

12 February 2026

Recommended free speech candidates in St Andrews Chancellorship election

Summary

- St Andrews alumni can vote in the upcoming election for the Chancellorship of the University of St Andrews 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 candidates requesting information about their position on free speech.
- Based on AFFS’ review and analysis of candidates’ responses, the candidates for the Chancellorship who **AFFS and The Free Speech Union (“FSU”)** **jointly recommend** to those who care about free speech are (in alphabetical order):

**Lord (Mark) Sedwill; and
Lady (Alex) Walmsley**

- Effective use of **alternative** votes is likely to be critical. Ideally, both candidates will be high on the list of those who care about free speech. Even if alumni do not wish to vote for both of the above candidates, we recommend that they ensure that an alternative vote goes to one of them.
- Our *recommendations are based solely on factors relating to free speech protection. We are politically neutral as regards the candidates.*

Introduction

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

AFFS has written to the 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 out in the Appendix below (together with some explanatory comments) and can also be found [here](#).

Two of the four candidates replied, thoughtfully and in detail. These are discussed below.

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

This document sets out the **joint recommendations of AFFS and the FSU**, based on AFFS' review and analysis of the candidates' responses, to those St Andrews graduates thinking of 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 comment or give recommendations regarding wider considerations, and we do not do so.

St Andrews' record on freedom of speech and academic freedom

Based on external and its own research and on its own interactions with the university, AFFS' regards St Andrews' record on free speech and academic freedom as unimpressive. As at many other universities, lip service seems to be regarded as sufficient compliance with legal and regulatory obligations even when unaccompanied by evidence of any action. AFFS' concerns were addressed in detail in correspondence with the university in 2023 which can be read on our website (<https://affs.uk/st-andrews>) to which voters are referred.

In our letters we raised detailed concerns including about the gross disparity between the resources the University was expending on various EDI initiatives (in order obtain accreditation for external lobbyists) the seemingly non-existent steps it was taking in relation to free speech and academic freedom. Summarising the lack of any steps to safeguard free speech and academic freedom in a letter to the University's Proctor we said:

"As far as we can ascertain, St Andrews has: no statement of its legal obligations in relation to freedom of speech or academic freedom (including under the legislation referred to above); no freedom of speech officer (or senior manager specifically responsible for compliance with freedom of speech obligations); no freedom of speech code or statement of principles; no freedom of speech ordinance; no academic freedom statement, code or ordinance; and no formal process for dealing with freedom of speech or academic freedom complaints. There isn't even mention on St Andrews' website of its endorsement of the best known (and we would hope, uncontroversial) statements of the importance of institutional neutrality in upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom like those in the Kalven Report or, more recently, the Chicago Principles. I would be pleased to be told I am wrong but, as we have been unable to find reference to any of the above, I would be grateful if you could direct me to where any of the above information appears on the website or can otherwise be found. If there is, in fact, a free speech

officer or a senior manager with specific responsibility for free speech compliance, please could you tell me who it is and provide me with their contact details?"

None of those statements was contradicted by anything said or provided by the University in subsequent correspondence. Nothing on the University's website suggests that anything has changed in respect of any of the matters we raised in the intervening three years either.

In connection with its failure to practice institutional neutrality, AFFS has also raised with the University its continued association with external activist groups such as Stonewall and Advance HE (including via its Athena Swan Awards programme) which have advanced ideological positions in relation to controversial aspects of gender, race and so-called decolonisation in terms which permit of no debate or argument.

St Andrews' use of ideologically influenced mandatory training for students was the subject of press criticism, but, when AFFS sought information about contents of mandatory student and staff training in further FOI requests, the University declined to provide the information sought.

From what we can tell from its website (try, for example, searching under "EDI", "Stonewall", "Athena Swan" and "Training") three years on: the University continues its association with Stonewall and Advance HE; despite press criticism of the comparative sums involved, continues to employ numerous dedicated EDI staff and no dedicated free speech staff; and continues to provide (sometimes mandatory) "training" to both staff and students in ideologically contested areas.

In short, AFFS has seen little from St Andrews in the past three years which, taking account of its knowledge and experience of free speech issues and protections at other UK universities, would lead us to a different conclusion than that reached by Civitas as a result of a nationwide study of free speech protection at UK universities in 2020 (<https://www.civitas.org.uk/publications/academic-freedom-in-our-universities/>) i.e. that St Andrews continues to be among the worst performers.

