

04 May 2015



To the University of Bath Students' Union and the University Secretary,

We were saddened last week to hear of what appeared to be censorship imposed on CWIPS over a 'controversial' sketch from their "The Bible According to CWIPS" show on 24th March.

We welcome the SU's commitment to inclusivity on campus and your work to ensure discrimination and prejudice are removed wherever possible. However, we are concerned by your latest efforts surrounding the 'Cooking with Christ' sketch from this show.

Given the feelings this story has provoked, we hope you will agree that it is in everyone's interest to be clear on the facts. As we understand the events, the CWIPS committee approached you for consultation with the entire script for the show, in which was the sketch in question. The SU Activities Officer was also invited to a dress rehearsal to offer his thoughts. In a discussion at this rehearsal the Activities Officer told the committee to remove a line about Mohammed and a sketch about a choir boy and a priest for being 'inappropriate'.

Later, on the day of the performance, the Activities Officer informed the Director that he had spoken to the University Secretary and the Chaplaincy, then told the Director to remove the entire 'Cooking with Christ' sketch from the show after a complaint from the Chaplaincy that it was 'too graphic'. During this time it was allegedly made clear that 'there would be consequences' should the Director not comply with the demands.

Whilst we understand the need to combat prejudice, we feel it is frankly ridiculous, and itself prejudiced, to simply assume all Muslims and Christians would be offended by the sketch. Great comedians have made arguably more controversial jokes in the past with no problems. Sensitivity to these issues is important, but this sketch was in no way singling out any one religion or belief system for humour. Indeed we feel this sketch shows the importance of inclusive comedy, focussed on ideas, as a means to overcoming prejudice.

We are also confused by the inclusion of the Chaplaincy in this affair. As an organisation independent from the Students' Union we cannot understand why the Activities Officer approached them with the script, or indeed why the Chaplaincy should have any influence on the SU's decisions whatsoever.

To reiterate, we understand and applaud the Students' Union's and University's continued efforts to remove religiously- and ethnically-motivated prejudice from our community. We simply feel it has been applied in a misguided and heavy-handed way in this instance.

As it is too late to reverse your decision on the matter, we would instead call on the Students' Union and the Activities Officer to apologise for demanding the censorship described above and for using the threat of 'consequences' to get your way. We would also like assurances for CWIPS and all other societies that free speech and expression at society events will be guaranteed from now on without interference from the SU or the University in the content of events. We feel the national laws in place surrounding acceptable speech should be sufficient in governing society events and any attempt by the SU or University to supersede them is inherently dangerous and unwelcome.

Signed,

Bath Atheists, Humanists & Secularists