



You are under attack for your opinions at university: what to do

Being attacked for your viewpoints can be a horrible experience in the age of social media and self-righteous ruthlessness. Here's what you can do.

First steps

- **Give yourself a moment to think:** was this a discussion that got heated? Things like meetings on controversial topics can involve strong feelings. Robust debate can be uncomfortable, we all have to live with that. Or was/is this nastier than that? How will you feel tomorrow?
- **Don't rush to react**, think carefully about what to do, and **seek advice from a free speech group**.
- If appropriate, **point out that your free speech is being suppressed to** the people who are causing you a problem, and that they are likely to be in breach of your university's rules. Require them to stop, warn them you will escalate the matter if they persist, including to bring in free speech campaigns.
- Find your university's **anti-bullying and -harassment and free speech protection policies/rules**. Get familiar. Do they prohibit any of the actions being taken against you? What is the complaints process?
- If appropriate, **report that you are being attacked for your free speech (if relevant) anti-bullying or -harassment/free speech protection policies/rules are being broken to:**
 - the staff who are responsible for the relevant area of your university or its operations; and
 - your university's senior staff with responsibilities for protecting free speech,pointing out that your university has failed to protect your speech or is at risk of doing so, and requiring them to take prompt action to deal with the issue. Warn them you will escalate the matter if they fail to address the issue, including bringing in free speech campaigns to support you. Your university will be concerned about possible legal failures on its watch, so the sooner you do this, the better.
- If it seems appropriate, launch a **formal complaint** against the people who are taking the action against you, if they are in breach of the university's rules.

And then...

- **Get a secure record organised:** take screenshots of social media posts, gather relevant documents.
- **Make a timeline** of what has happened, with information on the key events/documents/communications. Take witness details.
- **Academics:** Contact your local branch of **Academics for Academic Freedom** and/or the **Committee for Academic Freedom**, whichever you are a member of. **All staff and students:** **Inform Alumni for Free Speech** briefly at info@affs.uk. And contact the **Free Speech Union**, if you are a member.
- **Check your university's free speech or other complaints process.** Consider starting to prepare a complaint, and perhaps send it to the university in draft format. This will galvanise them to act if they are being slow. Note that the complaints process is slow moving, so do not rely on this if you need urgent action.

The requirements to protect free speech:

See our statement **Know your Free Speech rights** and other high quality detailed information at Best Free Speech Practice's website <https://bfsp.uk/universities-and-free-speech>.