

## Written evidence from the Alliance of Pro-Life Students (FOE0177)

The Alliance of Pro-Life Students (APS hereafter) is a national organisation devoted to supporting pro-life students across the UK which includes helping them to start and maintain pro-life societies.

In 2017, we made a submission detailing the hostility, discrimination and censorship faced by pro-life students on UK campuses. The situation has not improved since then and we are now submitting further evidence of what has taken place both since then and of previous events of which you were not made aware in our last submission.

We recently conducted a survey of pro-life students and recent graduates inviting them to share their experiences of censorship or discrimination on university campuses. We received 206 responses to this survey, the results of which reveal a culture of hostility and intolerance that we would like to bring to your attention.

Results of our survey:

This survey was open to all current UK university students and anyone who had graduated from a UK university since 2013.

71.9% strongly agree or agree that “I have sometimes felt like I cannot speak about my pro-life views in lectures or seminars”

71.9% strongly agree or agree that “I have felt unable to raise my pro-life opinions with fellow students while at university”

8.3% have been silenced by an academic for holding pro-life views

67.9% strongly agree or agree that “I think it is more difficult to be known as pro-life at university than outside university”

87.4% strongly agree or agree that “I would imagine that it is harder for students to be pro-life in 2020 than it might have been 30 years ago”

52.9% have had a friendship or relationship adversely impacted because they held pro-life views

65% said they have witnessed another student being discriminated against or harassed for holding pro-life views

35.% were “aware that at least one event on my university premises has been cancelled, or threatened to be cancelled because one of the speakers identified as pro-life”

50.5% “have been threatened, abused, alarmed or distressed – by actions or words - by another student or academic because of my membership with the pro-life society”

52.4% have deliberately withheld information about being pro-life to future employers for fear of discrimination

The full results can be viewed [here](https://tinyurl.com/censorshipresults) - [tinyurl.com/censorshipresults](https://tinyurl.com/censorshipresults).

Students from Aberdeen, Birmingham, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Oxford, QUB and Strathclyde universities shared their personal experiences with us which will be presented in their own submissions. Below, we have also shared the experience of a student of Bristol university. These stories, coupled with the statistics from over 200 pro-life students, show that pro-life students are facing an increased amount of oppression on campuses. This consists of more than freedom of speech restrictions, but also of abuse and threats, often made on social media.

Pro-life groups at Glasgow, Nottingham, Aberdeen, Strathclyde and Birmingham had to seek legal advice in order to receive society affiliation with their Students' Unions. From our work with student pro-life societies we know that most students, even if they are pro-choice, have no problem with the existence of a pro-life society on their campus. However, there is a small minority of people who seek to no-platform pro-life societies and these people often play an active role in SUs and general student politics. Unfortunately, there is little engagement from the wider student body and therefore the small minority who chose to get involved give direction to the SU and its mandates.

When SUs are able to discriminate so blatantly against pro-life groups they help to make the harassment and abuse of pro-life students more acceptable.

Freedom of speech must apply to all students, not merely those students the SUs approve of in a personal capacity. However, many SUs do not have clear, coherent, democratic policies in place. This means that voting pro-choice, no-platforming, or safe space policies into official union policy is surprisingly easy, given the restrictions they place on freedom of speech. If universities had better guidelines for democratic policies, and if their Students' Union officials faced sanctions for disregarding freedom of speech and reports of abuse, bullying and threatening behaviour, the unions and the university environments would become both more democratic and more open to diverse viewpoints.

The experience below was shared with us by a student who wishes to remain anonymous, but they have granted us permission to submit this to you on their behalf.

Bristol University, academic year 2019/20

This incident highlights the partisan and un-democratic nature of a Students' Union that bans speakers whose views do not correspond with its own. It highlights the need for there to be tougher procedural policy around no-platforming and heavier sanctions if these policies are breached. The vandalism that took place outside the event reveals the visceral hostility faced by pro-life students at the hands of their own peers.

In October 2019, Bristol Pro-Life Feminist Society had a talk from a pro-life feminist speaker, and due to SU rules forbidding 'anti-choice' speakers on SU property, the talk had to be held in the university Catholic chaplaincy. Ahead of the talk the society became aware that there was a protest planned, though they didn't know the exact details of what shape this protest would take. During the talk there was some commotion outside. Afterwards the society found the car park covered in smashed eggs, condoms filled with what looked like flour, and a note left on the wall saying they weren't real feminists. Since this event the society is pleased to report that they have faced no further hostility from either the University or their SU and have felt welcomed and accommodated by the majority of their peers.

*30/01/2021*