

Report Finds UK Universities Failing to Protect Gender-Critical Academics from Harassment

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— Categories: Human Rights



UK universities have failed to adequately protect gender-critical academics from harassment and career suppression, according to a new report by Professor Alice Sullivan. The report highlights growing threats to academic freedom, calls for stronger protections, and criticizes excessive bureaucracy that enables activism to silence legitimate research on sex and gender.

Sullivan warned that academics exploring the biological and social dimensions of sex face sustained campaigns of intimidation simply for acknowledging the significance of biological sex in research. She called for universities to hold students and staff accountable when they engage in harassment that undermines free inquiry, suggesting consequences should match the severity of the offense. The report criticizes an increasingly bureaucratic university structure that makes researchers more vulnerable to internal and external pressures. It highlights how excessive administrative layers have created opportunities for activist influence, often suppressing legitimate academic debate.

The findings come as the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act is set to take effect in August in England, bolstering protections for researchers. Sullivan urged similar legislative mechanisms to be adopted in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. She argued that academic freedom is being compromised by an insecure career structure and declining democratic governance within universities, leaving most teaching and research staff with little say in institutional decisions.

The report includes evidence from prominent figures such as Professor Kathleen Stock, who resigned from the University of Sussex after facing years of protests and hostility for expressing gender-critical views. Stock described a pattern of abuse and harassment dating back to 2018, culminating in a sustained campaign of intimidation in 2021. Other respondents shared examples of research being blocked or downgraded due to ideological opposition from colleagues or administrators.

Sullivan emphasized that when essential topics cannot be researched or discussed openly, the integrity of academic institutions is threatened, ultimately harming the very groups activists claim to support. The report

recommends that universities promote intellectual resilience among students by framing disagreement as a form of academic growth, rather than directing students or staff to mental health resources in response to controversial views.

A spokesperson for Universities UK acknowledged the complexity of the issue, noting that universities are legally obligated to protect both freedom of speech and the rights of students and staff to protest, without allowing such protests to stifle academic inquiry.