

Cambridge alumni pulling funding from college after academics said gender speaker was 'hateful'

Helen Joyce, who believes that men and women are being redefined by trans activists, was invited to a debate at Gonville and Caius College

By Ewan Somerville
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Prof Arif Ahmed, who invited author Helen Joyce for a debate on gender ideology | CREDIT: Eddie Mulholland/Eddie Mulholland

Cambridge University alumni are pulling funding from their college in an intensifying row over the master announcing she was boycotting a “hateful” gender-critical speaker.

Helen Joyce, an author and former Economist journalist, was invited to Gonville and Caius College last Tuesday by Prof Arif Ahmed, a fellow, [for a debate on gender ideology](#).

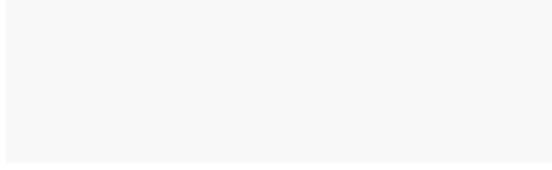
But in an “astonishing” intervention before she spoke, its master, Prof Pippa Rogerson – the most senior post – joined Dr Andrew Spencer, the college’s senior tutor, in telling all of the students that Ms Joyce’s views were “polemics”.

The head of Cambridge’s sociology faculty also apologised to students for the “distress caused” by sending them an email invitation to the talk.

Ms Joyce believes that men and women are being redefined by trans activists, with laws and policies “reshaped to privilege self-identified gender identity over biological sex”.

Around a hundred protesters, some masked, gathered outside the talk chanting “trans rights are human rights” and banged drums. Witnesses claimed a fire door was hit and [microphones had to be turned to full volume](#) because Ms Joyce was inaudible.

Now, many alumni have written to the college, Cambridge’s fourth oldest, with major donors telling The Telegraph they are withdrawing their funds and bequests unless a retraction is issued.



The Free Speech Union (FSU) has also written to Cambridge’s vice-chancellor asking him to confirm that future speakers will not be “denounced and defamed by senior leaders”, while a new group called Alumni For Free Speech has alleged breaches of equality legislation.

In their email to the all-student mailing list, Prof Rogerson and Dr Spencer wrote: “We do not condone or endorse views that Helen Joyce has expressed on transgender people, which we consider offensive, insulting and hateful to members of our community who live and work here.

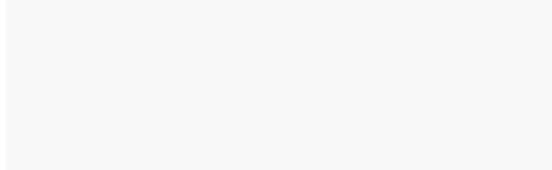
“Caius should be a place for the highest quality of research to be produced and discussed, rather than polemics. We will not be attending the event.”

One of the flurry of alumni to send protest letters since is Nick Sallnow-Smith, 72, who graduated from Gonville and Caius in 1973 and now convenes its Hong Kong chapter.

“I have been extremely upset by the way in which [the master and senior tutor have behaved](#)... it’s absolutely disgraceful,” he told The Telegraph.

“I certainly won’t donate anymore – with people like that in charge I will never donate again,” Mr Sallnow-Smith added.

“Saying sorry on Friday and expecting money on Monday is not going to work because it’s clear from their attitude of mind that they do not support the idea of an academic college that I was part of which is free speech, free enquiry, allowing people to present their viewpoint without vilification.



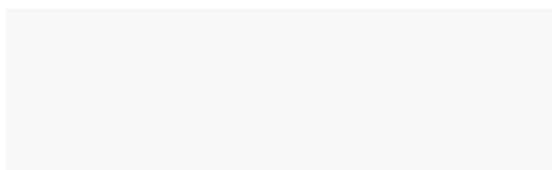
“We don’t have that anymore, they’re now vilified before they even attend.”

Another alumnus, who wished to remain anonymous, said: “I am embarrassed, I am appalled and I am absolutely disgusted with the stance taken by Professor Rogerson, the master of the college and the senior tutor.

“I think it is an appalling way to treat a woman who has gone out of her way to express her point of view and if we do not respect free speech in our universities, then the whole purpose of a university is gone.”

The alumnus added: “Certainly I would not wish to put the college in my will, the way things are at the moment. If Professor Rogerson does not issue a retraction or come to some sort of more reasonable statement, [I will] withdraw any financial support – I do contribute regularly – I would not wish to continue that.”

Numerous others have told the college and this newspaper [they are withdrawing bequests](#). Another has told the college she is now “discouraging” her son from applying to Cambridge.



The FSU told Dr Anthony Freeling, the vice-chancellor, that Prof Rogerson’s “astonishing” email had fallen “far below” the university’s own free speech policy, and “must bear some responsibility for the intolerant and discourteous” protests that “rendered Dr Joyce inaudible at times”.

Alumni For Free Speech, a new group of graduates founded by two lawyers concerned with the “de-Enlightenment” of British universities, alleged in its own letters to the university that the master’s email may have breached the public sector equality duty by creating a “hostile environment for a [visiting speaker with a protected characteristic](#)”.

The apology for sending an invite to the talk by the head of sociology, Prof Manali Desai, showed “she regards certain viewpoints as unacceptable and not appropriate to put in front of her students”, the group claimed.

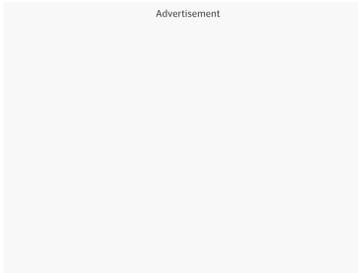
The University of Cambridge and the college did not respond to requests for comment.

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