

Freedom of speech

(or freedom from harm...)

JIM DICKINSON, WONKHE SUs
UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND RESIDENTIAL FEBRUARY 2022



WONKHE
SU_s

No, college students aren't obsessed with free speech. Here's what they do worry about.

Two researchers spent five years visiting 10 vastly different campuses. Their sobering conclusion: The field of higher education is going to need some big changes.

By Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner Updated February 17, 2022, 10:45 a.m.

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College concerns

- ~~Free speech issues~~
- ~~Political correctness~~
- ~~Cancelling~~
- Mental health challenges esp anxiety
- Feelings that they don't belong
- Alienation from peers, the academic agenda, and the ethos of their institution.

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Anxiety

- Anxiety as a fear response to a perceived threat. Students become anxious about education when they view it or the environment as a threat to them.
 - That may be stimulated by social and cultural experiences, which, for instance, leave students feeling marginalised, ostracised or humiliated.
 - Alternatively, it may arise from a fear of failure or the perceived consequences of failure.
- The Diversity paradox
 - Deeper acceptance of and commitment to diversity than ever before.
 - But spending less time with people “not like them” than ever before

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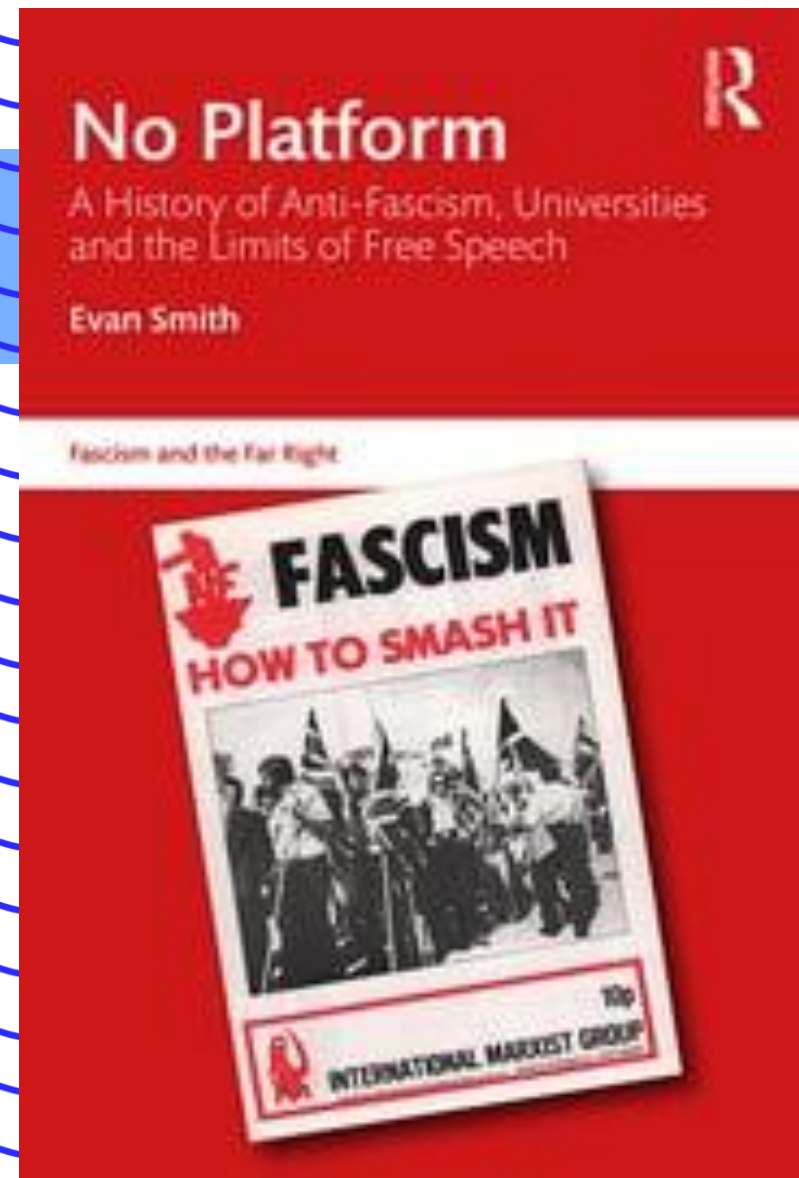
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Where to begin?

- Late 1920s, NUS and AUT work on future of universities
- In the context of Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia and amid propaganda for pacifism, widespread concern about student activism on both sides.
- A joint NUS/AUT position was that SUs should not take a position **but** that their clubs should for maximum debate, and AUT would defend any student's right to take part in that kind of debate.
- Students' unions as position takers or clearing houses.
- Debate about "platforms"...



Free speech: 70s and 80s

- NUS “No Platform” policy for fascists in late 70s
- Some SUs widen and seek to include Conservative and Jewish groups
- Early 80s: Lots of local incidents- ie John Carlisle MP, Tory apologist for apartheid visited various campuses prompting NUS President Phil Woolas to claim that he and others were deliberately trying to “provoke incidents”
- Demonstrations and boycotts resulted in negative headlines for NUS and students’ unions and demands for action by the press

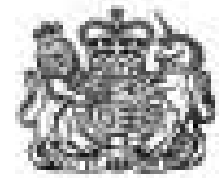


1985

- Shortly after a protest against Leon Brittan at the University of Manchester, a Green paper listed freedom of speech at British universities under the government's 'main concerns', stating:

All institutions, at all times have a responsibility to ensure that their affairs are conducted as befits a liberal institution. In particular, they have a responsibility to protect freedom of speech within the law, even for those with widely unpopular views: this is essential as part of a free society, for critical thought and the liberal education which it underpins.

- Said that if institutions took no action legislation would follow.
- Taxpayer's money should not be used “to fund unions that refuse a platform to speakers whose views are objectionable to some students although others wish to invite them”, or “to fund unions that prevent invited speakers from gaining a hearing, or that permit violence or the threat of violence to that end”.



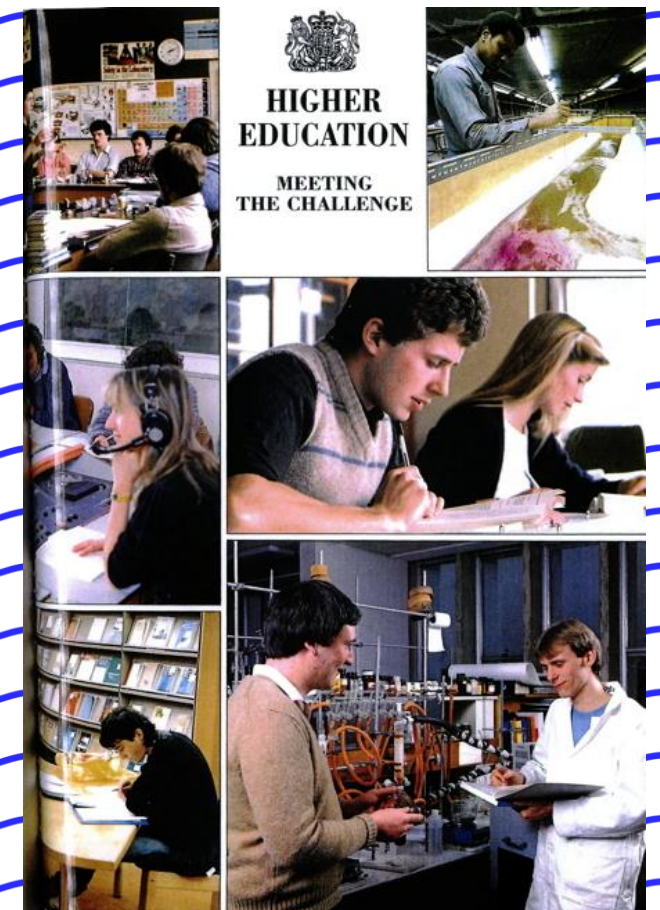
The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s