It was AFFS' ongoing concerns about the impact of the issues we had already raised about free speech and academic freedom at St Andrews that caused it to take its current interest in the Chancellorship Election. Those same concerns are reflected in the questions we asked the candidates.

As explained on the University's election website (linked below) and as some candidates have also pointed out, the role of Chancellor is largely ceremonial and does not involve any day-to-day management role. Nonetheless, AFFS hopes that the election of a Chancellor more concerned about issues like institutional neutrality, the influence of outside activists and the contents of mandatory training than the University's current senior management seem to be, might bring about some changes in the University's approach. It might also help to improve the free speech culture at the University in ways already slowly being seen at other UK universities.

Our process and the responses: comments on the candidates from a free speech perspective; rating system

The information and recommendations below are based on AFFS' review and analysis of candidates' responses, their formal Candidate Statements and any other relevant public information available to us.

All of the candidates responded to AFFS' request that they reply to its questions. As further explained below, however, only the two we have recommended actually provided answers, although others made some more general statements about free speech and referred us back to their Candidate Statements. We regard it as a negative rating factor where candidates did not consider it appropriate to reply to our questions. Further information about replies and candidates' positions regarding free speech is set out below, with links to their replies.

It will, of course, ultimately be for alumni 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 avoided the specific free speech issues which AFFS raised; and what should be made of candidates' failure or unpreparedness to respond to AFFS's questionnaire.

AFFS scored candidates according to the following, admittedly fairly simple, "Free Speech Ratings" we have used for earlier reports about the Chancellorship elections at Oxford and Cambridge: FS+2, FS+1, FS 0, FS-1, FS-2.

The Candidates

The four candidates are identified and introduced on the [University's website](#). This also includes their formal Candidate Statements.

In addition to their responses to our questions, we provide links below to Wikipedia pages relating to each candidate (where found) and to their Candidate Statements. While they have no reason to doubt what is said, AFFS and the FSU take no responsibility for the completeness or accuracy of the information in candidates' responses to AFFS or in their Candidate Statements, or on Wikipedia.

All four candidates are St Andrews graduates, and all have had very distinguished careers since leaving. Given however (and as already noted) AFFS has made its recommendations solely based on free speech considerations, it confines itself to saying that nothing said in any of the Candidate Statements or in response to AFFS suggests that any of the candidates holds negative views on that subject. Equally, AFFS has discovered nothing in publicly available sources to suggest that what the candidate has said to us about free speech does not reflect their genuine and considered view. AFFS otherwise leaves voters when deciding how to vote to make their own account of all other matters contained in Candidate Statements or other campaign materials.

We now set out AFFS comments on individual candidates and their statements and answers taking them in alphabetical order:

Dame (Anne) Pringle – FS 0

Dame Anne's early career was in the Foreign Office, including serving as the UK's Ambassador to Russia and to the Czech Republic. Since then, she has undertaken a range of roles across leadership, governance and public service. She studied for her undergraduate degree at St Andrews, where she has since funded scholarships for undergraduates and researchers, and acted as Senior Governor (the presiding officer of the University's Court at that time) for four years.

Here is Wikipedia's page about this candidate: [Anne Pringle – Wikipedia](#).

There is a link to Dame Anne's Candidate Statement in the link at the top of this section.

Dame Anne did not respond to AFFS' questionnaire. Instead, she chose to refer us to her candidate statement and to a sermon and a speech she made during University ceremonies relating to the conferment on her of an Honorary doctorate in 2022. A copy of Dame Anne's email (containing the additional materials she referred us to) can be found [here](#).

Because Dame Anne provided no answers to our questions and nothing in the materials to which Dame Anne referred us contains any information about her views on free speech whether generally or in relation to the particular issues we asked about, we are unable to recommend her.

