

Imperial College Union
Libel Reform

Proposed by the President, seconded by the Deputy President (Welfare)

The Union notes:

1. That for the past two years Imperial alumnus Simon Singh has been fighting a libel suit brought against him by the British Chiropractic Association, after he criticised their claims.
2. That although this lawsuit has now been dropped, Singh has had to fund £200,000 of costs which he will never fully recover.
3. That the author of the Guardian's "Bad Science" column, Ben Goldacre, was similarly sued after criticising Matthias Rath, who denounced Aids drugs in South Africa, promoting vitamin pills instead.
4. That the costs of fighting a libel case under English law mean that winning is expensive, losing disastrous.
5. That this situation has a "chilling" effect on scientific debate and objective assessment of potentially bogus claims, as the consequences of a libel suit, whatever the outcome, are too expensive for those without corporate backing or deep pockets.
6. That the English courts have become a common destination for "libel tourism", where foreign nationals are sued by foreign businesses.
7. That the United States is drawing up laws to stop English libel decisions being upheld in their courts, where the decision would breach the freedom of speech provisions in their constitution and amendments.

The Union believes:

1. That English libel law stifles scientific debate.
2. That our students, particularly on research courses, are at risk from vexatious libel suits should they use scientific methods to criticise the activities of others.
3. That evidence-based criticism is a vital part of scientific discourse.
4. That creating a climate where suspect claims are not challenged due to the fear of libel poses a danger to the public, particularly in the area of medical research.
5. That as students at one of the world's leading research universities, we have a duty to stand up to attacks on scientific freedom, especially when it directly impacts our students.

The Union resolves:

1. To provide support to the campaign by lobbying MPs in the next parliament.
2. To allow the campaign to use our logo on the following web-page:
<http://www.libelreform.org/who-supports-us>
3. To lobby the College to lend its official support to the campaign.
4. To advertise the issues among the students, via the Imperial College Union website and working with the student media.