

Recommended free speech candidates in Oxford Chancellorship election

Summary

- Oxford alumni can vote in the upcoming election for the Chancellorship of Oxford University to support candidates who stand for the protection of free speech, and thus demonstrate that free speech matters to alumni.
- Alumni For Free Speech (“**AFFS**”) has written to the then-known candidates requesting information about their position on free speech.
- Based on AFFS’ review and analysis of candidates’ responses, the **candidate among the apparent frontrunners** for the Chancellorship who **AFFS and The Free Speech Union (“FSU”)** **jointly recommend** to those who care about free speech is **William (Lord) Hague**.
- **Other candidates who appear to be strong free speech supporters** and who appear to be the most suitable to support are identified below. If alumni vote for any of these other candidates, we also recommend that they ensure that their **transferable vote goes to William Hague**.
- *Our recommendations are based solely on factors relating to free speech protection. We are politically neutral as regards the candidates.*

Oxford alumni can vote in the upcoming election for the Chancellorship of Oxford University to support candidates who stand for the protection of free speech, and thus demonstrate that free speech matters to alumni.

AFFS has written to the then-known candidates requesting information about their position on free speech. AFFS’ letter [can be found here](#).

All candidates were asked the same questions. These are set in the Appendix below (with some additional comments) and [can also be found here](#). Where, in the case of certain candidates, circumstances are known which indicate that they may have acted contrary to the best interests of free speech protection, additional questions seeking their comments about such concerns were also asked.

AFFS has shared its questions and the answers it received, and its review of those answers below, with other organisations committed to free speech at universities.

This document sets out the **joint recommendations of AFFS and the Free Speech Union** (“FSU”), based on the candidates’ responses, to those Oxford graduates thinking voting in the Chancellorship election and for whom candidates’ commitment to free speech and academic freedom is an important consideration.

Our recommendations are based solely on factors relating to free speech protection. We are politically neutral as regards the candidates. Other factors will, of course, matter to individual voters. It is not for us to give comments or recommendations regarding wider considerations, and we do not do so.

Recommended candidates based on their support for free speech

The **candidate among the apparent frontrunners** for the Chancellorship who we recommend to those who care about free speech is **William (Lord) Hague**.

Other candidates who appear to be strong free speech supporters and who (out of a strong-looking field from this point of view) appear to be the most suitable to support are (in alphabetical order):

Revd Matthew Firth

Dominic Grieve

Professor Simon Kay

If alumni vote for any of these candidates, we also recommend that they ensure that their **transferable vote goes to William Hague**.

Some candidates have shown signs of not understanding the problem, or being unsupportive of (or hostile to) the effective protection of free speech at our universities. An example of this is opposing the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act (“HEFSA”), whether during its passage through Parliament or by supporting the new government’s attempt to prevent it from coming into effect. Another example is proposing things such as compulsory training regarding matters such as “unconscious bias” despite the obvious free speech objections to this (including that imposing such training on students or staff might well be unlawful under existing university free speech, equality and human rights law). We therefore recommend that alumni who care about free speech do not vote for these candidates.

Responses: comments on the candidates from a free speech perspective

The information below is based on AFFS’ review and analysis of candidates’ responses.

Most but not all of the candidates replied to AFFS’ questions. Some replied specifically to AFFS’ questions, and some with more general statements. Information on the replies and

candidates' positions regarding free speech is set out below, with links to their replies where given.

Where candidates preferred to submit more general statements, AFFS has given its thoughts on this, but it will in the end be for the reader to form their own views about the candidates' seriousness about protecting free speech and knowledge of the relevant issues, and as to: the extent to which statements addressed or failed to address the specific free speech issues which AFFS raised; and what should be made of candidates' failure or unpreparedness to address particular questions.

AFFS conducted some basic research in respect of the views and actions of some of the candidates as regards free speech, in particular where there is publicly available information which indicates that they have done things which may be inconsistent with a commitment to protect free speech (whether in the university setting or more generally). While, of course, AFFS has endeavoured to provide correct information, it cannot guarantee the accuracy or completeness of the information provided. Where particular matters raised are of importance to voters, we recommend that they take their own steps to investigate and verify them further in publicly accessible sources.

Based on their replies and any other relevant publicly available information it is aware of, AFFS scored candidates according to the following, admittedly fairly simple, "Free Speech Ratings": FS+2, FS+1, FS 0, FS-1, FS-2.

We provide a link below to the Wikipedia pages relating to each candidate (where found), to provide some basic information about them. AFFS and the FSU takes no responsibility for the completeness or accuracy of the information on Wikipedia.

Lady Elish Angiolini – FS-1

Although Lady Angiolini did not reply to our questions, she provided her own statement. While the shortness of this statement does not evidence engagement with the detail of AFFS' questions (which many other candidates took the time necessary to answer fully), it does mean that it can easily be quoted in full:

"Freedom of speech is a fundamental and precious element of any modern democratic society and must be supported in Universities. Speech can however be abused to cause real harm, for example, re Nazi propaganda and threats of physical assault. It is therefore a freedom that must be exercised responsibly."

While AFFS, of course, agrees that free speech rights should be exercised responsibly, as is reflected in English and ECHR case law, unless speech is unlawful (as, for instance, it might be in her first example, would be in her second), free speech is an absolute even if people dislike, are offended by or profoundly disagree with what is being said. In such cases, the speech objected to should be the subject of reasoned contrary argument and, where appropriate, ridicule. But it should not be suppressed, as Lady Angiolini's statement could be taken as envisaging. This, coupled with the fact that she has not provided any answers to AFFS' questions intended to clarify the extent

to which candidates properly understand the free speech issues and concerns which have emerged at universities over recent years and/or oppose aspects of free speech and academic freedom, might be significant causes for concern for those who care about the overriding importance of free speech.

Here is Wikipedia's page about this candidate: [Elish Angiolini - Wikipedia](#)

Ankur Shiv Bhandari – FS 0

Mr Bhandari did not reply to our questions. We therefore have to give him a default free speech rating of 0.

No Wikipedia profile is available for this candidate.

Major-General Alastair Bruce of Crionaich – FS 0

Major-General Bruce did not reply directly to our questions, but submitted a statement, [which you can read here](#).

Major-General Bruce stated his support for free speech in resounding terms. We have no doubt that he is sincere in this, and we enjoyed the rare opportunity to smile at a response.

That said, as with other candidates, the fact that he has not engaged with the detail of AFFS' questions and the complex free speech problems they refer to, requires us to deduct some points in our rating system.

Here is Wikipedia's page about this candidate: [Alastair Bruce of Crionaich - Wikipedia](#)

Margaret Casely-Hayford CBE – FS 0

Ms Casely-Hayford did not reply directly to our questions, but submitted a statement, which [you can read here](#).

Ms Casely-Hayford makes positive statements about free speech generally. AFFS accepts that she means what she says. AFFS is, however, concerned that she did not directly answer our important question about whether she thinks there is a free speech problem at UK universities. This gives the impression that either she is unaware of the high-profile cases which have given rise to free speech concerns at UK universities or that, although she is aware of the, she does not consider them to be problematic.

She approves of the suspension of the HEFSA. This was regarded with profound dismay by many academics (including multiple Nobel Prize winners) as well as those who were (and are) actively working on improving free speech protection at our universities. It is seen as an unconstitutional overriding of the will of Parliament (as expressed after extensive debate on the detailed provisions of HEFSA as it passed through Parliament) at the whim of a new minister for apparently politically tribal motives and without consulting Parliament. The decision is subject to a serious legal challenge.

