



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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Professor David Phoenix, Vice-Chancellor, The Open University

Sent via email

30 March 2026

Dear Professor Phoenix,

Thank you for your response of 2 March to our letter of 26 February.

We welcome your statement, in both your correspondence and recent [public statements](#), that you and the Open University are fully committed to upholding academic freedom. Furthermore, we are reassured by your confirmation that there is no prohibition on the use of the term ‘ancient Palestine,’ and that Open University staff are free to use the terminology they consider appropriate.

We encourage the Open University to review its code of practice on free speech to ensure that the academic freedom of staff members is fully protected from pressure by external political actors in the future. As we noted in our original letter, the Office for Students [states](#) that academic staff must not be pressured to endorse or reject particular value judgements. Universities must therefore guard against undue pressure on their staff, including that which may arise inadvertently from power asymmetries between senior managers and academic staff.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Nicola Pratt
BRISMES President

Dr Lewis Turner
Chair, BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom