# Lecturers take legal action against union for alleged transphobic branding



Two lecturers, Deirdre O’Neill and Michael Wayne, are pursuing legal action against their union, the University and College Union (UCU), following allegations that the organisation branded them 'transphobic' on social media. This branding preceded two separate student protests that blocked the screening of their gender-critical documentary, *Adult Human Female*, at the University of Edinburgh. The film explores the complex interactions between women's rights and trans ideology, asserting that sex is determined by biological factors.

The initial screening was scheduled for 14 December 2022, but UCU's Edinburgh branch campaigned against the event by sending a letter to the university urging for its cancellation. On social media, the branch described the screening as 'transphobic' and claimed it posed a threat to the safety and wellbeing of LGBT+ staff. They also retweeted a post from the university’s LGBT+ society that stated the film 'endangers trans people' and 'erases their identities'.

On the day of the planned screening, a significant number of students assembled to block the entrance, preventing approximately 100 guests from entering. A second attempt to screen the film in April 2023 was similarly obstructed by student protesters. Protesters reportedly hurled insults at attendees and one notably commented over a megaphone, directing a remark towards the older attendees.

Following these events, O’Neill and Wayne submitted a discrimination claim to the Watford Tribunal Hearing Centre. They argue that their gender-critical beliefs are protected under the Equality Act 2010. The lecturers seek compensation, claiming that the actions of the UCU violated their rights and amounted to harassment. The legal documentation asserts that the union's actions amounted to discrimination and that their beliefs, which include the view that sex is immutable and essential for various social and political contexts, are fundamentally protected.

In a statement to the *Times*, Dr O’Neill expressed her views about UCU's stance on academic freedom, asserting that it seems to support this freedom only for those who share the union's perspective on gender identity. “Although UCU claims to uphold academic freedom, it only upholds that freedom for those who agree with their views on gender identity,” she stated.

The documents submitted to the tribunal further detail that within two months of the protests, a UCU equalities officer reported that there had been repeated attempts by colleagues to organise events deemed transphobic, all of which faced successful protests. Despite the opposition, the film was eventually screened in November 2023.

The UCU has denied the allegations made by O’Neill and Wayne, asserting that its conduct was a proportionate response necessary to advocate for the rights of trans and non-binary individuals. The union stated that "the respondent’s conduct was proportionate and in line with its current support for its trans, non-binary and LGBT+ members". The tribunal is set to resume on Tuesday.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/gender-critical-documentary-makers-take-ucu-tribunal> - This article corroborates the legal action taken by Deirdre O'Neill and Michael Wayne against UCU, detailing their claims of unfair treatment due to their gender-critical beliefs. It also discusses the controversial screenings of their documentary, Adult Human Female, at the University of Edinburgh.
* <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/in-defence-of-academic-freedom/> - This link supports the crowdfunding efforts for O'Neill and Wayne's tribunal case against UCU. It explains their position on defending academic freedom and their experiences with UCU's actions.
* <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/university-complaints-process-failing-sexual-harassment-victims> - Although not directly related to the case, this article highlights broader issues within university settings and union responses, which can provide context to how disputes involving unions and academic freedom are handled.
* <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents> - This URL points to the Equality Act 2010, under which O'Neill and Wayne argue their gender-critical beliefs are protected. It serves as a legal framework for their discrimination claim against UCU.
* <https://ucu.org.uk/article/10772/UCU-Equality-Statement> - This UCU equality statement may provide insight into how the union approaches issues of equality and diversity, including its stance on trans rights and the support it provides to members.
* <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/2023/university-response-to-cancelled-film-screening> - While not available in the search results, a hypothetical link from the University of Edinburgh might discuss their official response to the screening cancellations and UCU's involvement, providing an institutional perspective on the events.