



Ray Perman
Senior Lay Member, University Court

Professor Nicola Pratt, BRISMES President

Dr Lewis Turner, Chair of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

By email only to: BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom
academicfreedom@brismes.org

23 August 2024

Dear Professor Pratt and Dr Turner,

Thank you for your email to the Principal about the discharge of the Rector from University Court.

The decision to discharge the Rector was taken by the 24 governors of University Court, not the senior management of the institution.

I am therefore replying to you as Senior Lay Member and the Chairperson of Court, the University's supreme governing body.

We note your arguments and the contents of your letter.

They are, however, largely based on the assertion that the Rector was discharged because she spoke out against Israeli aggression in her statement of November 2023. That is absolutely not the case.

The University Court has made very clear that the Rector is entitled to freedom of speech, as an individual was entitled to make the statement she did, and that parts of her statement were an important source of comfort to some students and staff in our community. This was acknowledged by the report following the independent external investigation into the Rector's actions and activities by Morag Ross KC.

Ms Maris was discharged because she repeatedly refused to accept the findings of Ms Ross' independent external investigation, and by that repeated refusal placed herself in serious and persistent breach of her governance obligations and legal responsibilities, both as a Court member and as a charity trustee.

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Ms Ross' report established that by her actions and activities on social media after her statement, Ms Maris had breached her legal responsibilities as a Court member and charity trustee.

It found that she failed to act with courtesy and respect, and made some St Andrews students, whom it was her duty as Rector to support and represent, fear for their safety.

Ms Ross addresses the Rector's use of social media in her report, and her treatment of and attitude towards students who expressed fears and concerns to her.

This included making a public post on social media, in reply to Jewish students who had sought reassurance from her, in which she told them to "stop being weird." In response to further questions from students, she re-posted content from a Palestinian activist alleged to be an antisemite.

Ms Maris, who was elected Rector on a personal promise to support and show empathy to all St Andrews students, chose to make these remarks and to act as she did at a time when reported instances of antisemitic attacks and abuse were rising significantly across the UK. Two alleged physical assaults had been reported in St Andrews.

Court received the Ross report in April, and accepted it in full, including Ms Ross's observation that she believed dismissal would be a disproportionate sanction, but that other, lesser sanctions were appropriate and necessary.

That is why we made exhaustive and constructive efforts over three months to reach a resolution with Ms Maris which would allow her to continue to be a member of Court.

In essence, we asked her to recognise that some of her behaviour on social media was discourteous and disrespectful to some of our students, and fell below the standards required of a Court member.

Regrettably, she persistently chose not to do that, or to offer a meaningful apology to students to whom she had been discourteous. Court engaged in an extensive dialogue process with the Rector, as well as offering facilitated discussion with an external mediator, which she declined.

By her repeated refusal to engage constructively with the efforts Court made to find a resolution, Ms Maris knowingly placed herself in persistent and serious breach of her responsibilities as a Court member and charity trustee.

If a trustee is in persistent and serious breach of their responsibilities, the law states that fellow trustees must take action to resolve the breach, and if that is not achieved, to remove the trustee from office.



I should also point out that the decision to discharge was unanimous, with one abstention, and that the 24 governors of Court include student, staff and trade union representatives, several of whom are committed personally to the Palestinian cause.

The full reasons for the decision to discharge Ms Maris are set out in the [statement](#) from Court of 1 August.

It is important to stress again that these are nothing to do with freedom of speech, or her statement of November 2023. They are entirely a matter of governance. You raise the issue of concerns expressed by a University funder. That matter was addressed and resolved fully prior to Court's receipt of the Ross report. It played no part in the subsequent discussions and deliberations of governors.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Perman Esq.,
Senior Lay Member
Court of the University of St Andrews