



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

E-mail: administrator@brismes.org Website: www.brismes.ac.uk

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ

Professor Hugh Brady
Vice-Chancellor, Bristol University
By Email: vc-epa@bristol.ac.uk

12 October 2021

Dear Professor Brady,

Re: Academic freedom in relation to the dismissal of Prof David Miller

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our dismay that the University of Bristol took the decision to fire Professor David Miller following an investigation into comments that he made that were critical of Israeli government policy, Zionism and pro-Israel groups. We wrote to you in March expressing our concerns about the negative campaign that was being waged against Professor David Miller at that time. We regret that we did not receive any response from you.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest national academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. It is committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region, both in the UK and globally.

In our letter of 9 March, we reminded you of the legal obligation of universities to secure free speech within the law according to Section 2(8)(c) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, which states that the '*institutional autonomy of English higher education providers*' means '*the freedom **within the law** of academic staff at English higher education providers (i) to question and test received wisdom, and (ii) to put forward new ideas and **controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at the providers.***' (our emphasis)

We oppose antisemitism and racism of all kinds and recognise that universities also have obligations under the 2010 Equality Act to prevent discrimination, harassment and victimisation of individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity or religion.

However, we note that the statement issued by the University of Bristol on 1 October reported that an independent QC found that Professor Miller's comments were lawful.

In light of that fact, and even as some of our members strongly disagree with Professor Miller's utterances, we believe that Professor Miller's dismissal constitutes a gross violation of the right to freedom of expression and the right to academic freedom.

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We are deeply worried about the pernicious effects that your university's action against Professor Miller will have/is already having on academic freedom in the Middle East studies academic community in the UK, particularly the confidence of individual scholars and students to engage in public debate and research critical of Israeli policies and Zionism without the threat of being subject to career-destroying measures.

We call on you to uphold academic freedom within the law by reinstating Prof Miller immediately. A failure to do so will tarnish the reputation of Bristol University and undermine the right to academic freedom for all.

Yours sincerely,

Professor The Baroness Afshar OBE

President, BRISMES

Professor Neve Gordon

Vice President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

CC.

Prof. Simon Tormey, *Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Law*

Prof. Sarah Purdy, *Pro VC (Student Experience)*

Prof. Tansy Jessop, *Pro VC (Education)*

Mr Jack Boyer, *Chair, Board of Trustees*

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