

Gavin Williamson is promoting the abuse of free speech

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The [Guardian](#) has reported this morning that:

The government is to introduce legislation that will enable academics, students or visiting speakers who are no-platformed to sue universities for compensation where they feel they have suffered because of free speech infringements.

The proposal is one of a range of legal measures put forward by the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, as part of the government's manifesto commitment to protect free speech and academic freedom in universities in England.

Let's be clear that there is already free speech in UK universities.

Then let's note that there are already statutorily imposed limits on the right to free speech that this freedom within universities must comply with. It is illegal to incite racial hatred, for example. Inciting violence is also not permitted.

And let's also be clear that there are some opinions that might legally be held which are profoundly offensive, and that there is a right to object to them.

There are also serious and reasonable codes of conduct that make it very difficult for staff who hold some views to work in universities, and which most certainly prevent them expressing their opinions. For example, a member of staff expressing the view that women students do not perform as well as male ones cannot say so without it being apparent that they have unacceptable prejudice against women students that is likely to impact on their appraisal of their work if they have opportunity to identify it (most university marking is now of anonymised texts for precisely this reason now). Such views are not acceptable if said or otherwise evidenced in a university as a result.

All of which I note to record that there cannot be free speech without limit on any university campus without breaching legal, ethical, teaching and personal rights, and without in some cases being in breach of contract.

Which does not mean that I am saying issues should not be discussed in universities. I

am clearing saying how any matter can and should be discussed is not always a matter where free rein might always be had, and for very good reason. Constraints exist because they are required to prevent abuse of many sorts.

So what is the issue that Gavin Williamson is addressing? It is really not clear, is the honest answer, so we must get clues from elsewhere.

Priti Patel thinks 'Black Lives Matter' dreadful.

Robert Jenrick is to tell heritage organisations that they must not refer to any history implying that exploitation might have played a part in the accumulation of wealth when presenting historical artefacts in the future.

And 'woke' is a term of abuse for government ministers, which if it refers to an awareness of social and racial injustice, as I think is all it implies, is decidedly odd since the consequence is that very obviously they would not wish for that awareness, which would seem to be the only reasonable conclusion to draw from their actions.

Put that conclusion into Williamson's proposals and what do you get? It is that what he is proposing is the right to deny that social and racial injustice exists. Unsurprisingly that is going to provoke a response. Anyone proposing such ideas anywhere will provoke a response. In a university it is likely to be much more marked.

But the whole aim is to provoke of course.

First they came for migrants.

Then they came for Europeans.

They've never really been that keen in women or anyone in the LGBTQ community.

And now they want to pick on those who might promote what they consider to be left wing thought, making them the enemy that will explain to the Daily Mail reader why the failed model of capitalism that they have been persuaded to support is not delivering the promised land they expected and were promised. That is all the fault of those lefties in universities who want to address social and racial injustice whilst seeking to prevent other abuses to personal freedom on the way. They are the oppressor of the Daily Mail reader.

This is, of course, straight out of the fascist playbook. Create an issue where there is none. Promote a victim, in this case the racist or misogynist who cannot express their views freely whilst working in a university, and then find someone to blame - in this case those who think racism and misogyny unacceptable - and the reason for imposing financial penalties on the left that might provide a very useful source of funding for right wing promoters of oppression might have been found.

And in the meantime, those who tackle racial and social injustice will have been silenced. It is not by chance that causes like tax justice have been driven out of major NGOs already by threats under charity law when only a decade ago these organisations were at the forefront of campaigning on such issues in the UK, and often still are in other countries.

I believe in free speech. But I do not believe in its abuse. Gavin Williamson is promoting the abuse of free speech. And that is exceptionally dangerous.