As with Baroness Royall (see below), we are concerned that Ms Casely-Hayford does not appreciate the problems being caused for free speech under the cover of forms of EDI training and other enforcement. This arises because a vital distinction gets overlooked between the valid (and “legally mandated”) spreading of understanding of and compliance with the requirements of the Equality Act, and the wider use of EDI as cover by activists to enforce aspects of ideological agendas many of which are opposed by the majority of the UK population. The latter has no legal underpinnings, and, if universities enforce such agendas, they quickly act unlawfully under legislation which protects free speech and diversity of viewpoint, for instance through unlawful harassment of and discrimination against people with protected viewpoints under the Equality Act, as is now happening regularly, and expensively and embarrassingly. Universities enforcing contested ideological agendas is a free speech disaster, and they should be maintaining institutional neutrality about such matters.¹

AFFS asked specific questions about the impact of universities’ EDI agendas on free speech and academic freedom and the interaction of EDI and free speech in part to test the alertness of candidates to the problems being created and the depth of their knowledge about the legal framework. Ms Casely-Hayford chose not to answer these questions (for which, as with other candidates, she is “marked down”), and her general statement did not demonstrate appreciation of the problems or address these questions. Ms Casely-Hayford’s response, while perfectly reasonable within its quite narrow focus, did not convince that she sees a systemic problem as those who are focused on protecting free speech tend to.

Here is Wikipedia’s page about this candidate: [Margaret Casely-Hayford - Wikipedia](#)

Reverend Matthew Firth – FS+2

Rev. Firth answered our questions, and [you can see them here](#).

His replies are some of the fullest we have seen. They are extremely positive about free speech. They have the ring of sincerity about them and are consistent with his having been an activist for free speech.

He is a committed member of the Free Speech Union and does not accept agree with the suspension of HEFSA. The Rev. Firth does not believe in the enforcement of “EDI training” promoting contested agendas, calling it “totally inappropriate”.

No Wikipedia profile is available for this candidate.

¹ AFFS’ associated project, Best Free Speech Practice (“BFSP”) has issued two statements: *Free speech protection at English universities: The law and requirements in practice* and *EDI and similar courses, training and tests: Free speech requirements and risks for English universities*, which explain the relevant issues, including cases such as *Phoenix V The Open University*, in detail. These [can be found here](#).

Dominic Grieve KC, PC – FS +2

Mr Grieve replied to our questions, and [you can see his reply here](#). (This was not received in time for the first version of this statement.) Mr Grieve's answers are thoughtful, detailed and very positive about free speech. We are confident that they are sincere. We have some minor quibbles with some of the answers, but the overall picture is of unwavering and principled support for free speech.

Here is the Wikipedia page for this candidate: [Dominic Grieve - Wikipedia](#)

Lord Hague – FS+2

Lord Hague submitted his own comprehensive statement, addressing AFFS' questions. [You can see this here](#).

Lord Hague's answers are full, thoughtful and very positive about free speech in every way that those who care about free speech could possibly hope to see, while at the same time being reasoned and balanced. They also seem sincere. It is hard to say any more.

Here is the Wikipedia page for this candidate: [William Hague - Wikipedia](#)

Professor Simon Kay – FS+1

Professor Kay replied to our questions, and [you can see his reply here](#).

Professor Kay gave generally very full, sincere and positive replies in support of free speech. His uncertainty about the benefits of an independent, non-conflicted officer to protect free speech is a mildly concern, but he is a convincing candidate as far as free speech is concerned.

Here is the Wikipedia page for this candidate: [Simon Kay - Wikipedia](#)

Lord Mandelson – FS-1

Lord Mandelson did not reply to our questions.

It appears that Lord Mandelson voted against some parts of the HEFSA during its passage through the House of Lords, especially clause 4 (the Statutory Tort). Since clause 4 was (and is) a key enhancement of free speech protection at universities, this is an obvious free speech negative. When AFFS sent its questions to candidates its covering letter made clear that AFFS would *“take a failure to reply to this request as an indication that a candidate is, at best, indifferent to the need to protect free speech and academic freedom and might, at worst, be 3 positively hostile to those, including AFFS, who are campaigning for their protection at UK universities and other Higher Education Providers”*. As Lord Mandelson did not avail himself of the opportunity to explain his reasons for opposing this key element of HEFSA, we have to treat his having voted against it as a mark against him.

