# University of Aberdeen transgender row escalates as students demand concrete action after transphobic incidents



An open letter from students and academics at the University of Aberdeen has brought to light significant concerns regarding the treatment of transgender individuals within the institution. These issues include incidents of “transphobic hate material” appearing on noticeboards and the vandalism of trans-inclusive posters—a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges facing LGBTQ+ communities in educational environments. The letter urges university management to implement a "concrete action plan," which includes establishing disciplinary processes for policy violations, conducting an externally-led diversity and inclusion audit, and mandating trans-inclusive Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training for all staff.

This ongoing tension at Aberdeen has been building for years, particularly escalating over the past eighteen months. One notable flashpoint was a planned diversity training session featuring Simon Fanshawe, a gender-critical broadcaster and co-founder of Stonewall, which faced extensive backlash before being cancelled. Critics from the student body viewed the invitation as a disregard for their safety and well-being, alleging that it undermined the principles of inclusivity that the university claims to uphold. Fanshawe has publicly denounced Stonewall as a "propaganda machine," further polarising opinions within the academic community.

In light of their frustrations, students noted in the updated letter, “As of the 23 of April 2025, we have yet to receive any response.” The silence from university management, they argue, necessitated the publication of this letter to advocate for the safety and rights of transgender students and staff, in alignment with both university policy and UK equality law. More than 250 individuals have signed the letter, emphasizing the widespread nature of these concerns across the UK.

Amid this backdrop, personal testimonies from students reflect the resentment towards how the university navigates its commitments to inclusivity. PhD candidate Rowan Kuminski expressed frustration over the administration's perceived negligence of its own policies, stating that the university's actions seem at odds with its public displays of support for LGBTQ+ rights, particularly during Pride Month. Another student, Jack Barber, echoed a similar sentiment, criticising the university for prioritizing appearances over genuine inclusivity.

The president of the University's Students' Association, Christina Schmid, has voiced her support for the concerns raised. She stated that the Students' Union stands firmly with those who signed the letter, reiterating the need for a respectful learning environment for all students, especially those who identify as trans and non-binary. Schmid highlighted ongoing dialogues with the university to ensure that these urgent matters are addressed promptly and meaningfully.

In response to the growing concerns, a university spokesperson indicated the institution has commissioned an independent review of the complaints related to the incidents highlighted in the letter. They noted their commitment to promoting equality and respect for the rights of all individuals within the university, referencing the ongoing review as a critical step towards addressing the issues raised.

This controversy is unfolding against a broader backdrop of discussions regarding the UK's Gender Recognition Act, which has become a contentious political issue. The recent Supreme Court ruling on the definition of a woman has ignited discussions among university leaders about how to adapt their policies concerning transgender inclusion and single-sex spaces. Edinburgh University, for example, acknowledged that they would be reviewing their existing guidelines on these matters, pledging to approach any changes with compassion and legal scrutiny. Meanwhile, Glasgow University also expressed that they are “actively considering” the implications of this ruling on their policies.

The issues at the University of Aberdeen serve as a microcosm of a national debate where differing views on gender identity clash, revealing deep divisions and raising critical questions about how universities can foster spaces that are both inclusive and respectful of diverse perspectives. This ongoing situation underscores the urgent need for constructive dialogue and actionable steps to ensure that all students feel safe and valued in their academic environments.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/politics/alex-salmond-blames-trans-activists-26791094)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/support/edi/), [[6]](https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/08/23/edinburgh-fringe-something-to-believe-in-vandalism/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.aberdeenlive.news/news/aberdeen-news/aberdeen-council-candidate-slams-anti-7035857)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/08/23/edinburgh-fringe-something-to-believe-in-vandalism/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.aberdeenlive.news/news/aberdeen-news/aberdeen-council-candidate-slams-anti-7035857)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25217210.aberdeen-university-students-trans-row-publish-open-letter/?ref=rss> - An open letter from University of Aberdeen students highlights issues such as transphobic hate material on noticeboards and vandalism of trans-inclusive posters. The letter demands a concrete action plan from university management, including disciplinary processes for policy violations, an externally-led diversity and inclusion audit, and mandatory trans-inclusive EDI training for all staff. The controversy intensified after the cancellation of a diversity training event featuring Simon Fanshawe, a gender-critical broadcaster, following backlash from students and staff. The letter has been signed by over 250 students and academics from across the UK.
3. <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/politics/alex-salmond-blames-trans-activists-26791094> - Former First Minister Alex Salmond accused trans rights activists of launching a 'sinister' attack on free speech after his booking at Aberdeen University's MacRobert Building was cancelled. The event was withdrawn amid objections from trans students who claimed the Alba Party was 'transphobic' due to their opposition to Gender Recognition Act reforms. Salmond labelled the cancellation as an attack on freedom of speech, highlighting the broader debate over the proposed reforms to the Gender Recognition Act.
4. <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/support/edi/> - The University of Aberdeen is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, offering support to LGBTQ+ students through various forums and societies. The LGBTQ+ Students' Forum provides a safe space for the community, organising events and celebrating Grampian Pride annually. The Trans Students' Forum campaigns for liberation on and off campus, running various events throughout the year. The university also offers support services, including the Student Advice & Support Office and the Counselling Service, to ensure the well-being of LGBTQ+ students.
5. <https://www.aberdeenlive.news/news/aberdeen-news/aberdeen-council-candidate-slams-anti-7035857> - Aberdeen council candidate Martin Greig condemned two 'anti-trans hate posters' found in Duthie Park toilets as a 'worrying example of intolerance'. The posters, critical of the Scottish Government's proposed reforms to the Gender Recognition Act, were reported to the police. Greig expressed concern over the increasing problem of intolerance and called for the removal of such materials, highlighting the need for a more inclusive environment in the city.
6. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/08/23/edinburgh-fringe-something-to-believe-in-vandalism/> - Posters advertising Sarah Alice Shull's queer-themed show at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe were vandalised, believed to be motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry. The posters, featuring a provocative design, were ripped down by individuals caught on video. Shull expressed disappointment over the damage, noting the financial and emotional investment in promoting the show. This incident underscores ongoing challenges faced by LGBTQ+ artists in promoting their work.
7. <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/events/pride-month/> - The University of Aberdeen celebrates Pride Month with events and activities supporting LGBTQ+ communities. The university hosts events such as 'Paint Your Pride' and participates in Grampian Pride, demonstrating its commitment to inclusivity and diversity. These initiatives provide opportunities for staff, students, and the wider community to engage in and support LGBTQ+ causes.