

## **The following is an account of the events at the LSE Fresher's Fair on October 3<sup>rd</sup>**

On Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, we (Abishek Phadnis and Chris Moos) were at the LSESU Freshers' Fair, manning the stall of the LSESU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society to meet other non-believing students. At around noon, we were approached by LSESU Community and Welfare Officer Anneessa Mahmood, Anti-Racism Officer Rayhan Uddin, and Deputy Chief Executive Jarlath O'Hara and several others who identified as LSESU staff.

Without explanation, Anneessa Mahmood started removing material from the stall. When challenged, she claimed that it was "offensive". In addition, the LSESU staff members demanded that we remove our t-shirts. We were told that should we not comply we would be physically removed from the premises. When we asked for the reason for this request, the LSESU officers stated that several students had complained about our t-shirts. When we asked what rules or regulations we were in breach of, they told us that they did not need to give reasons for removing students, and we would be informed at a later point in time. As we refused to take off our t-shirts or leave without appropriate explanation, we were told that LSE security would be called to physically remove us from the building. We came to the Freshers' Fair to promote our society to new students. Our ability to do that was heavily curtailed by the actions of the LSESU staff. We especially felt that the abrasive behaviour of the LSESU staff was not aimed at protecting other students from harm, but rather an attempt to humiliate us in front of dozens of students.

When the LSE security arrived, we were asked to cover our t-shirts or leave LSE premises. When we asked for the rules and regulations we were in breach of, we were told that the LSE was being consulted about how to proceed. After a period of consultation, Kevin Haynes (LSE Legal and Compliance Team) and Paul Thornbury (LSE Head of Security) explained to us that we were not behaving in an "orderly and responsible manner", and that the wearing of the t-shirt could be considered "harassment", as it could "offend others" by creating an "offensive environment". We asked what exactly was "offensive" about the t-shirts, and how the display of a non-violent and non-racist comic strip could be considered "harassment" of other students. Paul Thornbury told us that it was "clearly deceitful" of us to say that we had not intended to cause offence and that we did not feel that we had behaved inappropriately or harassed other students. This unreasonable behaviour of the LSE and LSESU staff caused us serious distress, particularly the allegations that our motives were to "offend" others.

At the end of this conversation, five security guards started to position themselves around our stall. We felt this was a tactic to intimidate us. We were giving an ultimatum that should we not comply immediately, we would be physically removed from LSE property. We made it clear that we disagreed strongly with this interpretation of the rules, but that we would comply by covering the t-shirts. When we covered our t-shirts with jackets, the head of LSE security told us that "this was not enough", and that we had to zip up the jackets. When we zipped up the jackets, we were told that this was still not enough, as the word "prophet" was still visible at the top. After that, the head of LSE security told us that as he believed that we might open the jackets again when we were going to leave, two security guards were going to

stay in the room to monitor our behaviour. These two security guards were following us closely when we went in and out of the room. We felt that this highly unnecessary and geared at intimidating and humiliating us in front of others.

We reject in the strongest possible terms that by wearing a non-violent, non-racist t-shirt we would harass other students or create an “offensive environment”. We reject completely that we were not behaving in an “orderly or responsible manner”. In fact, when faced with the entirely unreasonable request to change or cover up our clothing, we remained calm and asked for clarification on what rules or regulations we were alleged to be in breach of. Even though we completely disagreed with the instructions of the LSE, we still complied, making clear that we would challenge this decision through the appropriate procedures.

As much as we respect and defend the rights of others to wear whatever they choose to wear, we claim this right for ourselves. Our right to free expression and participation in the LSE student community is being curtailed for no other reason than that we are expressing views that are not shared by others. As visible from the pictures (attached), the t-shirts are harmless satirical depictions of fictitious religious figures and certainly cannot be considered intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive to anyone by even the most stringent standards.

We will be at tomorrow’s fresher’s fair to continue promoting our society to new members. In the meantime, we have asked Professor Paul Kelly (Pro-Director for Teaching and Learning) to clarify to us what exact LSE rules and regulations we are alleged to have breached.

Abishek Phadnis & Chris Moos