Here is the Wikipedia page for this candidate: [Peter Mandelson - Wikipedia](#)

Onyeka Nwelue – [FS +1](#)

Mr Nwelue gave a remarkably full and positive set of answers, from the point of view of those who care about free speech protection, [which you can see here](#).

Here is the Wikipedia page for this candidate: [Onyeka Nwelue - Wikipedia](#)

Maxim Parr-Reid – [FS+1](#)

Mr Parr-Reid replied to our questions: [you can see his reply here](#).

Mr Parr-Reid's replies are strongly in favour of free speech, and fairly convincing. We do have some concerns about one or two of his answers, in particular as regards whether the promotion and enforcement of EDI programmes and policies can give rise to any free speech issues.

We note that Mr Parr-Reid tweeted (on 4 October): "I will (respectfully) challenge attempts to curb freedom of speech so long as the free speech does not constitute hate speech. I am not a free speech absolutist like certain others, but we should encourage (sometimes forceful) debate which should be part and parcel of a university education." This is concerning, as, unless the relevant speech is unlawful (including unlawful hate speech), someone who really believes in the overriding importance of free speech would be defending it: anyone can accuse anyone they disagree with of "hate speech", a subjective concept in this context, and the only viable option is to allow (and defend) that speech, if lawful. The alternative is to allow effective censorship by activists.

No Wikipedia profile is available for this candidate.

Baroness Royall – [FS-2](#)

Baroness Royall did not reply to our questions, but submitted a statement, which [you can see here](#).

Her statement contains some strongly positive generalities about free speech, its importance and work she has done at Oxford in support of good debate, which AFFS is taking at face value. Lady Royall did not, however, address the issues of concern raised in AFFS' questions, such as whether she thinks there is a free speech problem at UK universities, other than expressing in general terms a breezy confidence in Oxford's free speech protections, and that "legal protections are already strong" despite the key reason behind HEFSA being brought in was to remedy a profound and widely acknowledged lack of accountability. This is typical of the sorts of general statements AFFS regularly receives from senior university managers. It regards them as concerningly complacent.

Furthermore, AFFS thinks it troubling that, uniquely among the candidates with a Parliamentary role, Lady Royall opposed HEFSA root and branch as it passed through Parliament. She says that this was because she "*believed it would have had the very opposite effect to that which was intended*". AFFS has seen these sort of general statements

elsewhere (they were, and are, commonplace, for instance, in Universities UK's public statements). AFFS does not regard this as a credible or persuasive viewpoint (from a free speech point of view). HEFSA addresses one of the fundamental problems with the existing legislation, being a lack of accountability for universities for failures to comply with their obligations to protect free speech. Lady Royall also says that she had concerns that some provisions of the HEFSA Bill would introduce "*unnecessarily bureaucratic complaints mechanisms*" which would have created problems for all who would be subject to the legislation. While this is a legitimate viewpoint, her statement is a clear indication that Lady Royall places a relatively low emphasis on protecting free speech when weighing up competing claims.

AFFS notes that Lady Royall did not address the question relating to her attitude to the new government's suspension of HEFSA but thinks her attitude to this can be safely implied from what she says about her general opposition to the legislation.

Finally, in her capacity as Principal, Lady Royall instructed all incoming Somerville students to take "unconscious bias" training, and said they would have to retake them until they got 100%. For information, see her correspondence with the FSU at the time this was reported in the press: <https://freespeechunion.org/letter-to-baroness-royall-regarding-unconscious-bias-training-at-somerville-college/>

Although AFFS specifically asked Lady Royall about this, her statement did not address it. However, in a response to the FSU, she said: "*The next point I would like to address is the wish expressed in my original message that students should achieve one hundred per cent in the test. This is one area where I should have thought further, and I thank you for bringing it to my attention. On reflection, it has been agreed that completing the test with less than 100% will be seen as the opportunity for a chat about the issues involved, nothing more.*" As the FSU noted, this did not go far enough to be compliant: compulsory training about this sort of thing is very likely to be unlawful, as explained below.