Because we noted from her Candidate Statement that Dame Anne served on the University Court (including as Senior Governor, its presiding officer) between 2012 and 2020 and was among those responsible for appointing the present Principal (under whose leadership the EDI department appears to have assumed its present size and prominence and the University appears to have developed its present close connections with external lobbyists), we considered whether there is a risk that Dame Anne was partly responsible for the current state of freedom of speech at St Andrews. However, since Dame Anne's role appears to have focussed on property and capital projects and we have seen nothing to suggest that she has been personally involved or supportive of the worrying developments we refer to above, we have not thought it either fair or appropriate to count her involvement in the governance of the University against her in our free speech score.

On what limited information available to us, therefore, we can only give Dame Anne a neutral free speech score.

Lord (Mark) Sedwill – FS+2

Lord Sedwill was a senior civil servant, having served as Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service, as well as the UK's National Security Adviser. Before this, he held positions in the Home Office and Foreign Office, including as the UK's Ambassador to Afghanistan. Lord Sedwill has a BSc in Economics from St Andrews.

Here is Wikipedia's page about this candidate: [Mark Sedwill – Wikipedia](#).

Lord Sedwill responded to AFFS' questionnaire in a covering letter attaching his full answers to our questions. Both documents can be found [here](#).

AFFS was very encouraged by what Lord Sedwill said in his covering letter and in his answers to **Qs1** and **2** about the importance free speech and academic freedom generally and proper role of open debate at universities including on controversial subjects. The limits he identifies (that speech must be lawful in content and in the way it is exercised e.g. so as not to amount to unlawful harassment) are ones which AFFS, of course, acknowledges and agrees with.

Lord Sedwill's answer to **Q3** might reflect a lack of knowledge of the particular free speech issues which have arisen at St Andrews which, for example, include the lack of "clear rules" of the sort he refers to protecting free speech. While it is perhaps too much to have expected him to be aware of the very granular issues raised in AFFS' own correspondence with St Andrews, Lord Sedwill's comments suggests that he is also unaware of the conclusions of the well-publicised Civitas Report, and the criticisms of the content of mandatory training and disproportionate expenditure on EDI reported in the press. However, given Lord Sedwill's robust answers in relation to the importance of free debate, institutional neutrality, the risks to free speech from trying to impose ideological positions on students and staff, we are not overly concerned by his more general answer here.

While, for the understandable reasons he gave, Lord Sedwill did not contribute to the debates about HEFSA in the House of Lords, his confirmation in answer to **Q4** that the issues addressed by HEFSA also arise at Scottish Universities (even though the statute only applies in England) was positive from AFFS' point of view, as was his agreement that some elements of HEFSA should be followed as a matter of best practice at St Andrews. Of more concern, though, was the first of a number of references to the need to avoid "perpetual litigation risk".

We are not clear what sort of litigation he has in mind. Even legislation applicable in England (let alone the weaker free speech protections provided under applicable Scottish legislation) as eventually enacted does not permit legal proceedings to be brought against universities for breach of their statutory duties to protect free speech and academic freedom. Since legal claims under the Equality Act 2010, most often made for breach of employment contracts, would arise from alleged failures to prevent discrimination and harassment against staff on account of their lawful protected beliefs and opinions, we assume that Lord Sedwill would not wish to discourage such claims where well founded.

Lord Sedwill's responses to **Qs 5** to **7** were very encouraging statements of strong support for the rights of students and staff to express all lawful views. His qualifications for speech expressed in a way amounting to unlawful harassment and comments about the responsibility of those with governance and management roles to have regard to how their words impact on others and on the institution they represent are obviously unobjectionable.

Lord Sedwill's strong defence of institutional neutrality as important to academic freedom was a breath of fresh air when compared to the University's own repeated failure in our own correspondence with it either to endorse institutional neutrality or even to identify what its official position is in relation to it. His identification of the areas in which a university might

have and express an official position seem sensible to us and to make the right distinction between matters integral to the proper functioning of a university and those which involve a university taking a partisan position on controversial political and ideological issues. We would hope that, if elected, Lord Sedwill might encourage the University to follow an increasing number of other UK universities (24 in a survey AFFS has recently made, up from a handful a couple of years ago) in formally signing up to a position of institutional neutrality.

