

‘Dare to be different! Dare to speak up! Freedom of expression – and why it matters’

At last! And not before time.

We are delighted to introduce readers to Professor Arif Ahmed, the first Director of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom at the Office for Students, whose main task is to uphold freedom of speech within England’s higher education sector.

As the Professor himself explains, the role exists by virtue of amendments to the Higher Education Act, with responsibility for overseeing free speech at the Office for Students.

In a robust and compelling keynote speech at King’s College London earlier this week, Professor Ahmed outlined the purpose and scope of his new role, defending freedom of expression with compelling arguments which will gladden the hearts of millions who believe that our ancient liberties are being trampled on by a militant minority mob.

We summarise the main points of his address below, including direct passages from the speech, with links to the original two-part report beneath it.

Non-partisan, non-judgmental

As the professor is at pains to point out, ‘this is not a partisan role. I really can’t stress enough that there is absolutely no question of conforming university teaching or research to any political agenda. Freedom of speech is not the property of one side in any culture war. It belongs by right

to the whole human race; indeed for those of us who enjoy it, nothing is more precious.”

Why does it matter?

‘The role exists to protect and promote freedom of speech within the law...So what matters to us, within the confines of the law, is not what side you take – what matters is that you get to choose what side you take.’

“Freedom of speech and academic freedom are fundamental to higher education. The core mission of universities and colleges is the pursuit of knowledge, and the principles of free speech and academic freedom are fundamental to this purpose. They provide a necessary context for advancing new ideas, encouraging productive debate and challenging conventional wisdom.”

Under threat in the UK

Professor Ahmed’s intervention is not just timely, it is necessary too, especially when measured internationally. The Academic Freedom Index 2023 for example has Britain ranked at a shameful 61st in the global academic freedom index, with 23 EU states ranked above the UK.

The Counter Arguments

According to Professor Ahmed there are those who argue that freedom of expression should not be upheld on the following grounds:

- Free speech threatens to discriminate against equality.
- Free speech allows people to express views that are

outdated or 'wrong.'

- Any perceived threats to free speech are a 'storm in a teacup' and simply misplaced.

To each and every objection the professor provides a counter-argument, concluding with the most important of all.

Settling arguments though civilised debate

"It is essential for our society to function that we settle disputes not through violence but through discussion. For this to happen, it is essential that we learn to tolerate views, and the expression of views, that we might find wrong-headed and even appalling.

"Tolerance for disagreement is therefore a public good, like public utilities or clean air and water. By promoting the value of free speech, in all who pass through them, whatever subject they are studying, our universities are helping not only their own students but also everyone else. That is why this duty falls, and ought to fall, upon all of them."

And so say all of us.

We are grateful to our affiliate [Brexit Facts4EU.Org](https://BrexitFacts4EU.org) for their latest research, and we provide links to the two articles in full below.

***"Permission to speak, Sir?"* New Free Speech Tsar makes attack on cancel culture**

PART II of *"Permission to speak, Sir?"* – New Free Speech Tsar's pivotal defence of fundamental freedoms

Please support our work:

Please donate today

You can make a difference

CIBUK thanks its Affiliated Organisation Brexit Facts4EU.Org for permission to republish these articles.

Main Image montage: © Facts4EU.Org 2023