

Academic freedom and freedom of speech are not abstract ideals, they are what have contributed to the continued success of Cambridge University. In an era of profound transformation and mounting pressure, Cambridge must remain a sanctuary for difficult questions, principled disagreement, open debate, and fearless inquiry.

My campaign for the Chancellorship is rooted in the conviction that we need an active, engaged leader who will defend these freedoms not only in rhetoric, but in practice. As President of Queens' College and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Cambridge Union, I have consistently upheld open debate, even when controversial or uncomfortable. I've done so because it is essential to allow for intellectual growth, groundbreaking research and innovation to flourish.

In this new era of both breathtaking innovation and deep societal risk, if Cambridge is to thrive amid global turbulence, it must be anchored in this timeless principle. That includes protecting free speech from political, cultural, or institutional pressures. As Chancellor, I will be a champion of academic excellence and a vigilant steward of its foundational freedoms.

Responses to Questions:

1. Do you think there is currently a free speech and/or academic freedom problem at UK universities?

I worry about this a great deal as we are seeing growing pressures on free speech and academic freedom, not only in the UK but globally. As I have stated publicly, Cambridge – and indeed all universities – must remain places where difficult and controversial questions are welcome, and where individuals can speak freely without fear of being ostracised or 'cancelled' in modern parlance.

The fundamental purpose of universities is to explore complex issues, where rigorous examination of the facts and the evidence can take place, regardless of current popular thinking on a topic. I stand firmly in favour of academic freedom and free speech.

2. How overriding should protections for free speech be? Where should lines be drawn?

Free speech is, and should be a foundational principle of academic life. However, it must be exercised with responsibility and be done in a respectful and honest way. This is especially important in an academic setting where we encourage debate, testing positions and challenging arguments, investigating proofs and searching for evidence.

The line should be drawn at incitement to violence, harassment, or speech that violates the law. However, we should continue to allow for unpopular or uncomfortable views to be aired in the spirit of academic inquiry, and debated. Those that are uncomfortable with certain views being expressed have a right to protest respectfully.

3. How do you think Cambridge performs regarding free speech and academic freedom?

- **Airing controversial views:** I believe that Cambridge and Queens' College do better than many peer institutions but must remain vigilant. I'm privileged to be chair of trustees at the Cambridge Union, where successive generations of Cambridge Students have built and maintained a heritage of open and challenging debate – since 1815!
- **Promotion and protection:** The Union remains a forum where dissenting voices can often be heard publicly from all sides of the political spectrum, both inside and outside the chamber, and I've always backed the elected leaders of the Union to continue inviting controversial speakers. This has led many to oppose attendance of certain controversial individuals, which I fully support their right to criticise, but ultimately it is vital that these opinions can be heard.
- **Enforcement:** Like many academic institutions, Collegiate Cambridge (the University and its Colleges) has not been immune to controversy when hosting speakers whose views diverge from prevailing norms. Having set that, Cambridge and other universities must remain spaces where challenging and uncomfortable ideas can be expressed and debated in good faith. I fully support the autonomy of Colleges to host such discussions. Upholding the principle that lawful speech - however contentious - can be heard is essential to the survival of free inquiry at Cambridge.

4. HEFSA (Freedom of Speech Act):

a. I was not a serving politician, but I support the principles behind HEFSA: to protect lawful free expression and academic freedom. The independence of universities like Cambridge is an important part of that freedom, so any enforcement of HEFSA requires care, ensuring it does not become a tool for political interference in Cambridge's teaching.

b. The suspension by the Government should be reviewed cautiously. We must not send the message that safeguarding free speech is a partisan issue. Transparency, accountability, and robust protections should remain regardless.

5. Examples of supporting free speech:

At the Cambridge Union, I've supported a wide range of speakers from across the political spectrum and upheld the Union's right to host controversial debates. As President of Queens' College, I have championed open inquiry, encouraged respectful dialogue, and supported initiatives that bring students and academics together across ideological lines.

6. Have you ever been hostile to free speech or academic freedom?

No. I have consistently spoken in favour of protecting speech, even when views expressed diverge from my own. My career in academia, business, and media has been defined by dialogue and mutual respect.

7. Should people be free to express unpopular but legal views?

Yes. Academic institutions must be robust enough to withstand ideas that challenge orthodoxy. Silencing views only drives them underground. Cambridge must foster a principled, open, and respectful discourse environment.

8. Institutional neutrality and its role in free speech and academic freedom

Institutional neutrality is essential in areas of academic inquiry, funding decisions, and promotion processes. Universities should not become political actors, they should provide space for all sides to be heard. University officials should speak to the institution's values and academic mission.

9. OfS fine on University of Sussex – appropriate? Implications for Cambridge?

While I won't comment on another institution's internal processes, the fine signals a growing outside interest and greater regulatory involvement in regards to free speech. Cambridge must ensure its internal policies are robust, transparent, and aligned with the principle of lawful free expression to avoid similar scrutiny.

10. Can EDI policies impact free speech?

Yes, if implemented inappropriately. Genuine equality, diversity and inclusion is essential to promoting merit-based academic excellence. Having said that, we have also seen in some places badly formulated and implemented policies, while with notable objectives, undermining this and other objectives. We need both a respectful, inclusive environment and a culture of open intellectual discovery.

11. Should EDI metrics factor into job promotions or funding decisions?

A crude metric should not be a deciding factor. It is possible to promote merit-based inclusion and protect the exploration of ideas.

12. Should there be a senior officer responsible for free speech?

Yes. The Vice Chancellor should be responsible for free speech, supported by an elected Chancellor. It's gratifying that all, as far as I am aware, all candidates running for Chancellor have pledged to support free speech. Such a role helps institutionalise values we should never take for granted.

13. Views on mandatory training on gender ideology/CRT:

In five years at Cambridge I have not come across any evidence of mandatory training on gender ideology or critical race theory. What I will say is that the Colleges should encourage an

openness to understand others' views and ways of life. Ultimately, we want to create a welcoming and respectful environment for all students, academics, and staff alike.

14. Will you actively advocate for free speech as Chancellor?

Absolutely. If elected, I will be an engaged and inclusive Chancellor – not a figurehead. I will support free speech and academic freedom in all appointments, fundraising efforts, and external engagement. This is not an abstract commitment, it is central if the University of Cambridge can lead the world in academia and innovation, while contributing to the betterment of society.