*(Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education and Science,
the Secretary of State for Higher Education,
and the Secretary of State for the Environment, in accordance with the
Constitution of the United Kingdom)*

LONDON

HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

(2000 1000)



Boxing Day 2009

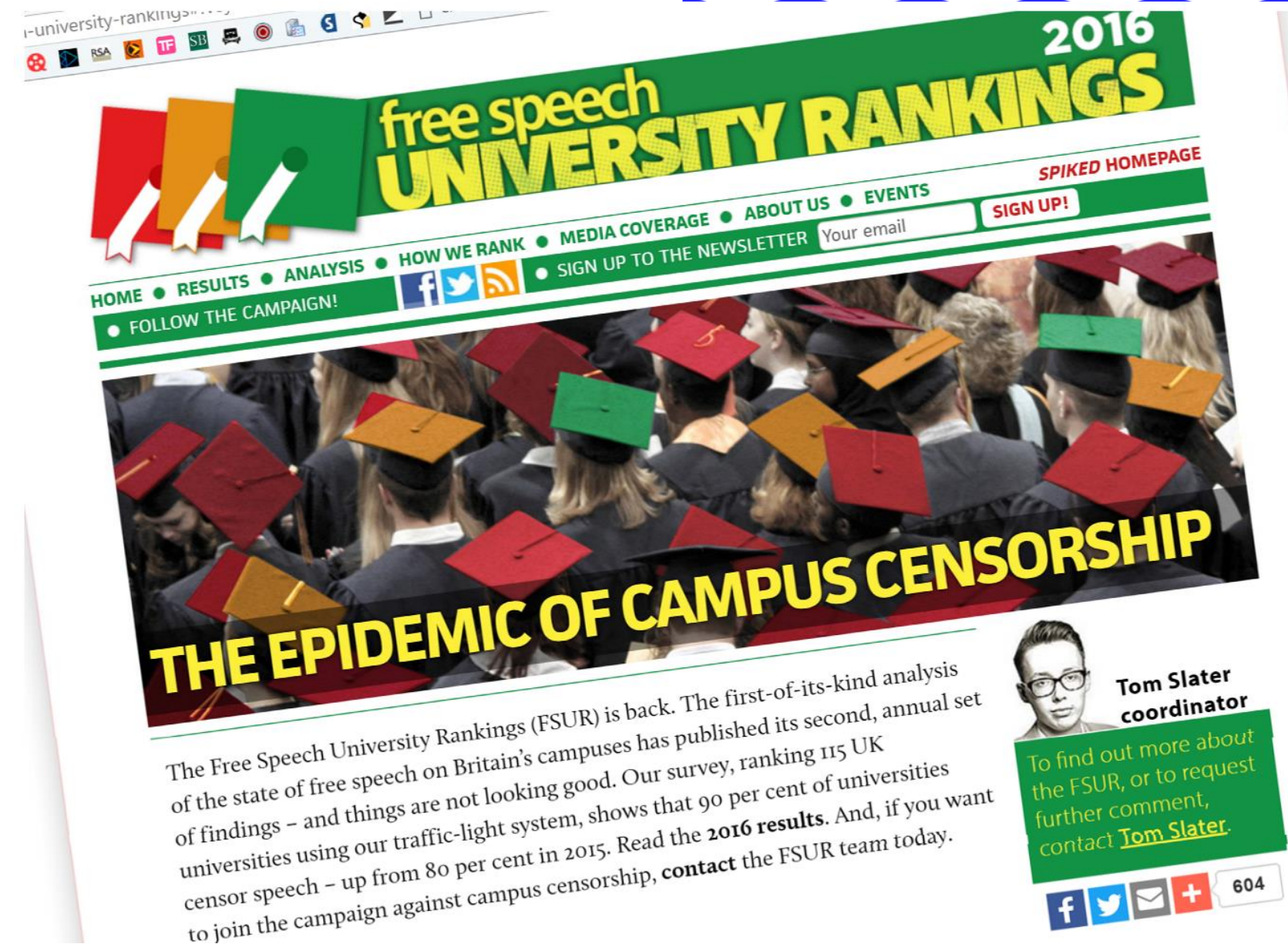


Prevent

- Israel – Palestine a long running intractable
- Student groups on both sides of the conflict
- Manifested in political debate around platforms
- Converts into a risk assessment approach (PVE and antisemitism)
- Eventually adopted into law and adaption to EA 1986

Spiked!