We were similarly impressed by what Lord Sedwill had to say about the risks posed by overtly ideological EDI agendas to both freedom of speech general and access to employment and research funding opportunities in his answers to **Qs 10** and **11**. What he said in passing in those answers about the risks of compulsory training about politically contested issues was strongly reinforced by his answer to our specific question about such compulsory training (**Q13**). Lord Sedwill's answer (including that the contents of training materials should be publicly available) contrasts sharply with what the University has been doing in recent years. We hope that if he were elected Lord Sedwill might be able to encourage some positive changes in this area (including an end to the University's dogged refusal to disclose the contents of controversial EDI training in answer to FOIs).

The one area of concern AFFS has about Lord Sedwill's, otherwise very encouraging replies, relates to his response to our question about the need for a senior, dedicated, FS officer at universities (**Q12**). While his recognition of the general need for such a person was positive, we were, to be frank, somewhat perturbed by his assertion that St Andrews already has such a senior officer in the person of "The Vice-Principal (Governance & People)".

We are not sure who he means. The University has always had a V-P (Governance) (<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/about/governance/principal/principals-office/governance/>) and, in 2022 (apparently as part of its institutional championing of EDI agendas), appointed a new V-P (Diversity and People) (<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/about/governance/principal/principals-office/vp-people-diversity/>). Neither, though, is an independent senior officer with specific responsibility for protecting free speech and academic freedom. For reasons which are made clear in our own correspondence with him (included at <https://affs.uk/st-andrews>), we were troubled and unimpressed with what the V-P (Governance) said in response to the detailed free speech-related issues we specifically raised with him. Equally concerning is the fact that (as at some other universities with well-publicised free speech problems) St Andrews has put its EDI chief (the new V-P (People and Diversity)) in charge of addressing free speech issues. Quite apart from the obvious conflicts or priorities and interests such a dual role creates, as we have already noted above nothing has so far come of any attempt by the V-P (People and Diversity) (whose officially stated role says nothing about her responsibility for free speech) to improve the University's poor record and reputation in this area.

From other cases, AFFS's understand that, under the Scottish regulatory system, the person at the University who has ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance by the University with its statutory obligations (under Section 26 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005) to uphold academic freedom is the Senior Lay Member of its Court. He too, however, is

not a dedicated FS officer with appropriate powers and independent of the University's EDI department.

Overall, however, the positives in Lord Sedwill's responses greatly outweighed these limited negatives. Taken together, his answers to the questions we have now raised in Chancellorship elections at Oxford, Cambridge and St Andrews were among the most encouraging of those provided by the candidates for any of those posts. Accordingly, we feel able to recommend Lord Sedwill to voters on the basis of a free speech score of FS+2.

Lady (Alex) Walmsley – FS+2

Lady Walmsley's career has spanned the defence and nuclear sectors in the UK and US. She is the CEO of Ashbourne Strategic Consulting Ltd, a defence consultancy. Lady Walmsley completed both her undergraduate degree and her PhD at St Andrews, and has pledged to establish a PhD scholarship at the university for History and International Relations students.

No Wikipedia profile is available for this candidate.

There is a link to Lady Walmsley's Candidate Statement in the link at the top of this section.

Like Lord Sedwill, Lady Walmsley responded in detail to AFFS' questionnaire. Her answers can be seen [here](#).

As with Lord Sedwill's, AFFS was generally very encouraged by Lady Walmsley's responses to our questions.

Her response to **Qs1 and 2** acknowledged the existence of a free speech problem at some of our universities and appeared to identify limitations for free speech with which AFFS agrees i.e. that speech should be restricted when unlawful in content (e.g. when defamatory) or effect (e.g. when it amounts to harassment).

Lady Walmsley's response to **Q3** (and her general comments at the end of her response) did not suggest any familiarity with the free speech issues at St Andrews which have been the subject of public comment (e.g. the Civitas Report and the press criticisms of mandatory training and EDI spending – as to which see above) other than the recent controversy over the removal of the current Rector from the University Court following her comments about Israel's actions in Gaza (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwy0z1ej1zo>). Since the Rector's appeal from the University's decision was upheld by the previous Chancellor, we are unclear which of the University's decisions she thinks was appropriate or correct from a free speech perspective. It would seem, though, that Lady Walmsley's view is that the original decision was correct on the basis that, given her governance role, the Rector's comments were inconsistent with institutional neutrality. If so, although surprised that Lady Walmsley appears unaware of other free speech issues in relation to which, we assume that had she known about them she would not think the University's behaviour was (or is) itself appropriate or correct. AFFS is not, therefore, overly concerned by her position in relation to the recent controversy concerning the Rector.

