

**Keeping Schtum?
What students think of free speech
Wave 2 of the HEPI / YouthSight Monitor**

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YouthSight

HEPI Report 85

HEPI / YouthSight Monitor: Key facts

- Conducted using YouthSight's OpinionPanel Community, the UK's largest panel of young people, built in partnership with UCAS.
- Respondents were 1,006 full-time undergraduates in years 1, 2 or 3+ studying at publicly-funded higher education institutions across the UK.
- Quotas were set on gender, university type and year of study, based on Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) data, and weights were applied after the fieldwork to ensure a balanced sample – for example, there were 449 male respondents and 557 female respondents and these numbers were reweighted to become 443 and 563 respectively.
- All questions were asked to all respondents.
- Respondents received a £1 Amazon gift voucher.
- Fieldwork occurred between the 16th and 22nd March 2016.
- Percentages may not sum due to rounding.
- The full data are available from HEPI on request, with additional crossbreaks.

Introduction

Wave 2 of the HEPI/YouthSight Monitor was conducted among 1,006 full-time undergraduates at UK higher education institutions between the 16th and 22nd March 2016. It focused on a number of issues related to free speech at UK universities.¹

Recent months have seen a surge in media coverage of how these issues affect students, staff and institutions, focusing in particular on:

- free speech versus No Platform policies;
- whether higher education institutions should remove or retain memorials to certain historical figures with whom they have been associated; and
- the right of students to feel completely safe at all times even if it means missing part of the curriculum.

Many forthright views have been expressed. To take one example, after a statue of Cecil Rhodes was successfully removed from a central location at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign reached the University of Oxford, where it centred particularly on a Rhodes statue outside Oriel College.

Ntokozo Qwabe, a Rhodes scholar and the leader of the campaign, said:

The reason why Rhodes Must Fall Oxford is constituted of people from all parts of the world (including Britain itself) is because your outdated 'US' and 'THEM' narratives are no longer tenable in the 21st century. We refuse to be outsiders in our OWN institutions.²

Harry Mount, a *Daily Telegraph* journalist, in contrast wrote:

Every time the authorities are accused of racism, they bend over backwards to soothe the offended egos of the little, tinpot dictators – rather than telling them that they, the teachers, are there to tell the students what to do; and not the other way round.³

The campaign to remove the statue in Oxford failed, apparently due to the concerns of donors. But some people still found the debate a useful intellectual exercise. The Oxford academic and *Guardian* columnist, Timothy Garton Ash, wrote:

Rhodes Must Fall has failed. Rhodes Must Fall has succeeded. The statue high up on the wall of a college building on the High Street in Oxford will not be removed, instead receding into its former pigeon-spattered obscurity. But the student protest movement has sparked a valuable debate about how Britain deals with its colonial past. I think both these results are good ones.⁴

University representative bodies (such as Universities UK), the National Union of Students (NUS) and various campaign groups frequently express views on issues relating to freedom on campus. Yet one piece of information apparently missing from the debate is what the

mass of students think. That is why Wave 2 of the HEPI / YouthSight Monitor took the form of a set of questions covering issues including free speech, No Platform, gender segregation, safe spaces, trigger warnings and even whether it is appropriate for student unions to ban the sale of tabloid newspapers.

As with our Wave 1 poll on students' attitudes towards the UK's place in the European Union, the data show many instances where the majority of students appear to hold similar views to the balance of opinion among university authorities and representative bodies. In particular, they show considerable support for the principle of free speech.

However, the responses also highlight considerable uncertainty and some apparent contradictions. On many questions, the most popular response was the most neutral one, with other respondents splitting between support for unlimited free speech and support for more controlled environments. Alongside the notable support for free speech, there was support for relatively strict limits on free speech. A large proportion of full-time undergraduate students support universities becoming safe spaces, the use of trigger warnings and the NUS's No Platform policy. More than one-in-four students think UKIP should be banned from speaking at university events. Some people argue that academic staff have encouraged this trend to limit free speech. HEPI has itself been on the receiving end – for example, in 2015 we were asked to withdraw a paper purely because some university staff (ironically open access advocates) disagreed with its policy proposals.

It is not always clear whether the results reflect confusion or muddled-thinking, or whether they simply reflect a complex picture on a complex set of issues. But it seems as if, for some students, censorship is actually seen as a way of protecting freedom of speech.

The results display notable differences by gender. In particular, male full-time undergraduate students seem to express firmer support for absolute free speech than female full-time undergraduate students, who are somewhat more willing to countenance censorship.⁵

Overall, the answers to the questions suggest the pendulum may have swung too far away from favouring free speech. Debating, rather than barring, unpalatable arguments is often the best way to expose them for what they are. Where free speech curtails a university's core functions, the consequences need to be fully debated among students and staff.

The results of the poll are presented in an objective way. The raw data is freely available from HEPI for anyone who wishes to check our results, to dive more deeply into the data or to find new angles.

Readers should note the results are presented here in what is designed to be a logical order and it is not exactly the same order in which the questions were originally posed.

Responses to the survey can be left on our website at www.hepi.ac.uk.

Freedom on campus

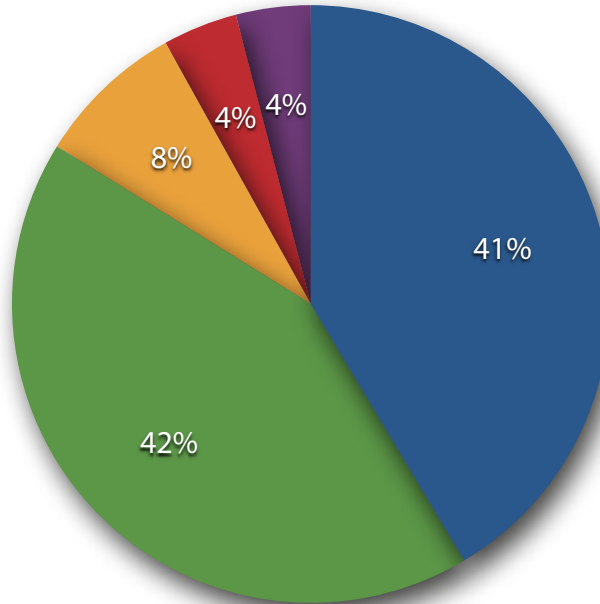
The questionnaire began by assessing students' overall perceptions of free speech at university.

When asked whether they feel 'free to express their opinions and political views openly', only 4% of respondents chose 'No, absolutely not' while a further 8% opted for 'No, probably not'.

A much larger proportion of students gave positive responses, with 41% opting for 'Yes, completely' and 42% for 'Yes, somewhat'.

So it seems the overwhelming majority of full-time undergraduate students – more than eight-out-of-ten – currently feel unrestricted in what they can say.

At your university, do you currently feel you are free to express your opinions and political views openly and without any restriction?



● Yes, completely ● Yes, somewhat ● No, probably not ● No, absolutely not ● Don't know

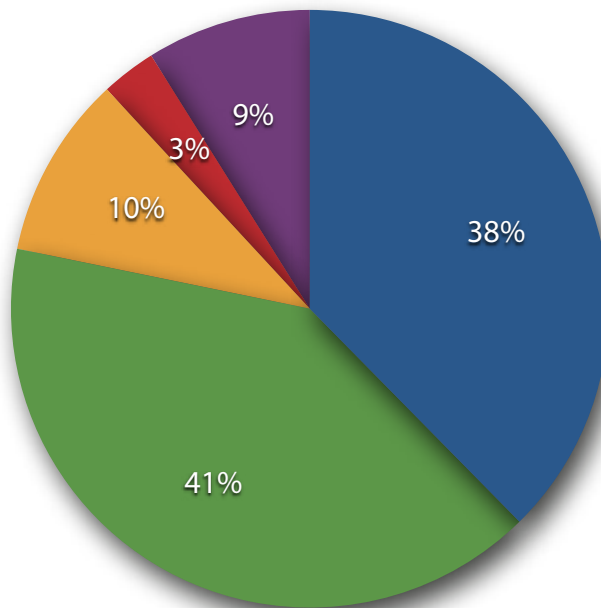
Protection against discrimination or emotional harm

The responses to the subsequent question on whether students enjoy 'satisfactory protection' against 'discrimination or emotional harm' were similarly positive.

Among the full-time undergraduate students answering the survey, 38% opted for 'Yes, completely' and 41% for 'Yes, somewhat'.

However, despite this emphatic result, over one-in-five respondents opted either for one of the two negative responses (13%) or for 'Don't know' (9%).

And currently at your university, do you feel you have satisfactory protection to stop you from experiencing any discrimination or emotional harm?



● Yes, completely ● Yes, somewhat ● No, probably not ● No, absolutely not ● Don't know

Limiting free speech

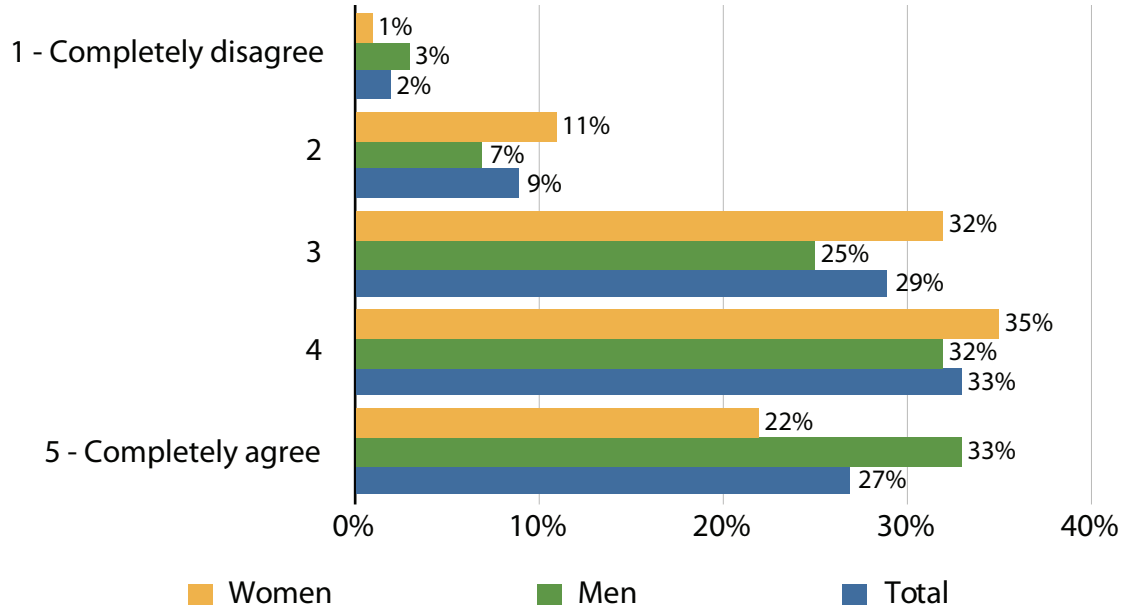
There is support for the idea that universities should never limit free speech, but only among a slim majority of full-time undergraduate students quizzed in the survey. When given a five-point scale ranging from '1 - Completely disagree' to '5 - Completely agree', 27% opted for the strongest positive option (5) and a further 33% chose the milder positive option (4).

