

Statement from Chris Moos and Abhishek Phadnis

December 19, 2013

The LSESU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society welcomes the [half-apology](#) from the LSE for the misconduct of LSE and LSE Students' Union staff during the Freshers' Fair of 3 and 4 October, 2013.

Professor Craig Calhoun, the Director of the LSE, issued the apology today in response to our Appeal under the LSE's Free Speech Code, adding that "the wearing of the t-shirts on this occasion did not amount to harassment or contravene the law or LSE policies", and that School staff and Students' Union Officers had "unfortunately misjudged the situation".

Even as we welcome Professor Calhoun's apology, we are disappointed that it took the threat of legal action to elicit an acknowledgement of our grievances, and that no apology has been forthcoming from the LSESU, whose grave misconduct began this chain of harassment. We also believe that several other lingering concerns must be put on record.

We are disappointed by Professor Calhoun's admission that there was no "audit trail of the number and substance of complaints received". We believe that such flippancy does not behove the LSE's commitment to freedom of expression, and hope that the LSE will reform its procedures to better reflect this commitment. In light of the LSE's inability to produce any evidence of complaints, we continue to believe that there were, in fact, none, and to suspect that our real crime was to offend the politics of the officials concerned, not the sensibilities of our fellow students.

We are also disappointed that Professor Calhoun has failed to apologise for, or even acknowledge, our harassment at the hands of LSE Security and LSESU officers. We disagree with Professor Calhoun's contention that they acted 'in good faith' in dealing with a 'difficult situation', and aver that the decisions in question were uncomplicated and taken unhurriedly, over two days. We would like to know of the punitive action taken against the LSE and LSESU staff concerned, particularly against the named senior officials of the School administration, who are guilty of more than an ordinary miscalculation.

We are also dismayed by an aside in Professor Calhoun's decision, in which he claims he doubts that the behaviour of the LSESU officers was "a complete shock to you, particularly in light of the controversial nature of these images". We reject this attempt to excuse the behaviour of the LSESU officers by apportioning blame to us.

We insist that the t-shirts were entirely innocuous, and that we did not wear them with the intention of causing offence, but we also maintain that genuine freedom of expression in a civilised society must protect the provocative, the offensive and the blasphemous.

We would also like to register our puzzlement at Professor Calhoun's lament that "so much time and energy has been spent on trying to deal with this matter in the public arena before I was given an opportunity to review (the case)". We can only wonder why Professor Calhoun did not intercede sooner himself, if only to mitigate the damage this shameful incident has done to the reputation of the LSE.

For our part, we would like to remind the public that the LSE's treatment of us during the Fair was effected on the instructions of its Head of Legal and Compliance, Kevin Haynes, and Pro-Director for Teaching and Learning, Paul Kelly. The collusion of these high-ranking officials in our mistreatment shook our faith in the fairness of the School administration, and prolonged our deliberation over the drafting of our complaint. The media attention in the interim period was merely a reflection of the public outrage over the conduct of the LSE.

Looking to the future, we would like to know what substantive changes are being made to the LSE's procedures and regulations to prevent a recurrence of this, and how LSE and LSESU staff will be familiarised with the relevant legislation on freedom of expression.

We thank all those who have supported us during this difficult period, and are particularly grateful for the invaluable guidance of David Wolfe QC and Tamara Jaber of Matrix Chambers, Dr Ronan McCrea of University College London, Charlie Klendjian of the Lawyers' Secular Society, Richard Stein and Ugo Hayter of Leigh Day Solicitors, Rory Fenton of the AHS, Keith Porteous-Wood of the National Secular Society and Andrew Copson of the British Humanist Association.

We hope this apology establishes a resounding precedent for freedom of expression at British universities.