Lady Walmsley's responses to AFFS' questions about HEFSA (Q4) were a mixed bag. Whereas we were encouraged by her acceptance that the issues relating to protection of free speech and academic prioritised under HEFSA arise at Scottish Universities, we were less clear about what she envisaged in terms of the striking of a balance between free speech protection and protection from discrimination and harassment. Where those protections arise under the Equality Act 2010 speech which breaches them will be unlawful and, therefore, not protected under HEFSA. There is, though, no wider limitation to the overriding protections under HEFSA.

Similarly, Lady Walmsley's acceptance that it is hard to disagree with the commitments to free speech and academic freedom contained in HEFSA was, in our view, unhelpfully tempered by her apparent opposition to external regulation in favour of what she refers to as "institutional autonomy". Given that it is precisely such autonomy that has created the problems which HEFSA addresses, we were rather troubled by this from a free speech perspective. As it happens, however, the issue does not have such direct impact in Scotland given the unfortunate continuing absence of both an equivalently onerous statutory duty on universities to protect free speech and a regulatory framework to enforce such limited duties as there are.

Given Lady Walmsley's personal experience of the impact of ideologically motivated extremists on her own free speech rights and personal security (as reflected in her answers to Qs5 and 6), AFFS would hope that, if elected, she would take the free speech risks posed by the University's own official endorsement of ideological positions which are the subject of lawful public debate equally seriously. This confidence is reinforced by her very clear and robust responses to Qs7 and 8 which upheld the rights of others to hold views unpopular with and offensive to others and the importance of institutional neutrality in relation to statements made by university leaders. We were also encouraged, in this regard, by Lady Walmsley's reference to universities sticking to their mission and purpose to educate.

Lady Walmsley's strong support for Professor Kathleen Stock's free speech rights and criticism of Sussex's failure to protect them in her answer to Q9 was refreshingly clear as was her recognition that the OfS's actions were likely to have a wider salutary effect even in Scotland.

AFFS was most encouraged, as well, by Lady Walmsley's realistic acceptance that university's promotion of certain aspects of EDI are having adverse impacts on free speech and causing self-censorship (Q10) and her clear disapproval of asking job or research funding applicants to demonstrate support for EDI or the agendas of external lobbyists like Stonewall and Athena Swan (Q11). We noted that Lady Walmsley appears to share AFFS' own impression that Athena Swan has suffered from mission creep having originally focussed on gender imbalance between male and female applicants.

AFFS is disappointed by Lady Walmsley's rejection of any need for a dedicated FS officer at St Andrews (Q12). Insofar as her position is that there is no need for such a person because other university managers can be relied on, AFFS thinks that somewhat complacent given what has actually been happening at our universities (including at St Andrews).

On the other hand, AFFS strongly approves of Lady Walmsley's very clear and strong rejection of the use of "training" of students and staff on ideologically controversial subjects (Q14). We would hope that, if elected, she might make her view that imposing such training is akin to Soviet re-education known to those in St Andrews current management who continue insist on mandatory EDI training (while declining to make its contents publicly available).

Overall, therefore, as with Lord Sedwill's, AFFS found much more to like in Lady Walmsley's responses than to concern us. We are, therefore, happy to recommend her to voters for whom free speech and academic freedom is a priority and have also awarded her a score of FS+2.

Dame (Barbara) Woodward – FS 0

Dame Barbara Woodward is a senior diplomat, having acted as the UK's Ambassador to China, and later the UK's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. She is currently serving as a Deputy National Security Advisor. Prior to her career in the Foreign Office, she studied for her MA at St Andrews.

Here is Wikipedia's page about this candidate: [Barbara Woodward – Wikipedia](#).

There is a link to Dame Barbara's Candidate Statement in the link at the top of this section. This is itself linked to her own campaign website.

Dame Barbara did not respond to our questions saying (without further explanation) that she was "not in a position" to do so and referring us back to her Candidate Statement. Her email is available [here](#). In her email, Dame Barbara also relevantly stated:

"I am proud that the University of St Andrews is committed to the principles and practices of freedom of speech and freedom of expression and recognises that every member of the community has the right to express their views within the law, to be accountable for them, and should expect that they may be debated, or challenged."