The responses to this question display two features that crop up in many subsequent answers.

First, male students are more forthright than females – for example, 33% of men chose 'Completely agree' compared to 22% of women.

Secondly, a considerable proportion, between one-quarter and one-third of students (29%), opted for the most neutral response, suggesting considerable ambivalence or confusion.

Universities should never limit free speech



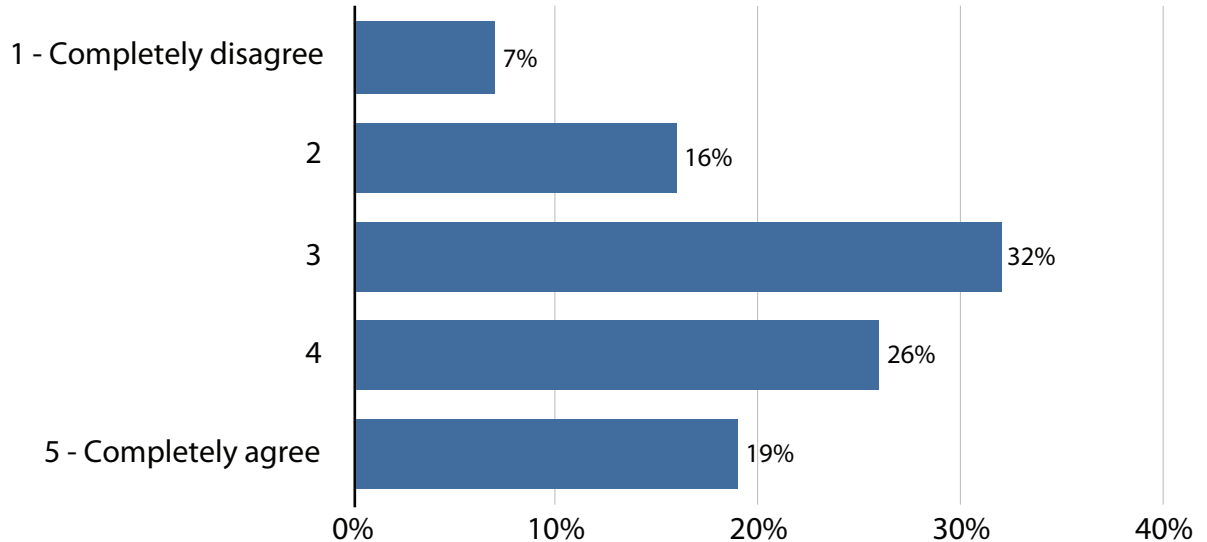
Education should not be comfortable

When asked to judge on the same five-point scale whether 'Education should not be comfortable, universities are places of debate and challenging ideas', far more students opt for one of the two agree options than for one of the two disagree options (45% versus 23%) but neither side has majority support.

The single most popular single answer, chosen by around one-third of students (32%), is midway between agreement and disagreement.

This suggests that a large minority of undergraduate students at UK universities are ambivalent or have not come to a conclusion about an issue that some academics consider a defining feature of higher education.

Education should not be comfortable, universities are places of debate and challenging ideas



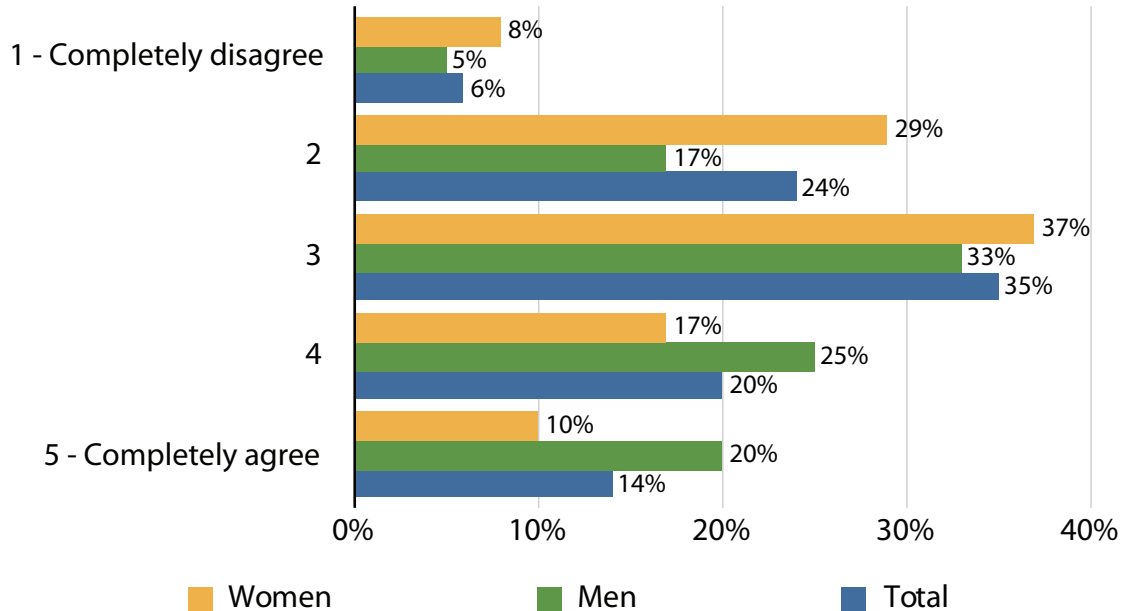
Censorship

If this could be seen as evidence that a significant proportion of students believe free speech should have limits on campus, other questions prove it beyond doubt.

For example, 30% of students disagree with the idea that 'University publications should not be censored in any way, even if they may be considered offensive to certain groups of students'.

A slightly higher proportion (34%) agree with the statement but, again, the most popular option is the most neutral one – and more women are open to such censorship than oppose it (37% to 27%).

University publications should not be censored in any way, even if they may be considered offensive to certain groups of students



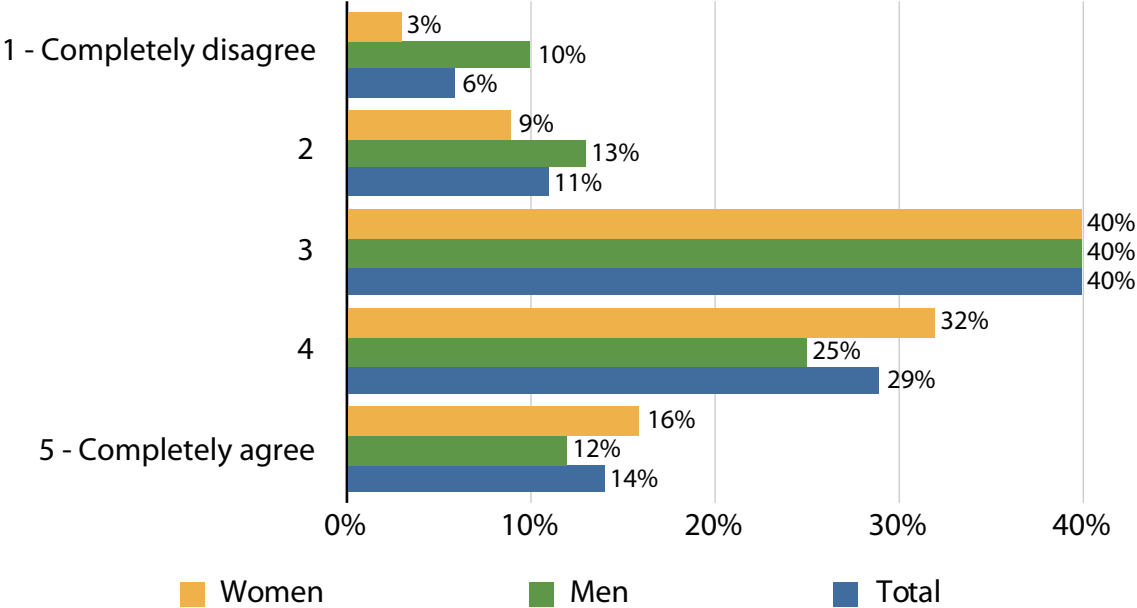
Protection from discrimination

When asked whether 'Protection from discrimination and ensuring the dignity of minorities can be more important than unlimited freedom of expression', the most popular single answer by some distance was the neutral one (40%).

But when the two agree and the two disagree options are compared, it is clear there is more than twice as much support than disagreement (43% versus 17%) with the statement.

So the support of many students for free speech comes with significant caveats when there is a risk of discrimination.

Protection from discrimination and ensuring the dignity of minorities can be more important than unlimited freedom of expression



Respecting students' safety

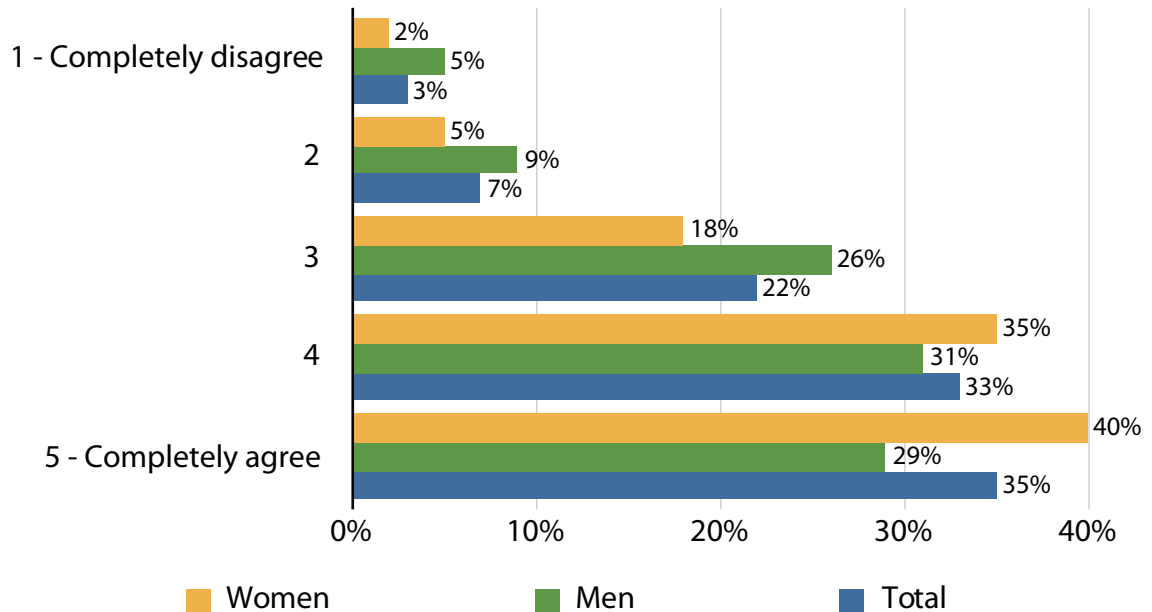
There is considerable support for the idea that 'Students that feel threatened should always have their demands for safety respected'.

Over two-thirds (68%) of full-time undergraduates either agree or 'Completely agree', although there is a difference between females (75%) and males (60%).

Only one-in-ten (10%) students express any disagreement.

It was up to respondents to interpret the extent and form of any threat and it is possible that this influenced how respondents answered the question. It could, for example, have been interpreted either as a psychological or physical threat.

Students that feel threatened should always have their demands for safety respected



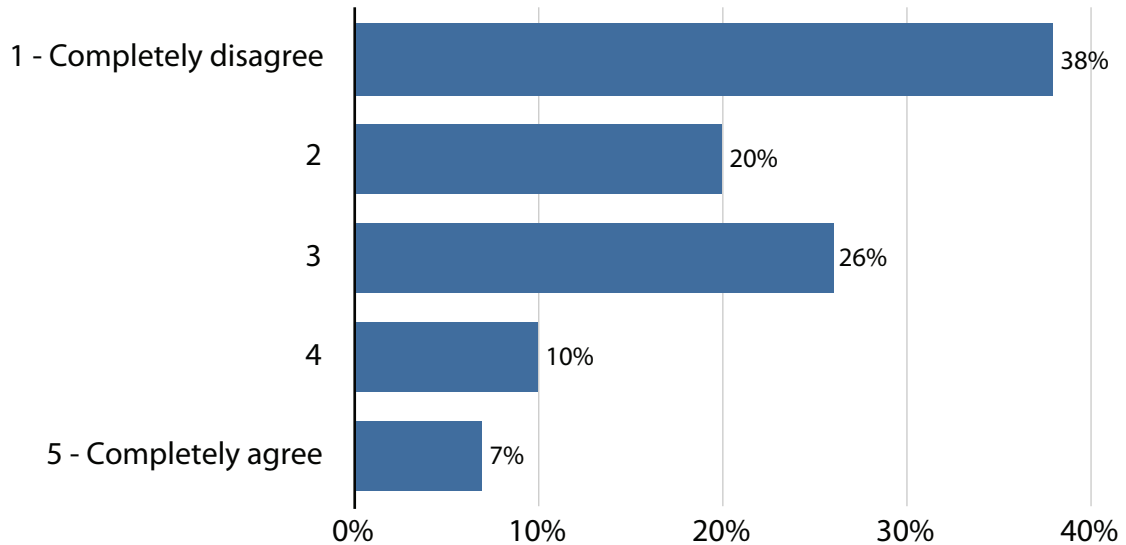
Racism and sexism

Considerable opposition was expressed in response to the idea that, 'If you debate an issue like sexism or racism, you make it acceptable'.

Nearly four-in-ten full-time undergraduates 'Completely disagree' with this, and a further 20% expressed less strong disagreement.

Around one-in-four (26%) opted for the neutral option, with comparatively small numbers expressing agreement (17% across the two agree options).

If you debate an issue like sexism or racism, you make it acceptable



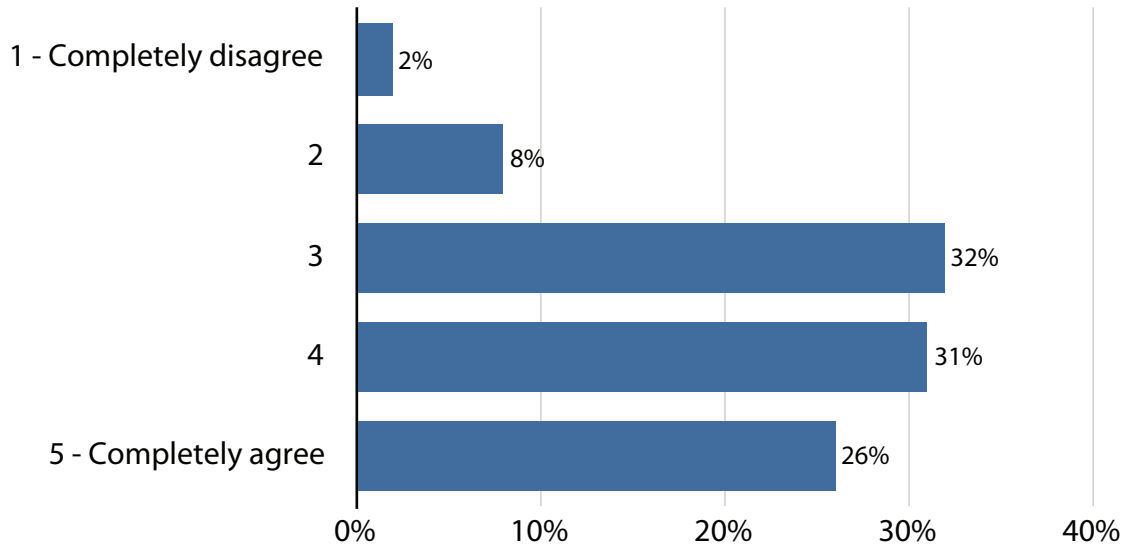
Debate or ban prejudice

Despite the balance of support in the poll against free speech taking precedence over the safety and security of students, a majority of students think 'The best way to fight prejudice is to debate it rather than to ban it'.

Indeed, nearly six-in-ten students (57%) opted for one of the two agree options while only one-in-ten 10% opted for one of the two disagree options.

Again, around one-third (32%) of students sought to avoid giving a clear preference one way or the other.

The best way to fight prejudice is to debate it rather than to ban it



How universities should approach free speech

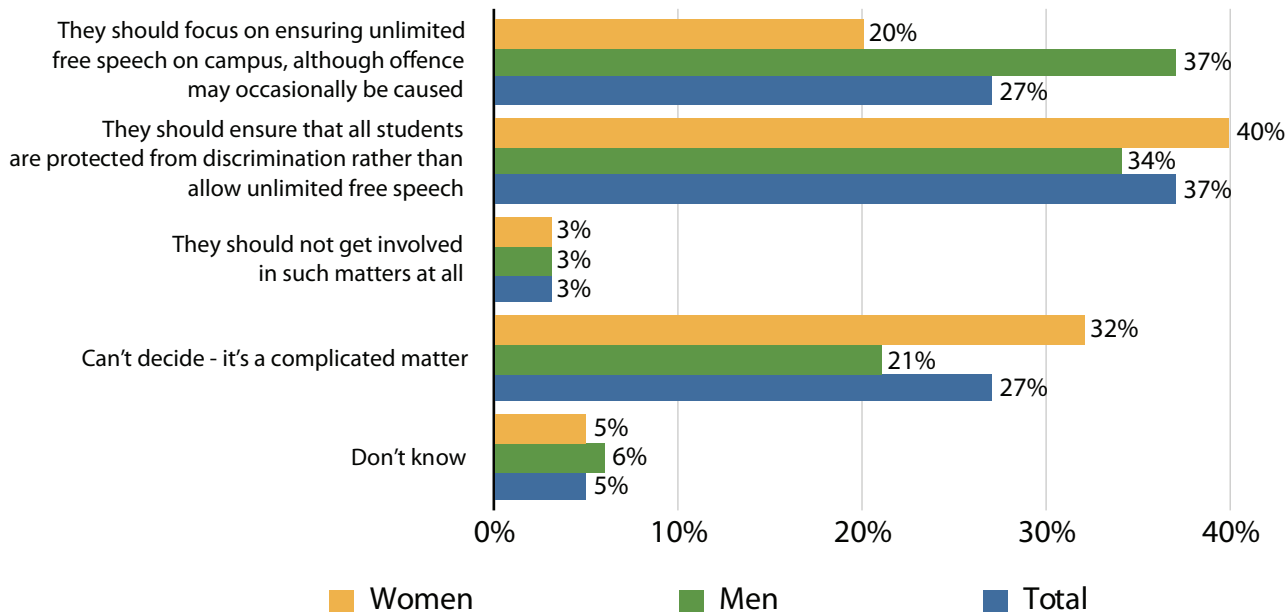
A question on the stance a university should generally seek to take confirmed the complexity of the picture.

More students prefer protecting all students from discrimination (37%) over unlimited free speech (27%), while only a tiny minority (3%) say 'They should not get involved'.

When broken down by gender, however, men slightly prefer unlimited free speech (37% against 34%) while women are twice as likely to favour protection against discrimination (40% against 20%).

Women were also more likely to say they could not decide because it is 'a complicated matter' (32%) than men (21%).

When in doubt, which approach should your university favour as an overall policy?

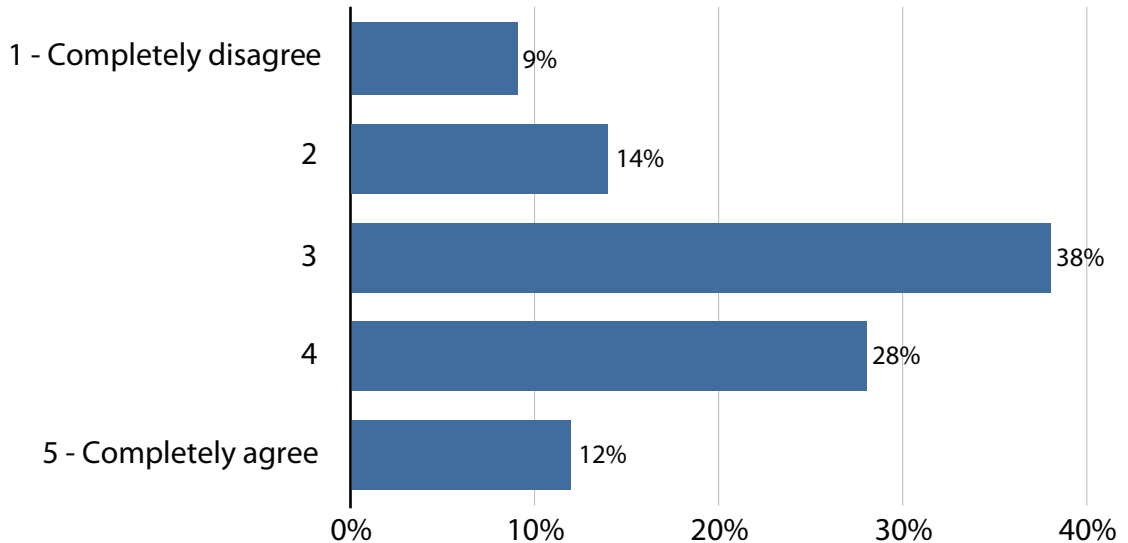


Consulting special interest groups

When asked whether 'Universities should consult special interest groups' about holding events, the neutral option was the preferred choice of 38% of undergraduates.