Requiring this sort of mandatory training creates profound problems as regards free speech protection, as explained in BFSP's statement *EDI and similar courses, training and tests: Free speech requirements and risks for English universities*, which [can be found here](#). As explained in BFSP's statement:

- Training about the relatively narrow range of matters which are "legally mandated", for instance pursuant to the Equality Act, is appropriate and does not contravene free speech protection legislation if executed correctly.
- However, so-called "training" which advocates and promotes particular viewpoints or agendas about contested wider issues such as gender ideology and aspects of Critical Race Theory, especially when mandatory (as, in AFFS experience, it often is when, for example, forming part of mandatory matriculation procedures) and when it requires certain answers to be given in order to "pass" (as, in AFFS experience, is often the case), gives rise very quickly to unlawfulness under free speech legislation.

The sort of mandatory training apparently favoured by Lady Royall is almost laughably inappropriate when thought through. AFFS believes that the failure to appreciate this is because of a mindset which sees not just EDI in general, but also the ideological positions on contested issues regularly advocated by university EDI staff, as unarguably correct as to justify it being effectively enforced through universities' policies and training (despite the fact that this is unlawful). It is a mindset which fails to distinguish between legitimately ensuring that the Equality Act is understood and complied with, and its use as cover for enforcing ideological agendas which probably the majority of the population disagree with. The latter has no legal underpinnings, and, if universities enforce these agendas, they quickly act unlawfully under relevant legislation, for instance breaching rights of freedom of thought and expression protected under the Human Rights Act and unlawful harassment of and discrimination against people with protected viewpoints under the Equality Act. This is also a free speech disaster more generally. Universities should be maintaining institutional neutrality about such matters, which is why we asked a specific question about this which Lady Royall did not address.

The question AFFS asked regarding EDI training as regards contested subjects was an opportunity for Lady Royall to clarify her position. AFFS is concerned that Lady Royall did not (and, judging from her answers, still may not) appreciate these problems. Someone who actively cared about free speech and understood the relevant legislation would be sensitive to these issues and distinctions. Instead, in her statement to AFFS, Lady Royall said, without qualification, that she believes in the importance of EDI training and that such training is consistent with the commitment to free speech. It is somewhat alarming that a head of an Oxford College takes this view, without appropriate nuance or qualification.

As a result of the above, we consider Lady Royall to be a very weak candidate when viewed solely through the lens of free speech protection.

Here is the Wikipedia page for this candidate: [Janet Royall, Baroness Royall of Blaisdon - Wikipedia](#)

Harry Stratton – FS 0

Mr Stratton did not reply to our questions, but submitted his own short freedom of speech statement which, at his specific request, we are providing in full and [which you can see here](#). (Mr Stratton believes in everyone's right to protest and is proactive in protests, which is a narrow form of free speech).

We do not have firm evidence for this given his not having addressed any of our questions (which itself begs a question), but we nonetheless are left with the distinct impression that Mr Stratton would not see there to be a free speech problem with, for instance, compulsory EDI training or requiring statements of support for organisations such as Stonewall in connection with job applications. We offered him the chance to

reply more fully to the original questionnaire. As with other candidates, he loses marks for not responding to the questions asked.

Here is the Wikipedia page for this candidate: [Harry Stratton - KeyWiki](#)

Lord Willetts – FS 0

Lord Willetts did not reply specifically to our questions, but submitted his own lengthy statement, which [you can see here](#).

Lord Willetts' answers are thoughtful and in themselves very positive about free speech and evidence a strong commitment. They generally are very encouraging for those who care about free speech.

He has not, however, addressed our detailed questions about, for instance, the relationship of EDI programmes with free speech. We view this (for all candidates) as a negative, although we find his general statement sufficiently full and convincing that we are reasonably comfortable that he would take a “free speech appropriate” approach to such matters.

