

University atheist society ordered out of freshers' fair for displaying 'blasphemous' pineapple called Mohammed

- Reading union staff claimed fruit caused 'distress and upset' to other students
- University accused of 'pandering to the hurt feelings of the devout'

By Dalily Mail



Offending fruit: An atheist society at Reading University were ejected from the freshers' fair after displaying a pineapple labelled with the name of the Prophet Mohammed

A group of atheist students were thrown out of their freshers' fair because they included a pineapple labelled 'Mohammed' on their stall. The Reading University Atheist, Humanist and Secularist Society (RAHS) said they wanted to celebrate free speech and promote their upcoming debate 'Should we respect religion?' But they were ordered to remove the offending fruit by union staff who said their actions were causing 'upset and distress' to a number of Muslim students and other societies. RAHS refused, citing that they had labelled the pineapple after the Islamic prophet to 'encourage discussion about blasphemy, religion, and liberty'. A spokesman said: 'We wanted to celebrate the fact that we live in a country in which free speech is protected and where it is lawful to call a pineapple by whatever name one chooses.' They claimed the union then issued them with the ultimatum: 'Either the pineapple goes or you do.' According to RAHS, a group of students surrounded their stall and removed the pineapple's name tag before the society was 'forced to leave the venue' accompanied by security, it was reported in the Huffington Post. Rupert Sutton, who blogs on Student Rights, a website which claims to 'tackle extremism on campuses', said the student union was wrong to censor the society.

He said: 'Extremes of free speech should be limited to ensure that they do not become hate speech. However, students do not have the right to impose their religious sensibilities on others and they must accept that they may be offended by those who do not share their convictions. Whilst this action by the RAHS may have been provocative, they should have every right to do it. Instead of closing down debate, Reading University Student Union (RUSU) should be encouraging students to interact with one another rather than pandering to the hurt feelings of the devout.'



Issued ultimatum: Student Union staff claimed a number of people had been left 'upset and distressed' by the pineapple

In a statement given to Student Rights, RUSU said: 'The RAHS were asked to leave the Freshers' Fayre after receiving complaints from individual students about a display they had on their stall. 'They were initially asked to remove the display and after refusal were asked to leave. Our Freshers' Fayre is an inclusive event for all students. 'As the society's actions were causing upset and distress to a number of individual students and other societies attending we took the decision to ask them to leave.' Yesterday's incident comes after a row erupted at a top London University when an atheist society posted a cartoon sketch featuring the prophet Muhammed having a drink with Jesus on its Facebook page.

The president of the Atheist, Secularist and Humanist society at the prestigious University College London (UCL), Robbie Yellon, stepped down over the controversy earlier this year.

Last year, it was reported Muslim students, including trainee doctors on one of the university's medical courses began walking out of lectures on evolution claiming it conflicts with creationist ideas established in the Koran.

The portrayal of the prophet in a U.S.-made anti-Islam video have also sparked violent demonstrations around the world in recent weeks.