A similar proportion (40%) opted for one of the 'agree' options, with less than one-in-four (23%) expressing any level of disagreement.

Universities should consult special interest groups (e.g. religious societies or gender societies) about on-campus events



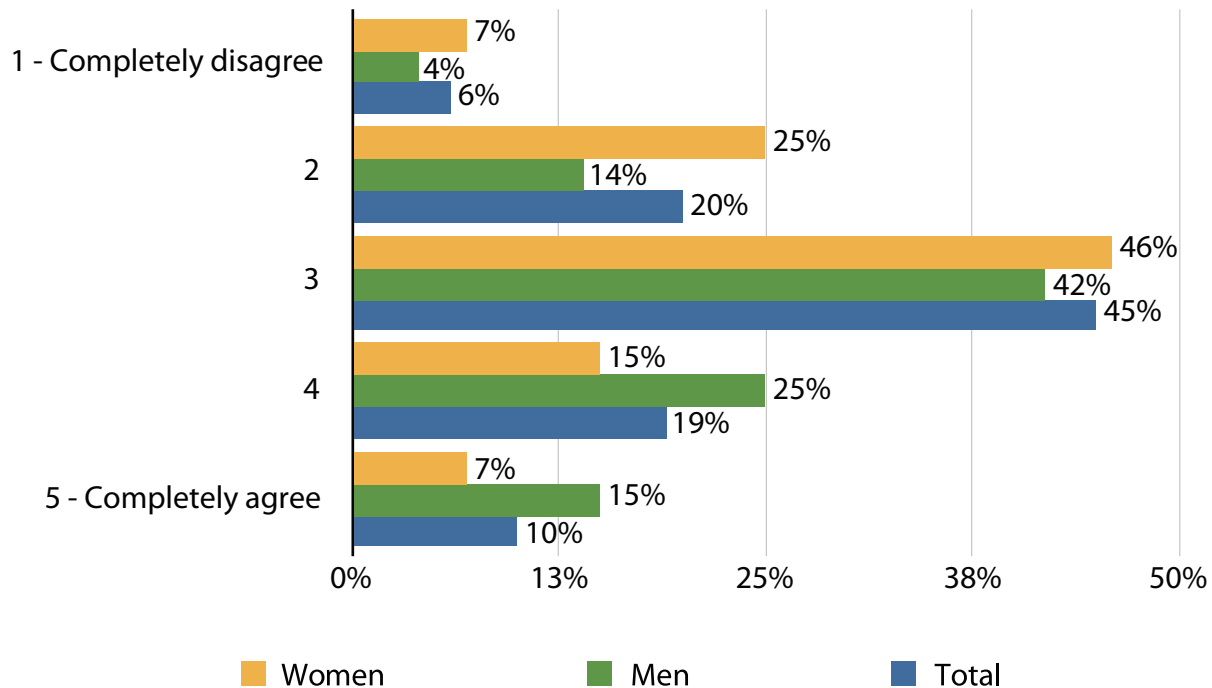
Cancelling events

When asked whether 'a university should never back down from an event', 26% of students express some disagreement with this idea while 29% agree.

The results differ markedly by gender as nearly twice as many male students (40%) agree as female students (22%).

Yet again, the most neutral option is by far the most popular, with not far off one-half (45%) of students choosing it.

Even if some people might protest, a university should never back down from an event



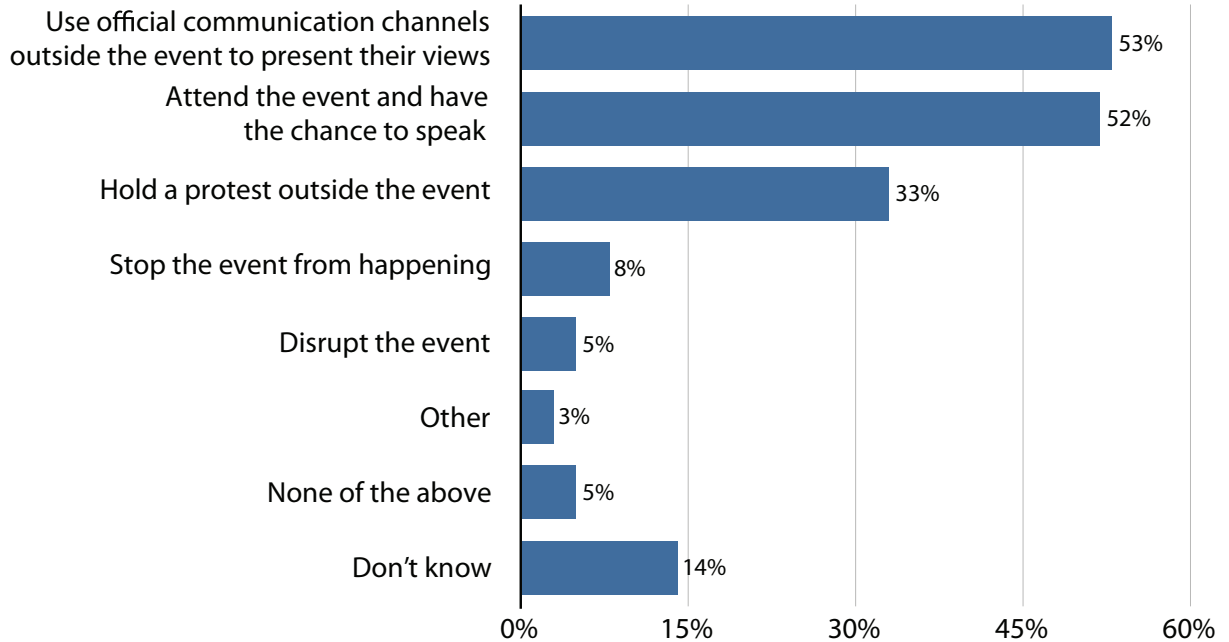
Protesting

Respondents were asked what reaction people who are unhappy with a specific event should be able to take.

A slim overall majority thought it was appropriate to be able to 'Use official communication channels outside the event to present their views' (53%) and a similar proportion (52%) thought they should be able to 'Attend the event and have the chance to speak'.

One-third (33%) thought holding a protest outside should be allowed but far smaller numbers regard blocking the event from happening (8%) or disrupting it should be allowed (5%).

If some students or staff are unhappy with a particular event at their university that is taking place within the law, which of the below actions should they have the right to carry out?

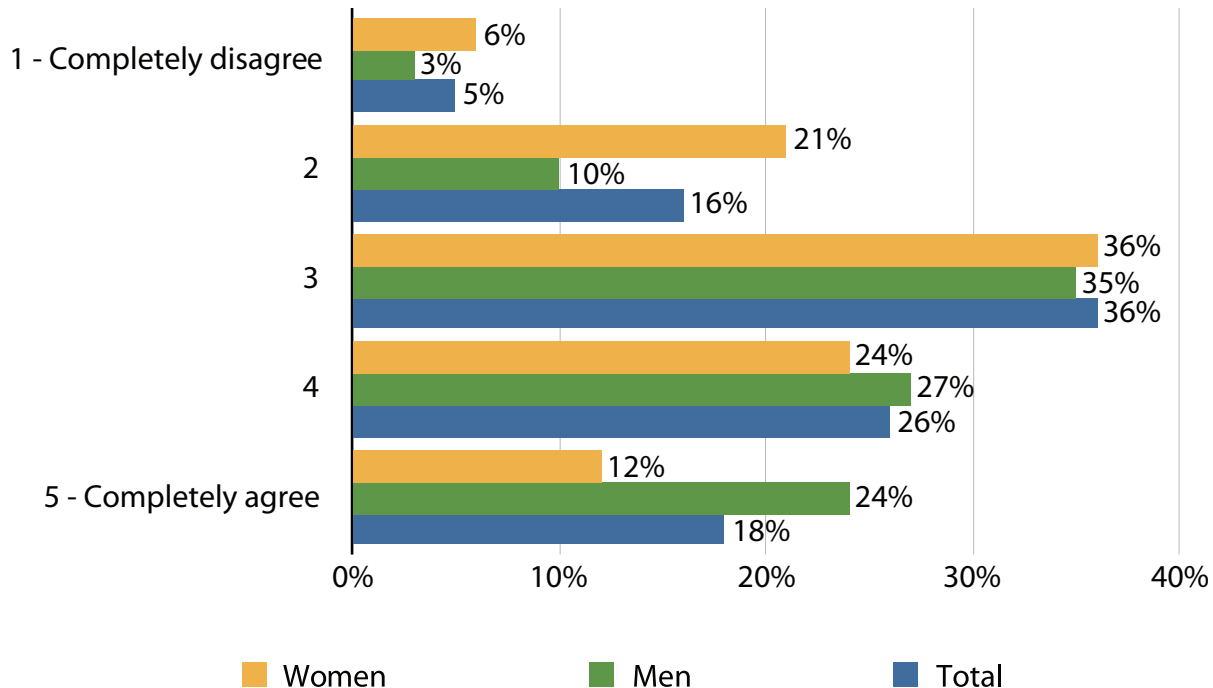


Student societies

There is notable support, including from over half of male undergraduates (51%), for the idea that many student societies 'are overly sensitive'.

While over one-in-four female students disagree (27%) compared to just 13% of men, yet again the most popular single answer, chosen by over one-third of men and women (35% and 36% respectively), is the most neutral one.

I think that a lot of student societies today are overly sensitive



Gender segregation

At some university events, men and women have been asked to sit apart from one another. This has proved controversial and, in 2013, guidance on the issue from Universities UK, which said gender segregation was sometimes acceptable, was withdrawn after criticism from David Cameron.⁶

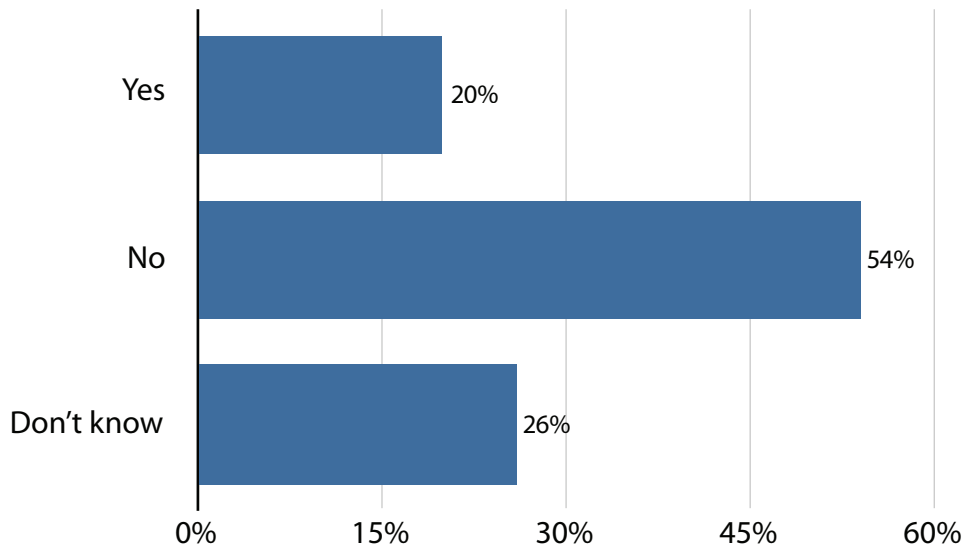
In the aftermath, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) issued new guidance. This distinguished between academic activities, where 'Segregation by gender is clearly not permitted', and other activities: 'Genuinely voluntary gender segregation does not cause disadvantage and is therefore permissible.'⁷

It is not clear that this guidance reflects the position of most students, as a majority (54%) think gender segregation should not be allowed even 'where it is a key part of the culture or religion of the student group involved'.

One-in-five (20%) disagree and a further one-in-four (26%) felt unable to express a view. The results themselves are not broken down by gender here because there were no material differences in views between men and women.

These responses could be interpreted as offering some useful protection to women, in particular. Yet, given the EHRC advice, they could also be interpreted by some as dressing up illiberalism as liberalism.

In your opinion, should gender segregation be allowed at official university events where it is a key part of the culture or religion of the student group involved?



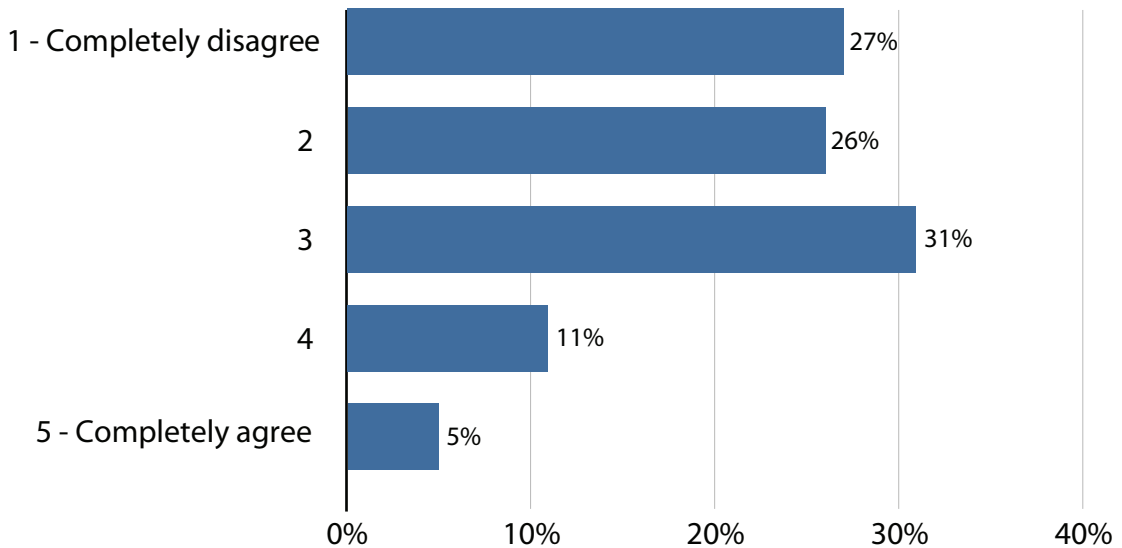
Student unions

In line with the strong support for free speech, only a small minority of students think 'Students' unions should ban all speakers that may cause offence to some students', with 11% opting for the milder of the two 'agree' options and a further 5% opting for 'Completely agree'.

Nonetheless, the opposition to the concept of banning all offensive speakers is not unequivocal, as only a little over half (53%) express complete or partial disagreement with the idea.

Almost one-third (31%) opt for the most neutral option, halfway between agreement and disagreement.

Students' unions should ban all speakers that may cause offence to some students



No Platform

The National Union of Students, which is a confederation of 600 student unions in further and higher education, has a No Platform policy, which bars people deemed to hold 'racist or fascist views' from standing for election or attending conferences, and also bans NUS representatives from sharing a platform with individuals thought to hold racist or fascist views. The policy states:

*any individuals or members of organisations or groups identified by the Democratic Procedures Committee as holding racist or fascist views shall not be allowed to stand for election to any National Union office, or go to, speak or take part in National Union conferences, meetings or any other National Union events, and Officers, Committee Members and Trustees shall not share a public platform with an individual or member of an organisation or group known to hold racist or fascist views.*⁸

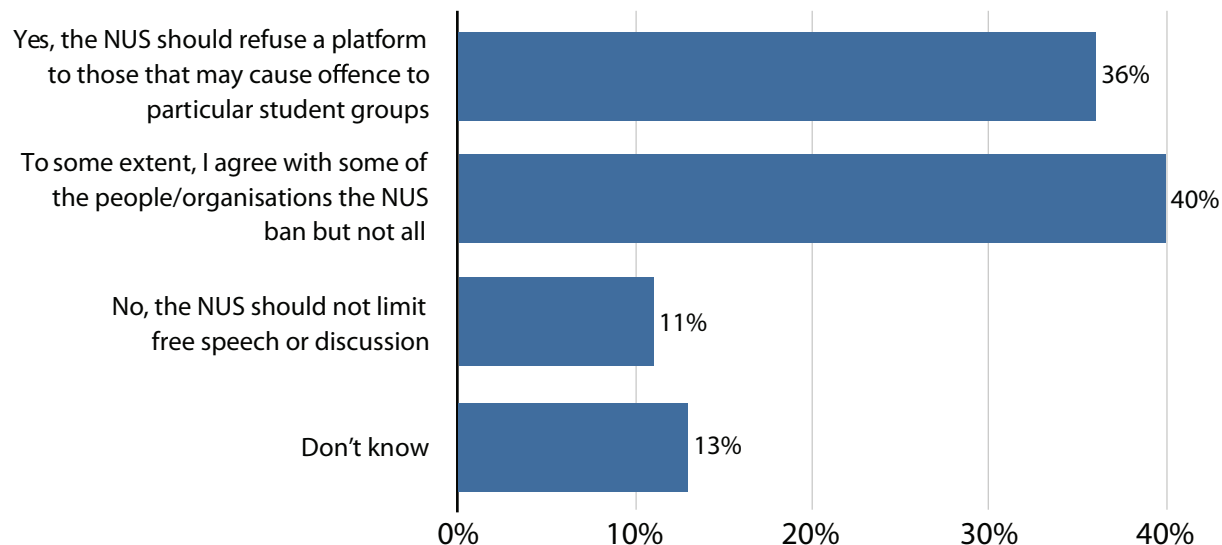
The organisations currently caught by the No Platform policy are: Hizbut-tahrir; Al-Muhajiroun; the Muslim Public Affairs Committee; the British National Party; the English Defence League; and National Action. However, recent media coverage has focused in particular on whether people accused of transphobia should be welcomed or barred from speaking to students.

Despite the controversy and negative press coverage associated with the No Platform policy and the slim support for students' unions banning all potentially offensive speakers, we found considerable support for the No Platform policy.

It is supported by a majority of students, with 36% expressing unqualified support and a further 40% offering qualified support. Only 11% expressed clear opposition to the NUS's attempt to 'limit free speech and discussion'.

This support is broadly comparable to that offered in a separate poll of a similar size undertaken by ComRes for the BBC.⁹

Do you agree with the NUS's 'no-platform' policies?



Political parties

Respondents were not informed of the groups currently caught by the No Platform policy. However, they were given a list of political groups and asked to state which, if any, 'should be banned from speaking at events held at higher education institutions'.

The British National Party topped the list with 31% of the vote. UKIP (27%) and the English Defence League (26%) were also chosen by more than one-in-four students.

Much smaller proportions favour a ban on other political parties, although the Communist Party was chosen by nearly one-in-ten students (9%).

A considerable minority of students (27%) thought none of the parties on the list should be banned, while a further 23% chose 'Don't know'.

Which political parties, if any, do you think should be banned from speaking at events held at higher education institutions?

British National Party (BNP)	31%
UKIP	27%
English Defence League	26%
Communist Party of Great Britain	9%
Conservative Party	6%
Sinn Féin	5%
The Scottish National Party (SNP)	4%
Ulster Unionist Party	3%
The Labour Party	3%
Socialist Workers' Party	3%
The Green Party	2%
Democratic Unionist Party	2%
Plaid Cymru	2%
The Liberal Democrats	2%
Social Democratic and Labour Party	2%
Other	2%
None of the above	27%
Don't know	23%

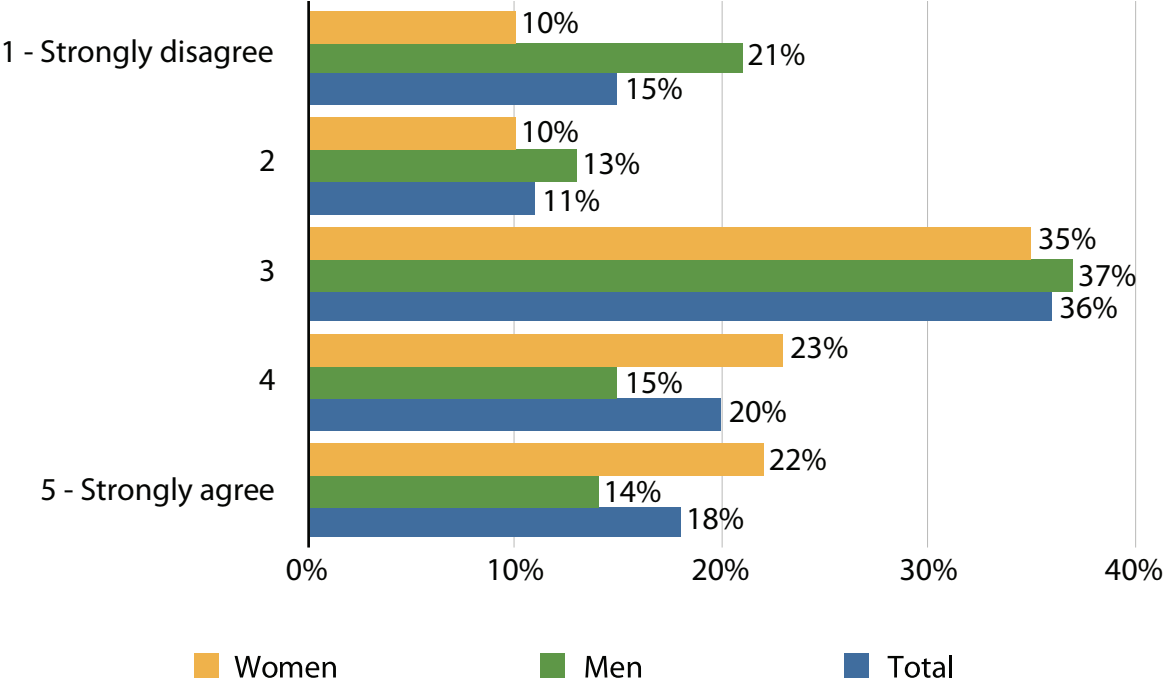
Tabloid newspapers

The questionnaire also covered the tendency of some student unions to ban tabloid newspapers.