- Libertarian “Living Marxism” sect...
- Culture wars, snowflakes
- Frank Furedi
- Claire Fox
- Brendan O Neill
- Munira Mirza



Today



Today

- Snowflakes
- Cancel culture
- Trigger Warnings
- No Platform
- Trans “debate”
- Greer, Tatchell, Rudd
- Adopted by Brexiteers and “the right”
- Wider society now having the debate?
- Different attitudes to freedom of speech?



Government looks to strengthen free speech on campus after Oxford's no-platforming of Amber Rudd

Education Secretary believed to be looking at increasing powers of university regulator

By **Harry Yorke**, POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT
6 March 2020 • 9:00pm

Related Topics
Gavin Williamson, Jacob Rees-Mogg,
Amber Rudd

Twitter Facebook WhatsApp Email 360



Amber Rudd's planned speech at Oxford was cancelled just 30 minutes before it was due to begin | CREDIT: Rex

Oxford University has been rebuked by the Education Secretary over the "unacceptable" no-platforming of Amber Rudd, with the Government on Friday threatening intervention to protect free speech on campuses.

Gavin Williamson is believed to be looking at increasing the powers of the university regulator after a speech by former Home Secretary Ms Rudd was blocked by a student society on Thursday.

[More stories](#)

Politics

Tom Slater

Beware the university campus
microaggression monitors

15 January 2020, 8:09am

13 J
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Iain Mansfield @IGMansfield · 20h

Sho
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Univ

At times, some university authorities have actively enabled policies that encroach upon free speech. Codes or statements have been introduced that would limit free speech, and some students' unions have been granted inappropriate levels of control over which speakers can visit and how student

The HEP should not encourage students to inform upon other students for lawful free speech, nor should they pay, or otherwise reward, students for doing so.

resort to criminal threats or violence. Even where lip service is paid to free speech, too often leaders have not done enough to defend those faced with 'cancellation', to prevent the abuse and personal harassment of those with heterodox views and to actively build a culture in which free speech is openly valued and celebrated.

7

2

6

1

Daily Mail

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 2021

www.dailymail.co.uk

Daily newspaper of the year 80p

PROOF COVID CURBS JUST DON'T ADD UP

97% of over-50s are now 'protected'

As cases rise, admissions to hospital FALL

Less than 1% of all deaths due to Covid

DOSSIER BORIS CANNOT IGNORE

SEE PAGES 6-9

After they claim portrait 'represents colonial history'...

By Josh White, Daniel Martin and Elliot Mulligan

OXFORD students sparked anger last night after voting to remove a portrait of the Queen from their common room because she 'represents recent colonial history'.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson condemned the move by graduate members of Magdalen College as



'absurd', while the university's Chancellor Lord Patten called it 'offensive and obnoxiously ignorant'.

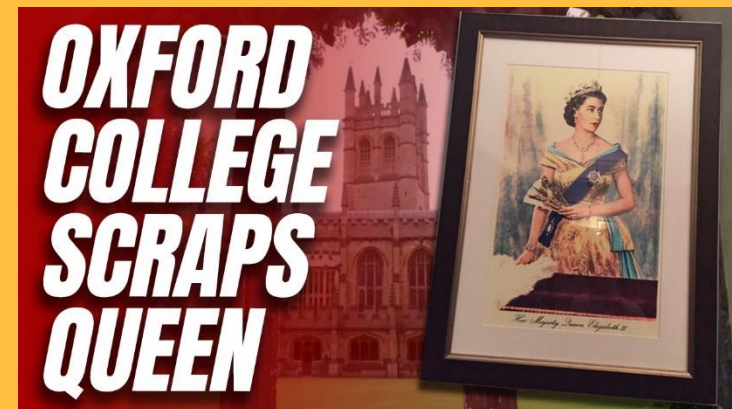
The row comes amid growing concern at the rise of intolerance and 'cancel culture' at British universities.

