



Freedom of Expression & Speech position statement

International Declaration by Universities on Freedom of Expression

As an international group of universities, we have a strong and longstanding commitment to the values of freedom of expression. The environment of rigorous inquiry that is critical to the very function of universities as centres of intellectual challenge and discovery is being debated in our diverse jurisdictions. There are some who argue that freedom of expression in universities is being inhibited through regulation, policies, practices and culture, conversely there are others who suggest that such freedoms need to be regulated to protect individuals and communities from offensive or controversial content.

Through this declaration we, the undersigned universities, affirm our commitment to freedom of expression.

We define freedom of expression as a broad concept that includes free speech, the freedom to engage in lawful protest and academic freedom. In taking such a position on free speech we acknowledge that the laws of the state may pose various constraints on speakers and topics and that by necessity we must operate within those laws. We also acknowledge that some ideas may cause offense to our students, staff and alumni. In such circumstances it is legitimate for students, staff and alumni to exercise their freedom to protest, but again such protest must be within the law and respect the principle of free speech. Within this context academic staff have a responsibility to contribute to debate and advance knowledge by ensuring they engage with debates that they are qualified to contribute to.

There will be times when aspects of this definition will be in tension with one another. The role of each university signatory is to manage these tensions with an overriding commitment to protect freedom of expression within the law. In a time of contestation universities have a unique role to foster and debate the free exchange of ideas – facilitating how such conversations happen is a more urgent question than ever.

To support this commitment, we will:

1. Formulate and publish institutional statements on freedom of expression that uphold this declaration, taking into account context of our diverse jurisdictions;
2. Share good practice between our institutions on how to operationalise policies and statements, through both regular dialogue and online resources;
3. Promote our commitment to Freedom of Expression on Campus through public dialogue, engagement and education.

The University of London, and its Member Institutions, are fully committed to the principle, and to the promotion, of freedom of expression within the law and the vast majority of our events occur without incident.



We believe an active speaker programme is fundamental to the academic and other activities of the University and Member Institutions, and we encourage staff and students to invite a wide range of speakers and to engage critically but respectfully with debate at events.

Contentious discussion and robust debate within the law is encouraged and universities should be *the* space for this to occur. The lawful expression of controversial or unpopular views does not constitute reasonable grounds for withholding permission for an event and as such, the University and Member Institutions do not unreasonably refuse to allow events to be held on its premises.

Some speakers may prompt protest; freedom of expression means freedom to support an idea and to protest against it.

With freedom comes responsibility. It is the responsibility of protesters and supporters to act lawfully and peacefully. It is the responsibility of the University and Member Institutions to enable lawful and peaceful protest, and take action when it is not. Only in this way can we ensure that lawful freedom of expression is secured for all. *

Agreed by:

- Birkbeck College
- City, University of London
- Courtauld Institute of Art
- Goldsmiths' College
- The Institute of Cancer Research: Royal Cancer Hospital
- King's College London
- London Business School
- The London School of Economics and Political Science
- London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
- Queen Mary University of London
- Royal Academy of Music
- The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
- Royal Holloway and Bedford New College
- The Royal Veterinary College
- St George's Hospital Medical School
- The School of Oriental and African Studies
- UCL
- University of London

* Further detail is available within each Member Institution's policy, procedure and code of practice.