

**When Words Wound: New Limits on Academic Freedom**  
**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2019**  
**14.00 to 15.30**  
**The Edge Management Suite University of Bath**

The limits of academic freedom today, in relation to teaching, research and extra-curricular activities, are often reached when claims of harm, or the potential for harm, are encountered. It has come to be widely accepted that words can wound (see Matsuda et al, 1993) but this relies on an expansive definition of violence that takes us beyond the physical and into a psychological terrain. Meanwhile, we also have the emergence of a broader understanding of who can be harmed by speech: this goes beyond the immediate audience to encompass reputational damage to the university as well as entire sections of the population. I trace these changes to the development of thinking around intersectionality and the growing perception of young people, in particular, as increasingly vulnerable. I ask whether it is possible, or even desirable, to defend academic freedom within a marketised higher education sector that privileges customer satisfaction in the form of emotional safety.



**Dr Joanna Williams** is Head of Education and Culture at Policy Exchange and Associate Editor of Spiked. Previously she taught at the University of Kent where she was Director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. Joanna is the author of *Women vs Feminism* (2017); *Academic Freedom in an Age of Conformity* (2016) and *Consuming Higher Education, Why Learning Can't Be Bought* (2012). She co-edited *Why Academic Freedom Matters* (2017) and has written numerous academic journal articles and book chapters exploring the marketization of higher education, the student as consumer and education as a public good. In addition, Joanna has written about education, feminism and gender for many popular outlets including the Times Higher Education, Times Educational Supplement, The Spectator, The Sun and The Telegraph.

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