The decision to take down the photographic print of the monarch came after a debate by a committee of students from Magdalen's Middle Common Room.

One opponent of the proposal suggested it amounted to 'cancelling the Queen and

Turn to Page 4

OUTRAGE AS OXFORD STUDENTS VOTE TO AXE QUEEN





Gavin Williamson @GavinWilliamson · 13h

...

Oxford University students removing a picture of the Queen is simply absurd. She is the Head of State and a symbol of what is best about the UK. During her long reign she has worked tirelessly to promote British values of tolerance, inclusivity & respect around the world

1.7K

1.3K

4.2K

NEWS › [EDUCATION](#)

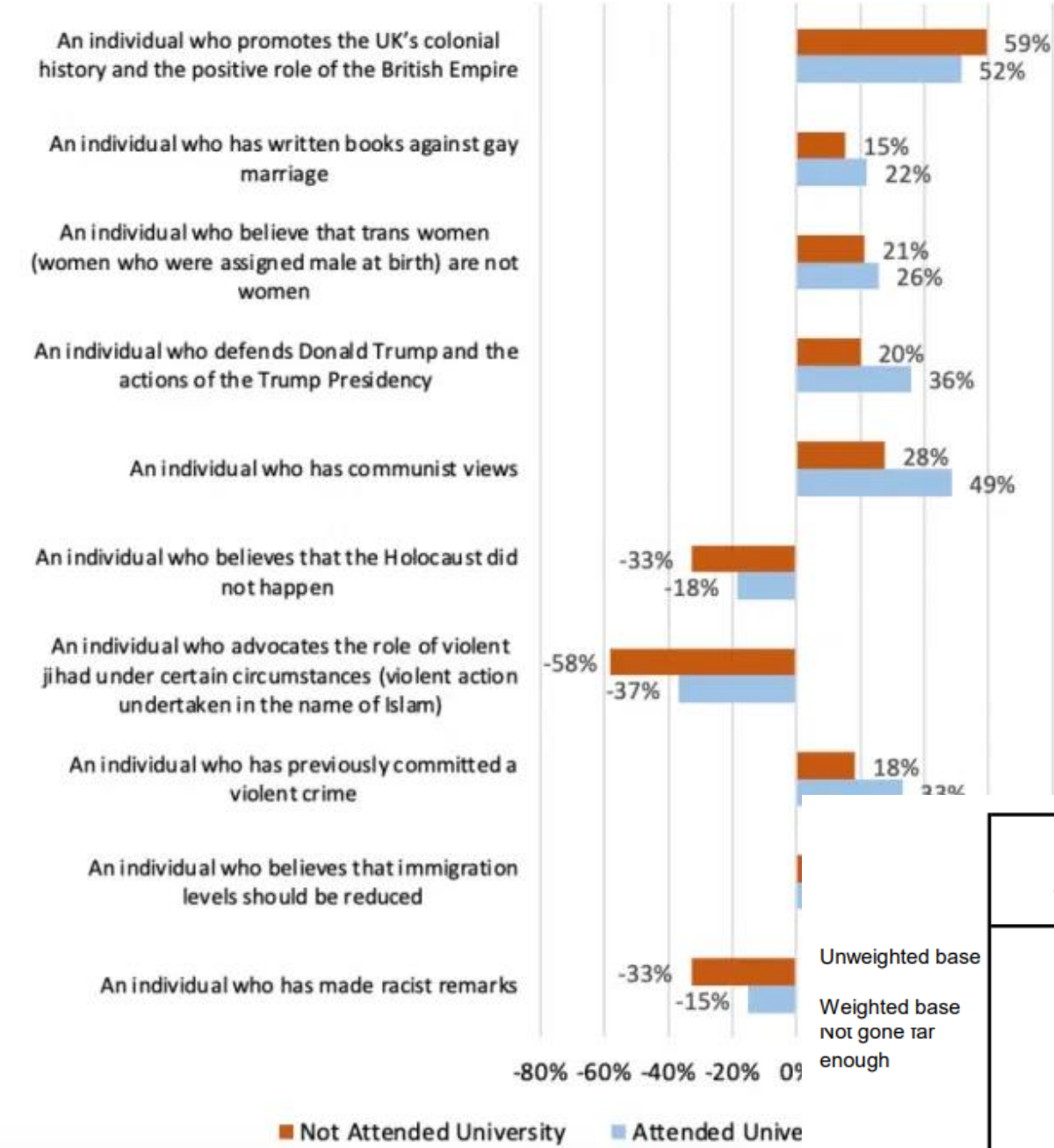
Universities ‘must be open to free speech’, says head of UCL

