|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Motion | **UD111** |
|  |  |  |
|  | Title | **Defending Freedom of Speech** |
|  |  |  |
|  | Submitted by | Goldsmiths Students’ Union, Black Students Campaign Committee |
|  |  |  |
|  | Speech For | Goldsmiths Students’ Union |
|  |  |  |
|  | Speech Against | Free |
|  |  |  |
|  | Summation | Proposer of last successful amendment |
|  |  |  |

**Conference believes**

1. The National Union of Students has a No Platform policy which was introduced in 1974 and is voted on every year.58
2. As part of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, under the Prevent Duty, the government made it mandatory for all public bodies - including schools, colleges, and universities - to have due regard for the need to be drawn into terrorism. Under government guidance, education institutions are trained to monitor the behaviour of their members, encouraging staff to raise concern over their members lives inside or outside of the institution59
3. On October 19th 2017, Jo Johnson called on the Office for Students (OfS) to champion free speech in universities, with the aim of ensuring that “students are exposed to a wide range of issues and ideas in a safe environment without fear of censorship”.60
4. Following this, Jo Johnson announced that the Office for Students would take a more aggressive role in securing freedom of speech in universities, including fining institutions for failing to uphold it.
5. An outrage about ‘Free Speech’ in universities has been manufactured in recent years by the government and press.
6. This often relies on crude, false conflations between diverse direct-action tactics and campaigns with ‘No Platforming’ or ‘Safe Spaces’, accusing student campaigning as the greatest threat to free speech in universities.
7. It is unclear exactly what this new ‘duty’ would add in practice, but in context it’s likely that student direct action will be targeted.
8. [https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-](https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/31475/NUS_No_Platform_Policy_information_.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJKEA56ZWKFU6MHNQ&Expires=1517780809&Signature=wiJ7rSvYlB6MKadAI8OEGiEtoiI%3D)

[1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/31475/NUS\_No\_Platform\_Policy\_information\_.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJKEA56ZWKFU6MHNQ&Expires](https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/31475/NUS_No_Platform_Policy_information_.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJKEA56ZWKFU6MHNQ&Expires=1517780809&Signature=wiJ7rSvYlB6MKadAI8OEGiEtoiI%3D) [=1517780809&Signature=wiJ7rSvYlB6MKadAI8OEGiEtoiI%3D](https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/31475/NUS_No_Platform_Policy_information_.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJKEA56ZWKFU6MHNQ&Expires=1517780809&Signature=wiJ7rSvYlB6MKadAI8OEGiEtoiI%3D)

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/free-speech-in-the-liberal-university>

**68**

1. Alongside this, the OfS will be enforcing the Prevent duty, to ensure that universities comply with the racist and repressive PREVENT agenda.

**Conference further believes**

1. The OfS’s inclusion on ‘freedom of speech’ is geared towards inhibiting Students’ Unions to create ‘no platform’ policies; this clashes with NUS’s policy on no platforming, and the safety of our liberation group students. It is well within our democratic rights to no platform those who incite hate speech.
2. The OfS’s stance on ‘freedom of speech’ is flawed and inconsistent with the Prevent strategy: they cannot both champion freedom of speech, and yet persist with the Prevent Duty, which creates a chilling effect on campuses, in which a number of students feel targeted and unable to speak freely and engage in democratic and normal debate, without being reported to Prevent authorities.61
3. It is unethical to monitor the activity of students - by monitoring prayer rooms, or emails, or by censuring normal student events. This leads to the censuring of students’ rights to freedom of expression.
4. The OfS’s stance on ‘freedom of speech’ is flawed and inconsistent with the Prevent strategy.
5. The University of Exeter and UCLAN intervened to cancel student-run events that were intended to raise awareness about Palestinian human rights because of links to Prevent.62
6. Muslims are fifty times more likely to be referred to Prevent than a non-Muslim. This is not conducive to an equal society, in which Islamophobia is increasing and Muslim communities are targeted.63
7. Links to Prevent also led The University of Westminster to install CCTVs inside their prayer rooms without consultation. This made women using the room feel uncomfortable with taking their headscarves off in a safe space.64
8. Free Speech is one of a number of rights to hold power to account and is inseparable from the right to organise and the right to protest. Therefore it must be defended and exercised ‘from below’.
9. Cases invoked by the government/press as threatening free speech on campuses include ‘Decolonise’ campaigns, pro-Palestine protesting, trigger warnings and antiracist/antifascist campaigning.
10. There is indeed an attack on Free Speech in universities - it comes from the state cracking down on student political organising, and the likes of PREVENT.
11. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/if-ofs-all-about-freedom-speech-policy-must-least-be-consistent>
12. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/27/universities-free-speech-row-halting-pro-palestinian-events>
13. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/criticism-prevent-based-facts-myths-170703072558455.html>
14. <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/preventing-free-thought-on-campus/18062#.Wnc46jTLjIU>

**69**

1. Student events have come under heavy restrictions and censorship under the Prevent duty. This includes demands for security, monitoring or vetting guests.
2. Direct action has a proud tradition in the student movement that we must defend.

Universities should not be made to police students’ action, nor should SUs ever be complicit in doing so.

**Conference resolves to**

1. To mandate the Vice President Union Development to support Students Unions to develop a ‘Know Your Rights’ toolkit, with legal briefings on student rights and freedoms as enshrined in legislation, including our rights of freedom of expression and freedom of speech
2. To continue the campaign against the Prevent duty, which curtails all our rights and freedoms
3. To work with other unions, including UCU, to lobby the government to review and repeal the Prevent duty.
4. Lobby for an end to the OfS’ ‘Free Speech’ duty, as government bodies cannot be trusted to defend Free Speech.
5. Campaign against any future laws or policies that stifle or criminalise direct and disruptive action.
6. Continue to campaign for the abolition of PREVENT and the Prevent duty.
7. Campaign for an end to extra restrictions and bureaucracy being applied to events and student activities under the Prevent duty.