speech and would see universities in England face fines for failing to protect free speech, was a positive step.

It is intended to combat so-called 'no-platforming' on campuses, prevent staff from being penalised for expressing controversial opinions and allow visiting speakers, academics or students to seek compensation if they suffer loss from a breach of free-speech obligations.

'We need to protect people's right to air diverse, reasonable viewpoints and protect people from malicious attacks,' said Dr Thin, whose case prompted claims that

the university was 'acting like Communist dictator Chairman Mao'.

He said the most important challenge was 'to persuade our student bodies and academic staff that open-minded discussion, moral curiosity and airing of diverse political viewpoints are crucially important to academic life and if we lose those values we lose the value of universities'.

In an open letter to colleagues, Dr Thin said he had been called racist, a transphobe, bigot and misogynist, adding: 'What has changed, dramatically, is the tendency for students with certain kinds of political views to seek to impose them on everyone else, and to try to censor anyone who questions them by

claiming they are vulnerable and easily "triggered", and need to be shielded from viewpoint diversity in "safe spaces".'

He said the university 'should not have launched an investigation. It should have been obvious that I had said nothing reprehensible'.

The father-of-three said the effect of the investigation had been 'catastrophic on me and my family', but he had been 'heartened by hundreds of emails offering overwhelming moral support' from academics, students and the public.

A university spokesperson said: 'We have a responsibility to take all complaints seriously and investigate them. We will not prejudge the outcome of this investigation.'

Facing the axe ... by order of the university gender police

Law student could be expelled – for saying 'women have vaginas'

A SCOTS law student could be expelled from university after saying women have vaginas and are not as physically strong as men.

Lisa Keogh, 29, is fighting disciplinary action brought against her by Abertay University in Dundee, after her comments were deemed to be 'discriminatory'.

In the latest example of a free speech crisis engulfing Britain's universities, Ms Keogh was reported by younger classmates after she said women were born with female genitals.

The former mechanic also stated that it was 'a fact' there was a difference in the physical strength between men and women.

She objected to a fellow student saying that 'all men are rapists' – and expressed her concern that people who had been born male but transitioned to become female had an unfair advantage in competitive sports.

In response, she was branded a 'typical cis white girl' by fellow students, a derogatory comment which implies she is too privileged to comment on the experience of transgender or BAME people.

Now, as she prepares for her final law exam on Tuesday, Ms Keogh is the subject of an official probe by the university, which could result in her expulsion.

Last night, she said: 'It would break my heart if, after all this stress and work, my law degree

By **Georgia Edkins**

was taken away. I have worked so hard to get where I am today. If there's a way to fight it, I will. I'm hoping the university sees sense.'

Ms Keogh, who lives in Dundee, first trained as a car mechanic before going to university.

But over the course of around ten seminars and lectures on gender and the law, she found herself increasingly dismissed and even silenced for her opinions by her peers and lecturer. In particular,

'I have worked so hard to get where I am today'

her peers were infuriated by her claims women have vaginas, which she believes is a 'biological fact'.

She also made comments that men were stronger than women, drawing on her experiences as a mechanic to make her point.

Following her comments, she was dismissed by classmates as a 'typical cis white girl'.

When Ms Keogh raised concerns about transgender women taking part in mixed martial arts competitions – owing to them being 'genetically stronger' – she says she was muted by her lecturer during her online seminar. She later received

an official email from the university accusing her of transphobic and offensive comments.

She said: 'I knew it was a real email but I thought this just can't be real. This can't be real.'

The university's definition of misconduct includes 'using offensive language' or 'discriminating against gender reassignment'.

Ms Keogh was grilled by university officials about the accusations for 50 minutes on April 22, as part of a disciplinary interview.

A private hearing will be held on Tuesday to decide her fate – at the same time as she is sitting her final law degree exam on human rights.

A spokesman for the Free Speech Union said: 'Lisa is one of at least two dozen cases we've been dealing with at Scottish universities.'

'In most of these cases, the student or academic has been placed under investigation, or worse, simply for expressing a point of view that challenges campus orthodoxy – even if it's something the vast majority of Scottish people would agree with, as in Lisa's case.'

'Free speech is in even greater peril north of the Border than it is in England.'

Ms Keogh has also received the support of women's rights activist and Nationalist MP Joanna Cherry.

Ms Cherry, who is deputy chairman of a House of Lords commit-



STRESS: Lisa Keogh was dismissed by classmates as a 'typical cis white girl'

tee on human rights, has written to the university to establish their policy on free speech.

A spokesman for Abertay University said the institution did not comment on student disciplinary cases.

Now, for Ms Keogh, there is at

least a silver lining to her ordeal. She said: 'My passion to begin with was criminal and politics law, but campaigning and human rights law is now where I see myself going.'

'This has given me a spark to follow that.'