Dr Michael Spence said speakers should not be cancelled because of protests and ‘it’s our job to make students uncomfortable’

[VIEW COMMENTS](#)



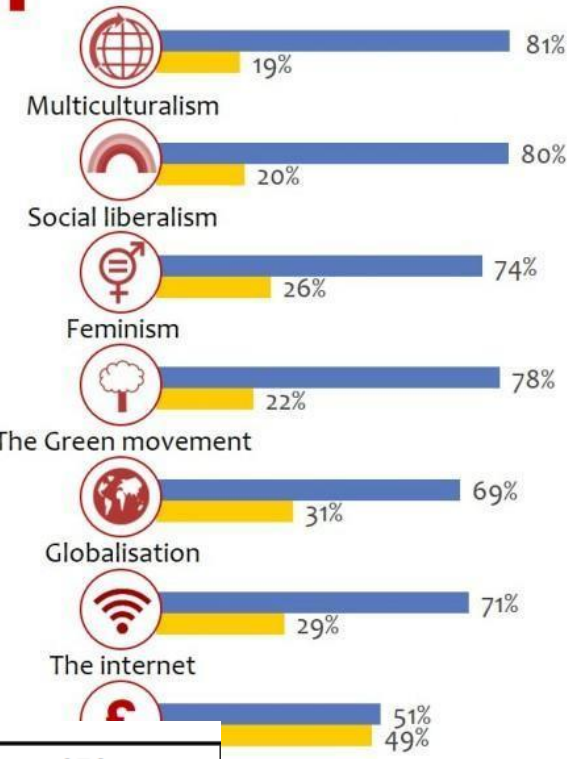
Chart 7: Who should be allowed to speak on university campuses – by graduate status



