

South Bank Atheist Society Statement

The following is an account of my attempts to set up an atheist society at South Bank University. It will show how rather than facilitating in an unbiased way, the SU have judged and hindered. I feel this has contravened my rights and shown bias against free speech & in favour of religious societies.

03/05/2013 15.30 - Meeting with the former Vice President Employability and Activities

Told, "not allowed to have debates about religion", & was not allowed to put up posters questioning God's existence. **2/12/13 14.00 Society** intern decided some posters "not suitable", refused to print them. We stood our ground, manager eventually approved them. **2/12/13** Despite having booked this event 2 weeks prior, we were told with 2 days to go that a booking had been taken for something else instead. (poor organisation or targeting?) **10/12/13 00:15am** - Received an "offended" email from an individual about our poster that said, "We can't turn water into wine but we like a lot of wine." **12/12/2013 14:00** At a meeting with the Society Intern and the President of the Student Uni., we were informed that we did not need to remove the posters, but were again asked to "consider" changing them. We declined. They also talked about the "equality and diversity act" & I felt again like I was being pressured to acquiesce (President of the AHS was present). **4/02/2014 13.30:** Second day of the fair: particular posters had been removed. Two of the Student Experience union staff said that I would be able to reprint it, however the Society Intern would not allow. Varying reasons given, it was "offensive" because it had a "naked man" and also because it involved a "religious painting". Another union staff member informed us that we had to be "considerate" and that it was reported as offensive, he would not listen to my side. There was no discussion. **5/02/2014 14.30** The next day we found that our entire stall had been removed, & the South Bank LGBTQ society had been placed there instead. The same union staff member who would not discuss with me had told them they could take down all of our posters (spent ages putting them up). We had reserved that table the entire week and even placed a "reserved atheist" sign there. The Society Intern told us that the reason we had been moved was there was also a volunteering fair and they had 'forgotten', there wasn't "enough space" for us. She asked us to go find a spare table from "somewhere". Eventually they "found space and a table". (They could have done this for the LGBTQ society?). When I requested to use another of the boards I was told that we could not "remove the posters" - although they thought they had a right to take ours down.

06/02/2014 approx 16:00 - 'Offence' student union worker openly discouraged and condemned a fellow colleague in front of us, for joining our society. Whether or not he did this in jest still does not excuse it, as a union worker he should not be expressing his beliefs in such a way. He tried to

make her feel bad for her decision & I felt it was deliberate attempt to undermine and humiliate us.

To sum up: Right from the offset officials were making biased judgements. After failing to convince me to call the society 'humanist' instead of atheist as it would be "more acceptable", they continued to decide what I could put up, when indeed they did allow me to put up anything at all. When my posters were continually removed, torn & stamped upon, they made no meaningful attempt to help. I felt harassed and intimidated - it was not aimed at protecting other students from harm, but rather an attempt to sideline and restrict our rights; perhaps perceived as the easier option rather than standing up to the (much bigger than us) "religious societies". Rather than included, we have been made to feel as an unwelcome minority of secularists.

Choe Ansari (President SBAS)

Please direct any press enquiries through the National Federation of Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Students Societies (AHS) or the British Humanist Association (BHA).