

Police called as Oxford students jeer anti-abortion speakers

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Police were called to a debate at the University of Oxford when student union activists heckled anti-abortion speakers.

The Oxford Students For Life group had organised the event for Wednesday and invited speakers to discuss proposals to legalise abortion in Ireland. It said that the debate was dis-

rupted by protesters who insisted on shouting for about 40 minutes, chanting slogans such as "Pro-life, that's a lie, you don't care if women die".

Police were called after college porters failed to silence the protesters, who were escorted from the room.

Anna Branford, co-president of the group, said that people of all views were welcome to speak at the event at St John's College. Breda O'Brien, who writes for *The Irish Times*, and Lorcan

Price, a barrister, who are both anti-abortion, were present at the talk.

"One minute into her presentation, a group of approximately 15 protesters stood up and chanted slogans to shout down Breda and prevent her from being heard," Ms Branford said. "It was impossible for the committee or security to engage in any meaningful manner with the protesters.

"The union have since defended their actions, claiming that they were violat-

ing neither the principle of freedom of speech nor the law. We disagree."

An article published on the student union's website said that the protest was organised by its Womcam group, which claimed that Ireland's ban on abortion stripped women of their right to autonomy and put women's lives in danger.

"We do not believe that the speakers invited should be hosted without challenge," the union's article stated. "Womcam was advancing its right to

freedom of expression and expressing solidarity with the thousands of Irish women and people who are pregnant and subject to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment every year.

"Protesters, including some from Womcam, entered the event peacefully. Security from St John's College attempted to forcibly remove protesters from the room almost immediately. Protesters did not use force in response."