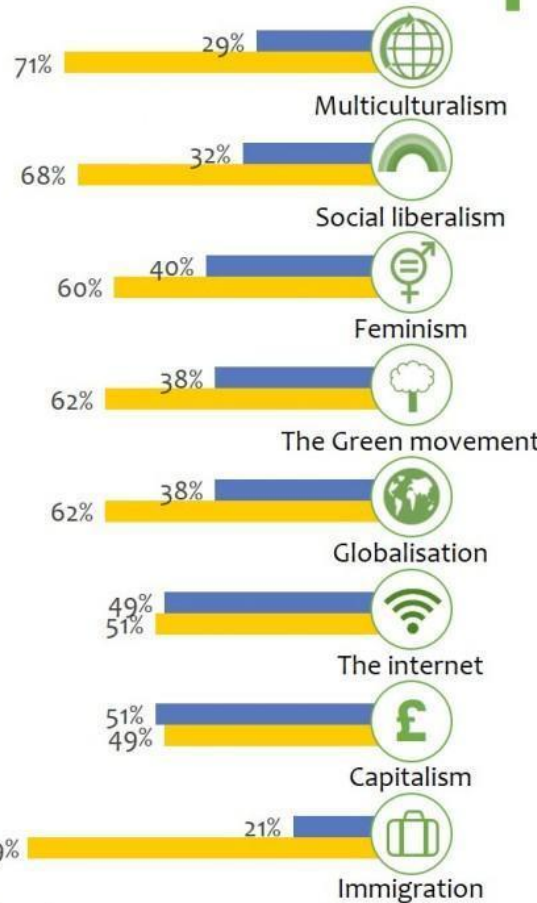
	Gender		Age							SEG			
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	
Total													
2069	1028	1039	220	350	338	371	316	474	532	583	440	512	
2069	1007	1060	240	358	340	369	298	464	556	556	451	504	
210	89	120	44	48	29	30	21	38	54	63	46	48	
10%	9%	11%	19%	13%	9%	8%	7%	8%	10%	11%	10%	10%	
441	205	235	79	91	101	64	45	61	146	106	82	108	
21%	20%	22%	33%	25%	30%	17%	15%	13%	26%	19%	18%	21%	
1245	647	598	81	167	184	242	222	349	321	344	281	297	
60%	64%	56%	34%	47%	54%	66%	74%	75%	58%	62%	62%	59%	
172	65	107	35	53	25	33	11	15	36	43	42	51	
8%	6%	10%	15%	15%	7%	9%	4%	3%	6%	8%	9%	10%	

Do you think of each of the following as being a force for good, a force for ill, or a mixed-blessing?

How did the people who thought the following were a **force for ill** vote?



How did the people who thought the following were a **force for good** vote?



Leave Remain

Lord Ashcroft Polls
@lordashcroft

Which party do you think is most likely to agree?		WHO BACKS THESE 'WOKE' IDEAS?	Do YOU support or oppose these ideas?	
Labour	Conservative		Support	Oppose
56%	10%	Statues of historical figures being taken down	18%	59%
43%	9%	Men being allowed to redefine themselves as women and access women-only facilities	19%	48%
31%	12%	Breastfeeding being renamed 'chestfeeding'	5%	68%
36%	8%	Children being allowed to use puberty blockers and hormone therapy to change their gender	13%	61%
52%	10%	The idea that Britain is a systemically or institutionally racist country	29%	39%
29%	24%	People face losing their jobs for writing or liking politically incorrect posts on social media	21%	40%
41%	14%	Environmental protest groups causing damage to property & disrupting city centres		
52%	6%	Negative attitudes towards the Royal Family		
47%	13%	Shorter sentences for criminals		
		'Don't knows' and 'I don't knows'		

Net support amongst age groups for "wokery"	18-34	35-54	55+
Statues of historical figures being taken down	29%	3%	-32%
Men being allowed to redefine themselves as women and access women-only facilities	31%	1%	-32%
Breastfeeding being renamed 'chestfeeding'	42%	-3%	-39%
Children being allowed to take puberty blockers and have hormone therapy to change gender	43%	-6%	-37%
The idea that Britain is a systemically or institutionally racist country	21%	-4%	-24%
People facing disciplinary action or losing their jobs for writing or liking politically incorrect posts on social media	7%	-1%	-5%
Environmental protest groups causing damage to property & disrupting city centres	24%	-4%	-29%
Negative attitudes towards the Royal Family	24%	-5%	-28%
Shorter sentences for criminals	27%	-2%	-25%

Time and time again we hear of instances where policies and practices have been adopted which have a chilling effect on free speech and academic freedom, such as systems that allow lecturers or students to be anonymously reported for unwittingly causing offence, or charging student societies security costs to invite mainstream speakers; where students or staff have been silenced or threatened with a loss of privileges or even dismissal for airing views or opinions that others find distasteful or provocative.

Under threat...

