

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

29th October 2017

Jean Constant

RE: STAND UP FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM.

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of freedom of speech at universities.

Our universities have a proud history of encouraging freedom of speech and it is vitally important that this right is preserved. I welcome that the Prime Minister has said our universities should not just be places of learning, but should also be places where there can be open debate.

I am encouraged that the Minister for Universities has been clear that universities have a legal duty to secure freedom of speech for students, staff and visiting speakers, and must have clear policies in place to support this practice. This duty extends to both the premises of the university and premises occupied by the students' unions, even if they are not part of the university premises. This means that universities have a legal obligation to ensure the use of student union premises is not denied to individuals on the grounds of their beliefs, policy or objectives.

Universities also have a responsibility under the *Equality Act 2010* to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all staff and students. This helps ensure that all individuals are able to express their opinions without fear of discrimination, or harassment. The Department for Education provides additional support to universities to ensure that ideas and opinions can be heard, challenged and debated - including help to assess the possible risks around external speakers.

Freedom of speech is vital in society, and in particular in higher education. It is essential for academic thinking to remain cutting-edge and for ideas to be explored and challenged. I am encouraged that procedures are in place to uphold this right.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE