

## Ban 'offensive' full-face veils in ALL schools because 'they make women invisible,' urges Tory MP

- **Dr Sarah Wollaston for Totnes, Devon, say schools 'collude with making women invisible' if they allow niqab**
- **Comments come after Birmingham Metropolitan College reverses ban on full-face veils after students protest**
- **Earlier this week a judge allowed a woman to give evidence in court wearing a burqa for the first time**

By Chris Brooke



Dr Sarah Wollaston holds the seat for Totnes, in Devon. The Tory MP has said niqabs are 'offensive' and 'make women invisible'

A Tory MP yesterday urged the Government to ban full facial veils in all schools and colleges because they were 'making women invisible'.

Dr Sarah Wollaston said some women found the niqab 'deeply offensive' and should not be accused of being bigoted for criticising them.

She made the comments on Twitter following a college's U-turn last week on banning students wearing veils and before a judge is due to decide today on whether a Muslim woman can stand trial while wearing one.

Dr Wollaston, the MP for Totnes in Devon, said: 'The niqab should be banned within schools and colleges; how on earth do they promote equality when they collude with making women invisible?'

She also wrote: 'A general ban on the niqab simply won't happen in the UK but that doesn't mean that it should be endorsed by schools or courts.'

Her comments were met by a backlash from supporters of the veil, but she stood her ground against the angry criticism.

The MP said her view was 'not bigotry' and that this accusation was 'the cudgel used to repress debate'. She added: 'Feminists should be allowed to say that they find the niqab deeply offensive without being accused of being bigoted or Islamophobic.'

Prime Minister David Cameron has indicated his support for the college, but Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has admitted he is 'uneasy' about banning full-face veils.

Last week, Birmingham Metropolitan College was forced to drop its ban on students wearing full facial veils on its campus after a protest. A 9,000-name petition saw its principal back down on its policy after it was accused of 'Islamophobia'.

## More...

- [College caves in over ban on students wearing veils](#)
- [Cameron backs Birmingham college ban on Muslim students wearing religious veils but Clegg feels 'uneasy'](#)
- [Muslim woman allowed to enter plea without showing her face - but may still have to remove her veil for trial](#)

The ban stopped Muslim pupils wearing the niqab, the full facial veil in which only the eyes are visible, or the burqa where the eyes are covered with mesh. But the college was attacked for its stance by local councillors, MPs and the National Union of Students.



## HER PROVOCATIVE TWEETS

Sarah Wollaston MP @drwollastonmp



**The niqab won't be banned in the UK because too many politicians will hide behind freedom; hiding women away is a perversion of freedom.**

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**A general ban on the niqab simply won't happen in the UK but that doesn't mean that it should be endorsed by schools or courts.**

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**What if a secular woman chose to wear a full face veil in court because she did not wish to be seen by the jury? Would that be acceptable?**

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**Not pandering to anyone ...but plenty of politicians selling out women's rights on this issue.**

The Tory MP posted a string of controversial tweets in light of recent events concerning full-face veils

Among the tweets hitting back at the MP's comments were from Muslim commentator Mohammed Ansar. He said: 'Poor Sarah Wollaston's twitter feed has become a total car crash of bigotry, Islamophobia, historical ignorance and exceptionalism.'

He added: 'Do you accept and support the right of a woman to dress as she wishes?'

One woman asked the MP on Twitter: 'How about asking a woman who wears niqab what she thinks about her freedom? Or does her opinion not matter?'



A student at Birmingham Metropolitan College wears a full veil after the college reversed its position which previously banned students from wearing niqabs so they could be 'easily identifiable at all times'

The wearing of veils in public faces another test in court today.

A judge at Blackfriars Crown Court in London allowed a woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, to plead not guilty while wearing her veil last month.

She argued she was unable to remove the face covering in the presence of men for religious reasons, but as a compromise she allowed a female police officer in a room next to the courtroom to lift it to check her identity.

The judge will now decide on whether she will be able to wear her veil during her trial for intimidating a witness, as he feared jurors would not be able to see her facial expressions during questioning.

A veil ban at the Birmingham college had been in place for eight years without protest.

But an anonymous prospective student complained to her local paper, saying that she was being discriminated against, and the publicity sparked an online campaign.

Birmingham Metropolitan College is believed to be the only college in the UK to have banned the niqab. Some 43 per cent of its 44,000 students come from ethnic groups that are non white.

An online petition was signed by 9,000 people, amid rumours that the college was also planning to ban prayers on its premises.

The college was forced to amend its policy, which also covered hoodies and hats, which had been brought in to make sure students were always 'easily identifiable'.