The responses showed a wide disparity of views: over one-third (36%) of students opted for the most neutral option, but 38% expressed some support for such bans while 26% chose one of the two disagree options.

Men were somewhat less likely to express support for bans than to oppose them (29% versus 34%). In contrast, women were considerably more likely to agree than disagree (45% versus 20%).

Some student unions refuse to sell certain tabloid newspapers in their shops on the grounds that they display sexist views. To what extent do you agree with this policy?

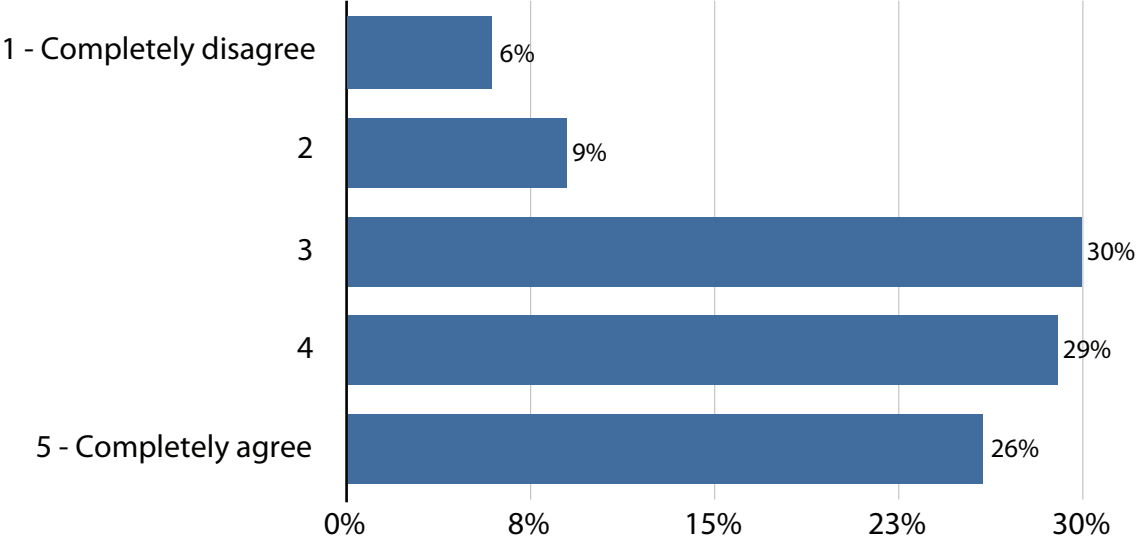


Staff training

Over half of full-time undergraduates believe that training about other cultures should be mandatory for all university staff, with 26% saying they 'Completely agree' and a further 29% plumping for the milder agree option.

Only 15% opted for one of the two negative options, but twice as many (30%) opted for the most neutral answer.

Training that teaches the ability to understand other cultures should be mandatory for all university staff



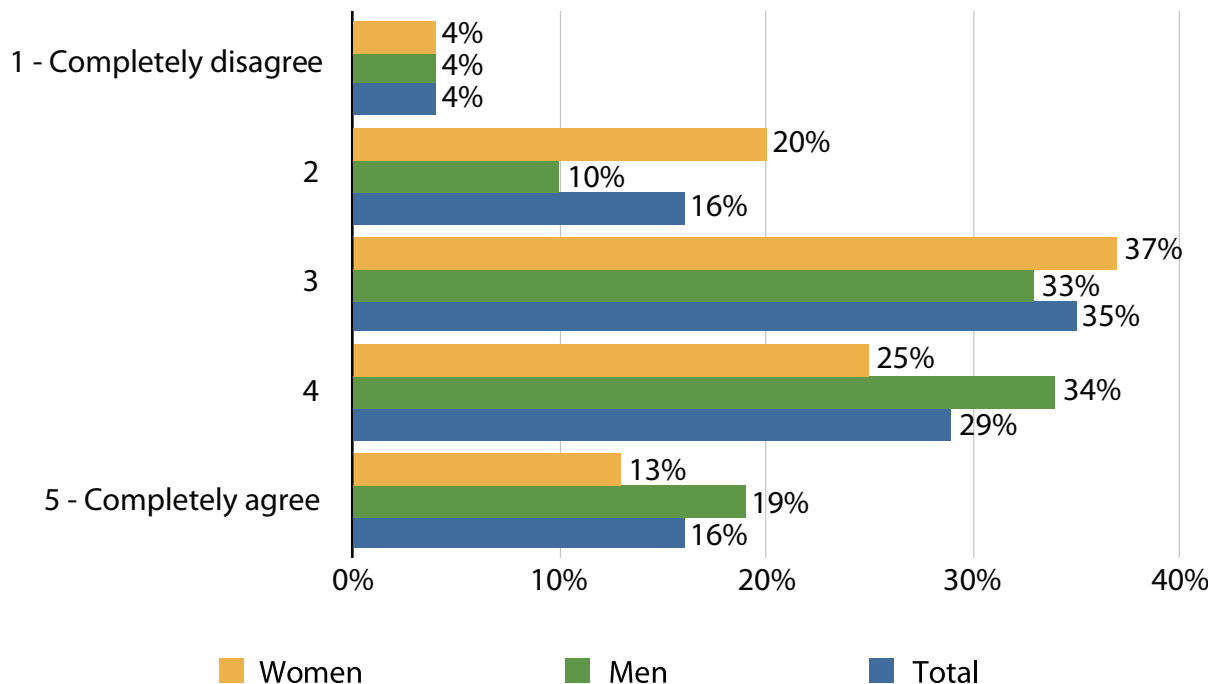
Freedom to teach and research

When asked whether academics should be free to teach and research what they like, almost half (45%) of full-time students at UK higher education institutions opted for one of the two agree options, but 20% disagreed and 35% opted for the neutral option.

The views differ by gender: over half of men (53%) agreed compared to 38% of women. Around one-quarter of women (24%) disagreed compared to 14% of men.

No distinction was made between teaching and research in the question and some respondents may have chosen to give more weight to one than the other. It is possible that splitting teaching from research would have elicited different responses.

Academics should be free to research and teach whatever they want

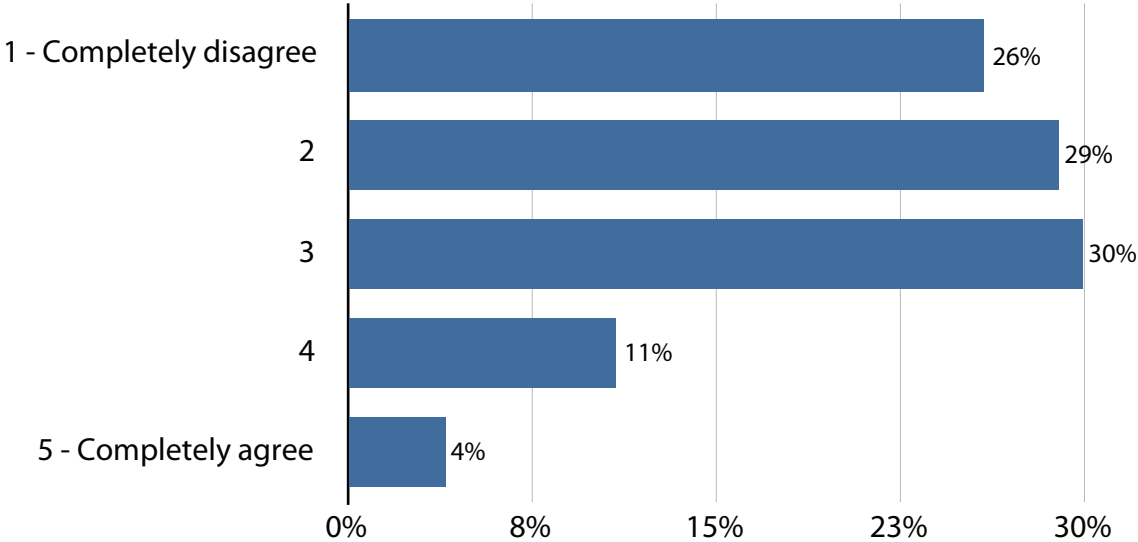


Teaching materials

When asked whether university staff who teach material that heavily offends some students should be sacked, only 15% opt for one of the two agree options.

A slim majority express disagreement, split fairly evenly between those who 'Completely disagree' (26%) and those who opt for the less strong disagree option (29%).

If academics teach material that heavily offends some students, they should be fired



Safe spaces

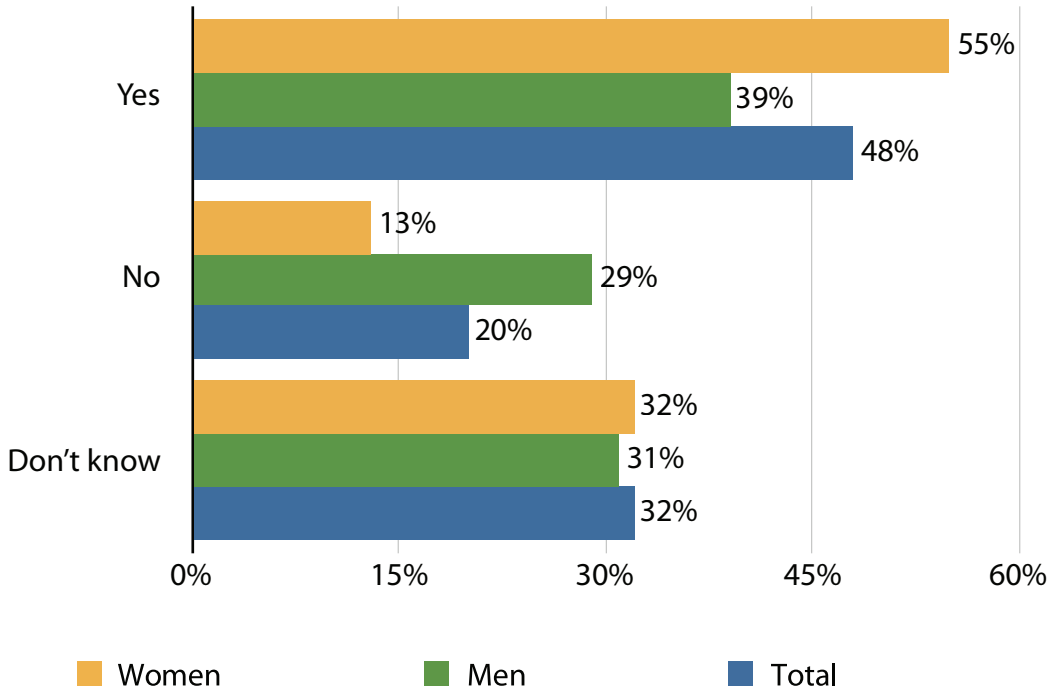
Respondents were provided with basic information on the safe-space concept, which said:

There have been calls for universities to be run as safe spaces, so that debate takes place within specific guidelines in order to ensure people do not feel threatened because of their gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity. This might include anti-discrimination and anti-harassment measures in official university missions, value statements in universities' official communications and staff training.