Although Lord Willetts says he generally supported HEFSA, he voted against one very important aspect of it (the Statutory Tort). While those actively campaigning for better free speech protections at universities consider this a bad sign about attitudes to free speech and the problems it faces, and AFFS does not agree with the reason he gives for his opposition and believes it to be a mistaken approach, Lord Willett’s opposition to the Statutory Tort does appear to have been motivated by genuinely pro free speech reasons. AFFS therefore considers this negative factor to be somewhat mitigated, especially when viewed in the context of his otherwise very strong (and evidenced) support for free speech.

AFFS have also heard concerns expressed from fellow free speech campaigners about Lord Willetts’ opposition to other aspects of HEFSA during its passage through the House of Lords. While there has not been time to verify these in the way AFFS would wish, it considers that they are reliable witnesses. This is therefore also being taken into account as a factor, although given less weight than the above.

Here is the Wikipedia page for this candidate: [David Willetts - Wikipedia](#)

Appendix: questions asked of all candidates

1. Do you think there is currently a free speech and/or academic freedom problem at UK universities? Please give reasons for your answer, if you wish.

AFFS comment: if candidates do not see a significant problem, we consider that free speech at universities cannot be a focus for them.

2.

- a. If an active politician (e.g. a Member of the House of Lords), did you support or oppose the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill (now Act) (“HEFSA”) (or significant aspects of it) during its passage through Parliament? Please provide any further information you consider relevant to your stance.

AFFS comment: we consider opposition to HEFSA to be a free speech negative.

- b. Do you consider that the suspension of the coming into effects of the main provisions of HEFSA pending "review and possible repeal" by the new Labour Government in July 2024 was appropriate? Please give your reasons for your answer, if you wish.

AFFS comment: we consider approval of the suspension to be a free speech negative.

3. Please give examples of how you have actively supported free speech (including, but not limited to) in the Higher Education sector) and/or academic freedom in your public life.

4. In your public life, have you done anything which could be construed (or was considered by some to be) actively hostile to free speech and/or academic freedom? For instance, have you ever made severe personal attacks on someone you disagreed with in relation to a matter of lawful public debate, or instigated or joined in an online pile-on against them? If you have, please give details and explain the reasons for your actions.

5. If someone is expressing views which are unpopular or offensive to some, but which were not illegal, would you consider they should be free to hold and express them? Please give reasons for your views, including any qualifications, if you wish.

6. Do you think that institutional neutrality at UK universities is necessary for the protection of free speech and/or academic freedom, including in the review, approval of and/or support for research plans, topics, applications and/or projects and the grant or allocation of research funding? We would be interested to hear your reasoning.

AFFS comment: if an institution takes sides, in an area of passionate and polarised debate, with one contested position, it necessarily formally sets itself against the other position. This gives rise to a very obvious risk of disadvantaging (i.e. discriminating

against) or creating a hostile environment for (i.e. harassing) people who hold that other viewpoint, and creating or tolerating environments in which attacking people for their viewpoints is acceptable. A number of recent public failures (with unlawful harassment and discrimination found by tribunals) have largely arisen as a result of an underlying failure of objectivity and endorsing and enforcing (or not preventing the unlawful enforcement of) one side of a bitterly contested debate.

Universities and their representatives therefore need to maintain sufficient institutional neutrality on matters of polarised public debate, i.e. at least take an approach which is very careful to avoid actions, statements and language which risk counting as discrimination or harassment under the Equality Act or suppressing free speech contrary to Section 43 and the HRA, while of course complying with their wider relevant legal obligations.

7. **Do you think that the promotion and enforcement of programmes and policies relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (“EDI”) can give rise to any free speech/academic freedom issues?** We would be interested in hearing your views either way.

AFFS comment: the enforcement of contested agendas and programmes by English universities through EDI programmes and policies is highly likely to result in unlawfulness under no less than three sources of legal requirements for the protection of free speech. See Part 3 of BFSP’s detailed *Statement on the legal requirements for the protection of free speech at English universities*, [which can be found here](#).