Although this, somewhat formulaic, statement could indicate that Dame Barbara is unaware of any of the issues we refer to above, given its generality, we have not thought it right to mark her down on account of it. Similarly, though, neither Dame Barbara's Candidate Statement nor anything said on her campaign website (<https://barbarawoodward.org/>) demonstrate any particular interest in or concern about free speech issues.

On what little information Dame Barbara has provided, therefore, we are unable to give her anything but a neutral free speech score or to recommend her to voters concerned about free speech issues and problems at St Andrews.

Recommended candidates based on their support for free speech

The candidates for the Chancellorship who we recommend to those who care about free speech are (in alphabetical order):

Lord (Mark) Sedwill; and
Lady (Alex) Walmsley

Effective use of **alternative** votes is likely to be critical. Ideally, both candidates will be high on the list of those who care about free speech. Even if alumni do not wish to vote for both of the above candidates, we recommend that they ensure that an alternative vote goes to one of them.

AFFS has shared this report with other organisations committed to free speech at universities.

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. How overriding do you think protections for free speech should be? Where do you think lines between free speech and other concerns and agendas should be drawn?

3. Taking account of any public statements or information (for instance about the University's attitude to or actions to support free speech and its performance in handling any free speech issues or disputes that have arisen) or existing formal policies and/or rules (if any), how do you think St Andrews performs as regards:

- being a place in which controversial and/or unpopular views can be freely aired and discussed?
- promoting the importance of free speech and academic freedom?
- acting to protect free speech and academic freedom?
- enforcing its requirements for protecting free speech and academic freedom, including requirements as regards the behaviour of staff and students?

4. HEFSA:

Although HEFSA only applies to English universities,¹ please could you respond to the following questions about it:

- 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 about your stance.

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

¹ Scottish Universities are subject to the following principal legal obligations to protect people's expression of their viewpoints as a result of: their duty under Section 26 of the **Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005** to uphold academic freedom (and to ensure that appointments held or sought and entitlements and privileges enjoyed by academics are not adversely affected by its exercise); their duty under the **Equality Act 2010** to protect people with the "protected characteristic" of holding (or not holding) religious or philosophical beliefs (as defined in Section 10) from harassment and discrimination; and their duties under the **Human Rights Act 1998** to protect freedom of thought, belief and freedom expression. As noted in the EHRC Scotland's 2019 guidance document "Freedom of expression: a guide for higher education providers and students' unions in Scotland", Scottish Universities which are registered charities are also subject to potentially relevant duties to promote and uphold free speech as an important aspect of meeting their charitable purpose of furthering students' education for the public benefit.

- b. What influence or effect (if any) do you believe that the obligations of English universities under HEFSA should have in relation to the protection of free speech and academic freedom at St Andrews?
- c. In particular, do you believe that the obligations imposed on English universities via HEFSA should be regarded as best practice and voluntarily given effect to for that reason? If not, why not?
5. 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.

If you are an academic or an officer at a university or college:

- Can you evidence your work in support of free speech at your institution?
 - Have there been any controversies or other matters giving rise to free speech problems within your area of responsibility, or your institution more widely? What steps and public positions did you take in relation to them?
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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?

How far should institutional neutrality be taken? Should it apply to the public comments of university officials?

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 an 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.

9. **What do you think of the recent fines by the Office for Students on the University of Sussex? Were they appropriate? What do you think their implications (if any) are for St Andrews?**
10. **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 BFSP’s Statement on *EDI and similar courses, training and tests: Free speech requirements and risks for English universities*, [which can be found here](#).

See also the AFFS report *University Recruitment: EDI requirements causing free speech compliance failures*, [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.

11. **Do you consider that there are any free speech implications in asking for evidence of support for “EDI” or campaigns (such as Stonewall or Athena Swan) in recruitment 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.

12. **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 (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. Candidates who are serious about free speech protection would surely appreciate this.

13. 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 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. required to “pass” such training; and/or
 - ii. entitled to decline to participate in such training;
 - iii. penalised for failing to “pass” or “participate”; and,
 - 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.

14. Will you actively advocate for and support free speech protection and academic freedom, within the limits of the role of Chancellor of the University of St Andrews? 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.