However, opponents of safe space policies fear free speech might be suppressed and differing political views stifled as a result of safe space policies.

When asked for their views on safe spaces, around one-third (32%) of students prefer not to express a preference but almost one-half (48%) support the safe-space idea (including 39% of men and 55% of women), with a much smaller proportion opposing it (20%).

Do you think universities should adopt safe spaces policies?



Trigger warnings

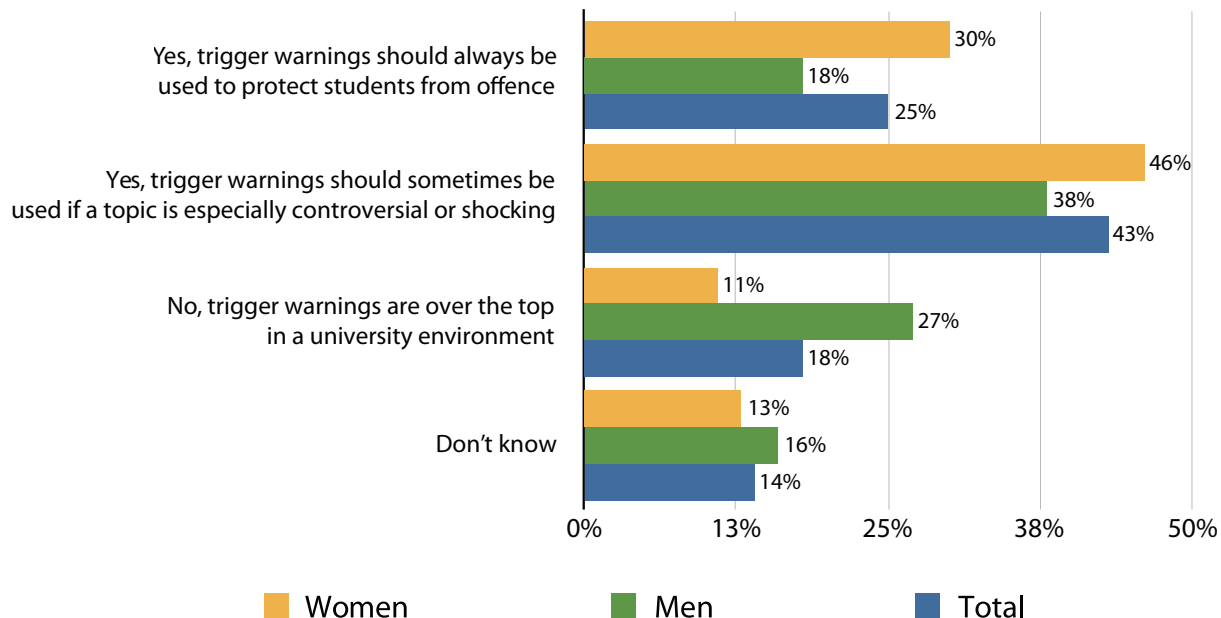
The students were asked whether lecturers should use trigger warnings to warn students in advance of tricky subjects, such as issues associated with sexual consent, so that those who wish to leave could do so. The precise wording given to respondents said:

In many higher education courses, such as English literature or Law, difficult issues are sometimes discussed that some people may find uncomfortable – for example, issues around sexual consent. It has been suggested that lecturers should use ‘trigger warnings’ to warn students in advance so that those who wish to leave can do so.

The survey found considerable support for the concept, but less support for blanket trigger warnings than for more nuanced use: 43% of students say trigger warnings should be used for material that ‘is especially controversial or shocking’ and an additional one-in-four (25%) think ‘trigger warnings should always be used to protect students from offence’.

Only 18% of respondents oppose the use of trigger warnings altogether, while a further 14% opted for ‘Don’t know’.

Do you agree with this idea [trigger warnings]?



Library resources

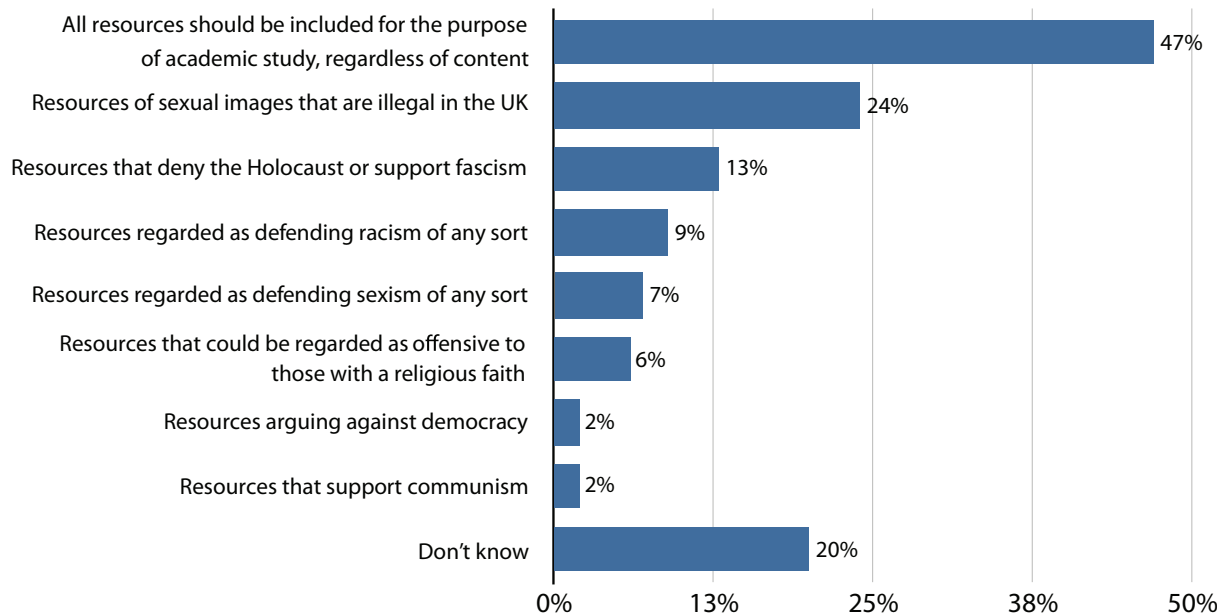
We also asked whether any resources that could be used for academic study should be banned from university libraries.

Nearly one-half (47%) of respondents said no such resources should be banned.

The next most popular response was to ban illegal sexual images (24%), with nearly as many opting for 'Don't know' (20%).

Smaller numbers opposed the availability of fascist (13%), racist (9%) and sexist (7%) materials and those potentially offensive to people with a religious faith (6%).

In your opinion, should any of the following resources be banned from university libraries even if they can be used for academic study?



Prevent

Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015), higher education institutions are expected 'to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.' In practice, this places a number of clear duties on them, which has proved controversial.

In 2015, Malia Bouattia, who has since been elected as the President of the National Union of Students for 2016/17, called the Home Office's Prevent Strategy an 'Islamophobic package.' Such remarks have helped encourage a perception that there is considerable opposition to the Prevent Strategy on university campuses.

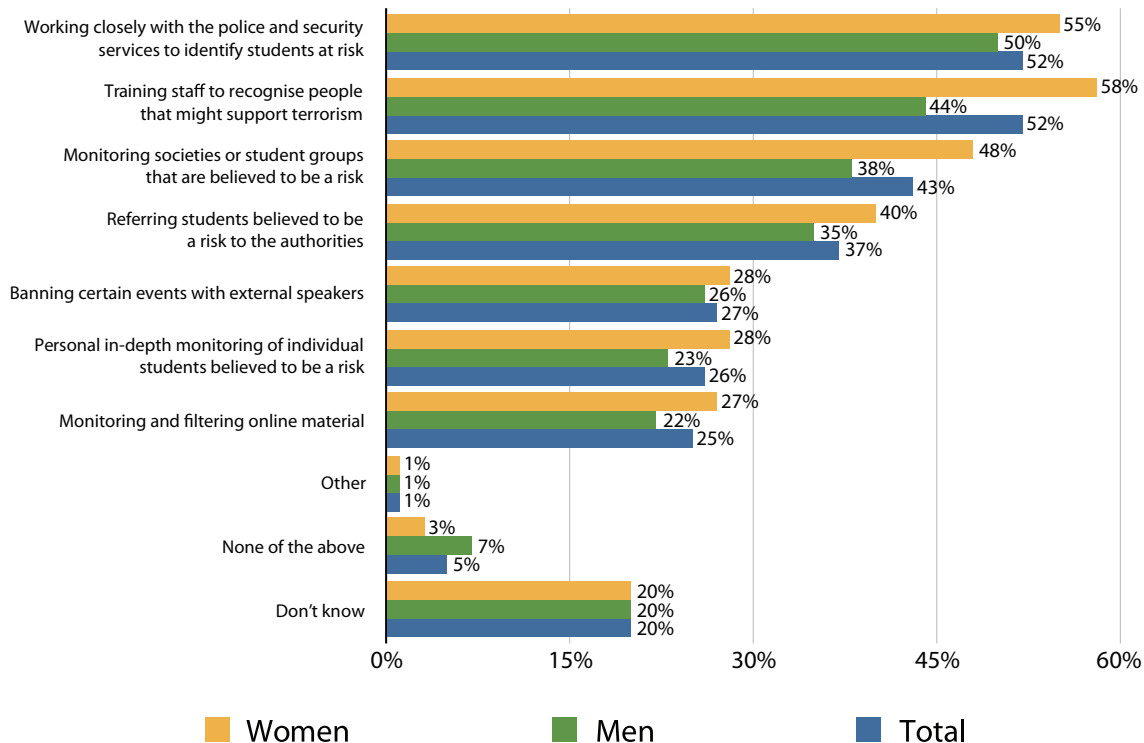
However, while some strong opposition does exist, many full-time students think it is reasonable for universities to undertake some of the sorts of duties that the Prevent Strategy expects of them.

When given a list of the things that a university might do to discourage terrorism, slightly over half (52%) said it was reasonable for universities to work with the police and security services to identify students susceptible to terrorism.

The same proportion of respondents supported the provision of training for staff (52%), with somewhat lower but still substantial support for monitoring certain student societies (43%) and referring students who might be at risk to the authorities (37%).

Only 5% opted for 'None of the above' – although one-in-five (20%) students plumped for 'Don't know'.

