

# Alumni for FREE SPEECH

3.11.22

## Gonville & Caius and its free speech problems

We note the statement attached below, which was sent on 1 November to "Caians" by the Master of the College.

We are pleased that the content and tone of this further statement are more careful and conciliatory than the original email from the Master and Senior Tutor that sparked the current problems.

Nonetheless, we do not think the statement even attempts to engage with the problematic issues raised by the original email, and we regard this statement as well below the standards one would hope the College would set itself. In particular, the further statement:

- Skates over what the Master and Senior Tutor said in the first email, when they described Helen Joyce's views as (inter alia) "*hateful to members of our community*" and "*polemics*". In the case of the Master at least, this was wholly inappropriate language for the leader of the College.
- Ignores the widely publicised concerns that:
  - o the first email may have caused the College to breach its Public Sector Equality Duty;<sup>1</sup>
  - o the Master and Senior Tutor did not comply with the College's [Statement on Freedom of Speech](#), which includes a requirement that it expects its staff to be "*tolerant of the differing opinions of others, in line with the College's commitment to freedom of speech, thought and expression*" and to "*engage with intellectual and ideological challenges in a constructive ... and peaceful way, even if they find the viewpoints expressed to be disagreeable...*"; and
  - o in the case of the Master at least, failed to act with the dispassion that her office requires: ie, to stay above the fray and act as a calming, not a divisive, figure.

There is nothing in this further statement that addresses any of these points. The public (including alumni) are extremely concerned about the failures at our universities to protect free speech appropriately, as exemplified by recent events at Caius. They expect the concerns raised to be addressed directly, not avoided.

Good governance requires the College to establish the facts and act appropriately in respect of any failures to comply with its (or its officers') obligations.

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<sup>1</sup> We attach a note on the Equality Act, the Public Sector Equality Duty and the impact of the landmark *Forstater* case.

Public relations driven attempts to manage or limit the damage done to universities by this sort of behaviour is no substitute for: proper engagement with the serious issues involved, acceptance of responsibility for errors of judgment which can involve potential breaches of equalities and free speech laws binding on universities and taking the action required to avoid further missteps.

We therefore call for:

- A review of recent events and recognition that there have been failings to achieve the standards Caius would want to achieve as regards free speech protection.
- Commitment to work to improve free speech protection in the College.
- The appointment of a free speech officer to be the College's internal advocate for free speech protection. A lack of such a person is perhaps one of the reasons why recent issues occurred as they did. This officer should be appropriately qualified and not subject to significant conflicts of interest. They will be appropriately empowered.
- A retraction of the initial statement and an apology for it.

#### **Alumni For free Speech**

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# Gonville & Caius

Dear Caians,

My colleagues and I have received correspondence from Caians (alumni, students, staff and Fellows) in recent days following publicity surrounding the Helen Joyce event which took place last week.

On this particular subject, I wish to share with you some background.

Some Caians raised concerns about the event, *Criticising gender-identity ideology: what happens when speech is silenced*, and did not want it to take place.

We did not consider a cancellation. Free speech is fundamental and disagreeing is part of academia. Students are encouraged to engage in

challenging discussions about difficult topics at university and at Caius. The event took place on Tuesday 25 October with practical assistance from the College to ensure everyone's security.

I agree that there are difficult and complex discussions to have around bodily autonomy and parental relationships with children, with the use of puberty blockers on children, on characterisation of participants in sport, on gendered violence, and the intersection between sex-based rights and protected characteristics. As well as on protected spaces for women.

I have read a great deal around this area, including Helen Joyce's book and related media, and listened to podcasts. Having given the matter a lot of thought I disagree with her views, the way she presents them and the way in which she responds to those who disagree with her.

This opinion was shared by Dr Andrew Spencer, the Senior Tutor. We expressed our personal opinions – as is our right. Individuals are free to choose to attend events or not.

The College is home to a diverse community; for some it is their only home. We have to consider everyone. There are around 11,000 Caians – 1,100 students, staff and Fellows and approximately 10,000 alumni. Each has a valued opinion and a right to express it. That will never change. Neither will our commitment to free speech.

I hope it is possible for reasonable people to disagree and that freedom of expression is available to everyone, including me.

Best wishes,

Pippa

Professor Pippa Rogerson, Master