We asked this question to try to identify whether the candidates had any conception that there were free speech problems with this.

8. **Do you consider that there are any free speech implications in asking for evidence of support for EDI programmes or campaigns (such as Stonewall or Athena Swan) in job application and promotion processes, and in the review, approval of and/or support for research plans, topics, applications and/or projects and the grant or allocation of research funding?** We would be interested in hearing your views either way.

AFFS comment: doing the above is highly likely to result in unlawfulness under no less than three sources of legal requirements for the protection of free speech. See BFSP’s detailed *Statement EDI considerations and inquiries in the recruitment and research approval process at English universities: Free speech compliance issues*, [which can be found here](#).

We asked this question to try to identify whether the candidates had any conception that there were free speech problems with this.

9. **Do you think that it is necessary for a healthy free speech environment that a university should have a senior, experienced, non-conflicted officer responsible for promoting free speech and academic freedom (including in the review, approval of and/or support for research plans, topics, applications and/or projects and the grant or allocation of research funding) and developing and enforcing policies and requirements for achieving this?** We would be interested in hearing your views either way.

AFFS comment: appointing such an officer would make a significant difference to free speech protection at universities. People who are serious about free speech protection would surely appreciate this.

10. Do you think it is necessary and/or appropriate to require students and/or staff (whether in the context of matriculation in the case of students, appointment and/or promotion in the case of staff or otherwise) to be required and/or invited to undergo “training” on contested subjects such as gender ideology and/or aspects of Critical Race Theory? In relation to such “training”:

- a. Should the contents of the “training” (including questions asked of participants) be publicly available?
- b. Should students and/or staff be:
 - i. be required to “pass” such training? and/or
 - ii. entitled to decline to participate in such training?
 - iii. be discriminated against and/or penalised for failing to “pass” or “participate”?
 - iv. if so, how?

We would be interested in your views either way.

AFFS comment: the enforcement of contested agendas and programmes through practices such as compulsory EDI training is highly likely to be unlawful at English universities under no less than three sources of legal requirements for the protection of free speech. See BFSP’s detailed [statement on this here](#).

We asked this question to try to identify whether the candidates had any conception that there were free speech problems with this.

11. Will you actively advocate for and support free speech protection and academic freedom, within the limits of the role of Chancellor of Oxford University? Will you view such support as a material requirement for the appointment of senior officers to the University? Please give any information that you think is relevant to share.

The following are the specific questions which AFFS asked of certain candidates.

Baroness Royall

1. Did you use your position in the House of Lords to oppose HEFSA? If so:

- a. Why did you vote against it?
- b. Considering the fact that you voted against, what would your message be to academics like Professor Selina Todd (of Oxford, of course) or Professor Kathleen

Stock, who have required protection from security guards because of reactions to things they have said?

c. In particular, do you think their treatment was justified? If you do, what would your preferred solution be?

2. Is it true, as has been reported, that you ordered all incoming Somerville students to take "unconscious bias" training, and said they would have to retake them until they got 100%? If so:

a. Do you consider it appropriate to make students take unconscious bias tests, and require they get 100%?

b. What is your position on students who refuse to take them?

c. Do you support their extension through the collegiate university?

d. Do you accept the suggestion, raised by the OfS in its draft guidance on HEFSA, that it would be a violation of an academic's academic freedom to be forced to take such a test (resting as they do on such contestable assumptions)? If not, please explain why not.

Lord Willetts

It was reported that you actively argued against many parts of HEFSA in the House of Lords, especially clause 4 (the Statutory Tort) and provisions that might affect universities' relations (including financial arrangements) with China and Chinese organisations, and/or numbers of for funding for Chinese students, and/or activities within (including satellite campuses and related institutions) China. Do you have any comments on this?

Lord Mandelson

It appears that you voted against some parts of HEFSA in the House of Lords, especially clause 4 (the Statutory Tort). Do you have any comments on this?