Which of the below measures do you think are reasonable for universities to undertake to prevent terrorism?



Memorials

Respondents were provided with the following information on the issue of university memorials.

Many universities accepted gifts in the past from people whose views are often regarded as outdated today, and still have memorials for those donors.

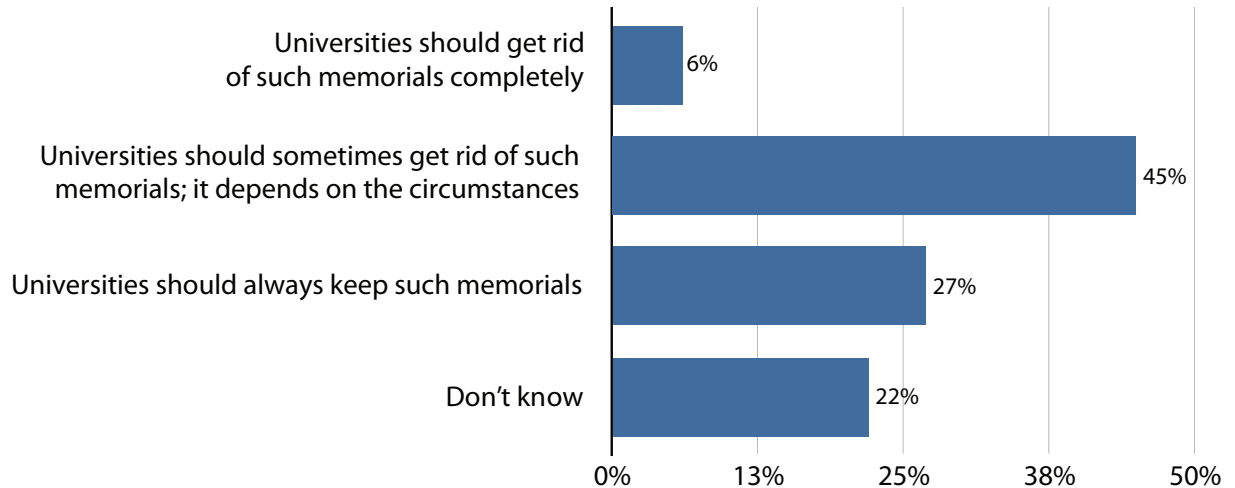
Advocates for removing such memorials say universities should reflect modern opinion and consider the potential offence such memorials might cause. Opponents of removing them say these memorials are part of a university's history from a different time, and that history should not be rewritten in accordance with today's morals.

The survey then asked what universities should do with such memorials today. There was very little support – just 6% of respondents – for a blanket eradication of such memorials at universities.

However, considerable support was expressed for dealing with them on a case-by-case basis, with 45% of students opting for this option.

Fewer students (27%) think universities should always retain such memorials, with nearly as many (22%) opting for 'Don't know'.

From your point of view, what should universities do today regarding such memorials?



Conclusion

Our data do not reveal a straightforward story. They could be used as evidence to show that students are confused, wrong or right.

1. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that our full-time student sample are confused, given the gap between their support for free speech and many of their other responses, where significant numbers apply strict limits to free speech and many students opt for the most neutral options. As Joanna Williams, an academic at the University of Kent who has considered these issues in detail, warned us at the start of the project, the argument that 'censorship is free speech' appears on many university campuses, which 'can make gauging attitudes complicated.'¹⁰ In other words, there are grounds for thinking that some students believe censorship protects freedom.
2. It could be argued, more pessimistically, by those who believe universities should be places of free thinking that many of today's students are plain wrong. Do they misunderstand the role higher education institutions have generally fulfilled in pushing boundaries of debate and knowledge? When given the chance to say free speech should be curtailed to limit offence and to engender feelings of safety, there is considerable opposition to the concept of universities as danger zones. The opposition of some student representatives to the Prevent Strategy on the grounds that it restricts freedom sits uneasily with their readiness to ban the expression of views they do not like.

3. Or it could be argued that students are approaching the inherently difficult question of where freedom should be curtailed in an appropriately nuanced way. Many of us, when confronted by black-or-white options, might express support for free speech over the alternatives, while simultaneously expressing sympathy for the protection of people's safety when the issues are posed in more specific ways.

The key question is whether the right balance is currently being struck on university campuses. There is evidence in these responses to suggest the pendulum among students has swung too far in favour of limiting free speech. Where else, other than in higher education, is there the knowledge, resources and time to debate so many global issues freely? Moreover, given the growing tendency in many countries – including the United Kingdom – to focus on metrics like student satisfaction, which can fall when students are challenged and tested, there is little evidence that this picture is about to change.

Above all, the results serve as a reminder that today's school leavers are still young. Leaving home for the first time to enter a new environment where debate could and should thrive can be a daunting, bewildering and even unsettling experience. The fact that, on many questions, the most neutral answer or 'Don't know' scored so highly is notable.

Perhaps the overwhelming message from the survey is that higher education institutions need to help their students, particularly their younger students, through the thicket. It has become a cliché to say students are partners in learning, but they need to be led too. Where free speech

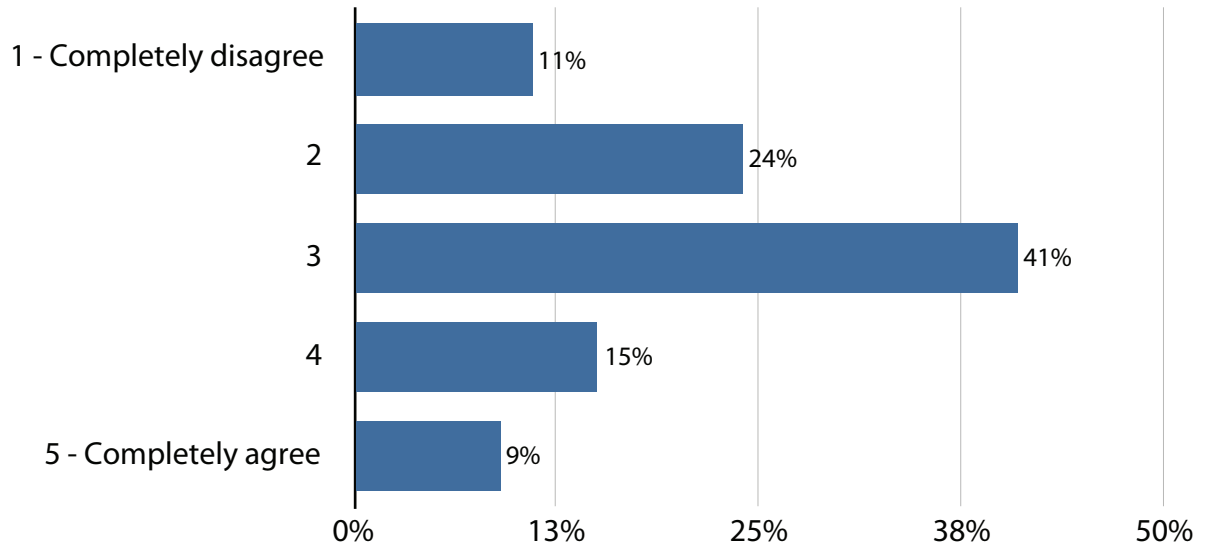
is curtailed to the extent that it is limiting a university's core functions, it should be brought out into the open for debate among both students and staff.

Furthermore, it might be argued that universities have a responsibility to open up minds and reduce bigotry. The social benefits of higher education include greater civic engagement, lower propensity to crime and even greater life expectancy. They should also include a lower tendency to extremism. As Louise Richardson, an expert in extremism, put it prior to taking up her post as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, 'education is the best possible antidote to radicalisation.'¹¹ Exposing rather than barring unpalatable arguments may be the best way to ensure this occurs in the long run.

Finally, much of the recent media coverage of issues related to free speech on campus typically portrays the past as more liberal than the present. This argument is not always easy to sustain because earlier decades saw vibrant debates about the limits of free speech on university campuses too. The underlying issues often remain the same even if the contemporary prisms through which they are discussed change.

When asked to assess whether 'Universities are becoming less tolerant', full-time undergraduate students are more likely to disagree than agree (35% versus 24% per cent), although – yet again – a high proportion (41%) opt for the most neutral option.

Universities are becoming less tolerant of a wide range of viewpoints



Endnotes

- ¹ Wave 1 focused on students' attitudes towards the forthcoming referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union and also on teaching in higher education institutions. The results were reported in: Nick Hillman, *Should we stay or should we go? What students think about the forthcoming referendum on the UK's membership of the EU: Wave One of the HEPI / YouthSight Monitor*, HEPI, November 2015; Nick Hillman (ed.), *Response to the higher education green paper*, HEPI, January 2016; and Nick Hillman and Nicholas Robinson, *Boys to Men: The underachievement of young men in higher education – and how to start tackling it*, HEPI, May 2016.
- ² Aftab Ali, 'Ntokozo Qwabe: Student who accused Oxford of propping-up "existence of systemic racism" says he is "tired" of being asked why he goes to the university', *Independent*, 30 December 2015
- ³ Harry Mount, 'It's time to say No to our pampered student emperors', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 December 2015
- ⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, 'Rhodes hasn't fallen, but the protesters are making me rethink Britain's past', *Guardian*, 4 March 2016
- ⁵ For a detailed study of young men in higher education, see Nick Hillman and Nicholas Robinson, *Boys to Men: The underachievement of young men in higher education – and how to start tackling it*, May 2016

- ⁶ Rajeev Syal and Matthew Weaver, 'Universities UK withdraws advice on gender segregation in lectures', *Guardian*, 13 December 2013
- ⁷ Equality and Human Rights Commission, *Gender Segregation at Events and Meetings: Guidance for Universities and Students' Unions*, July 2014, p.2 and p.5
- ⁸ National Union of Students of the United Kingdom, *Articles of Association and Rules*, January 2016, Paragraph 7
- ⁹ <http://www.comres.co.uk/polls/bbc-victoria-derbyshire-no-platform-poll/>
- ¹⁰ Joanna Williams, e-mail to the author, 8 February 2016
- ¹¹ 'Education is antidote to extremism, says new Oxford head', BBC News Online, 2 June 2015

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Wave 2 of the HEPI / YouthSight Monitor focuses on freedom and the limits of freedom at UK higher education institutions, including: free speech; freedom from discrimination; No Platform policies; gender segregation; academic freedom; safe spaces; trigger warnings; library resources; and even whether it is appropriate for student unions to ban the sale of tabloid newspapers.

The results show strong support for the principle of free speech but also considerable support for mechanisms that limit free speech. The data could be interpreted as suggesting that full-time undergraduate students are confused, plain wrong or are responding to complicated issues in complicated ways. Whichever it is, we conclude that higher education institutions need to do more to debate and discuss these issues with their students.

HEPI was established in 2002 to influence the higher education debate with evidence.

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