- Curriculum and institutional decolonisation
- Anti racism campaigns esp BLM
- Bystander initiatives
- Anonymous harassment reporting

Feb 2021 Policy Paper

- Threads: Classic libertarians, social conservatism, feminism
- 15,000 words of analysis and proposals
- Based largely around 2 x Policy Exchange reports from 2019 and 2020
- “Students have been expelled from their courses, academics fired and others who have been forced to live under the threat of violence”

Government set to fine universities who 'cancel' people due to their views as ministers 'defend British history and culture'

- Education Secretary Gavin Williamson is set to unveil the 'free speech champion'
- They will have the power to defend students and academics at college campuses
- Institutions trying to cancel people due to their views will be penalised with fines
- Ministers also told heritage groups not to use public funds for political purposes


Department
for Education

**Higher education:
free speech and
academic freedom**

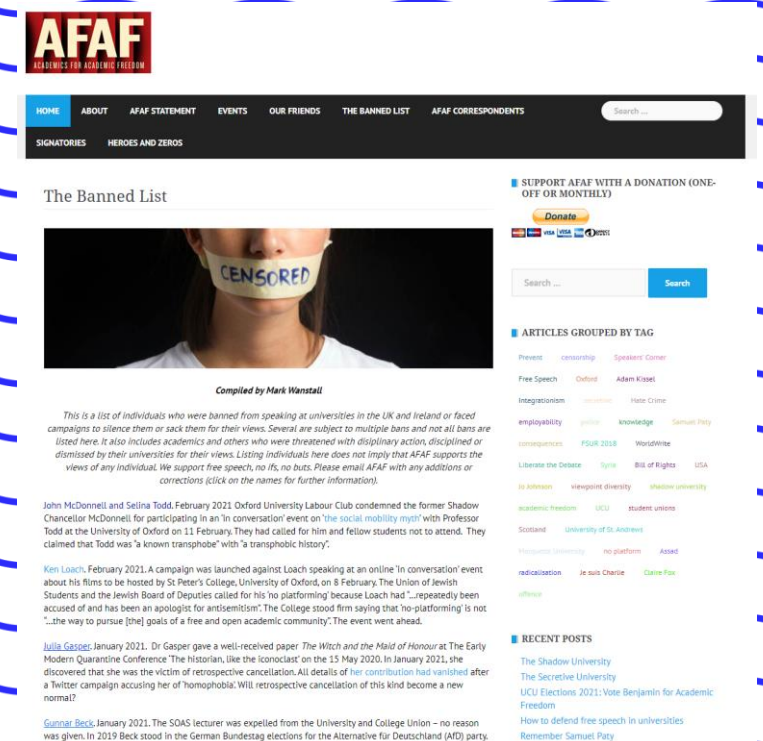
February 2021

CP 394

Contested scale?

- Number of events where a speaker has been banned?
- Expelled students (2 “cases” – Sheffield and Nottingham)
- “Sacked” staff?

Though there are noble exceptions, often a blind eye has been turned to the creeping culture of censorship. A culture has been allowed to develop in which it is seen as acceptable, even virtuous, for an academic to sign an open letter that calls for another to be dismissed or defunded.



DfE proposals

- Appointment of a freedom of speech/academic freedom champion with ombuds powers
- Strengthened free speech duty (actively promote)
- SUs within ambit of Education Act 1986
- Legal tort

Free speech bill

- Is it dead in this session?
- Will culture wars fade?
- See saw between EDI issues and free speech
- Duty of care of universities and unions re their members
- Handling complaints from students about students
- Pressure on EDI work (chilling effect)



Cases

- Sussex (Stock)
- Bristol (Miller)
- Edinburgh (Thin)
- Abertay (Keogh)
- Bristol (Ocasio-Cortez)
 - Duty of care? Coverage over conduct?

Broader debates

- Safety and discomfort muddles
- The “trans debate” as utterly intractable
- The students’ association as a platform or position taker
- EDI complaints / Free speech complaints see-saw
- Conduct and views conflation
- Generational issues and values transmission
- Push to have authority handle complaints re other students
- Complaints, EDI and process complexity
- Schools guidance...