

## **Briefing note for managers on the display of written materials, symbols and images in the context of freedom of speech**

The University has a longstanding commitment to promoting and encouraging free debate and enquiry. This aligns with our mission to generate new knowledge, challenge existing knowledge and engage locally, nationally and internationally to create a better world. The starting point is that speech is permitted unless it is restricted by law. To this end, the University:

- encourages individuals to express themselves freely and to hold their own opinions, even if their views are unpopular or could upset or offend others;
- expects mutual respect and tolerance of those with different views;
- recognises that free speech must operate within the law.

Free 'speech' is not limited to the spoken word. This briefing note deals specifically with the display of written materials, symbols and images on our campuses and digital platforms.

There is no restriction in the use of materials, symbols and images within the context of teaching and research activities and approved events if we always act within the law. Items that individuals may find upsetting or offensive can be used within a culture of mutual respect and tolerance of different views without leading to unlawful harassment or discrimination. Controversial issues indeed present an opportunity to communicate and model the values and behaviours that underpin freedom of speech. But it is always unlawful to express support for proscribed organisations in any way, to disseminate their materials, symbols or images, or to incite violence.

The University does not take an institutional position on political, cultural and religious debates to ensure that individuals are not discouraged from expressing themselves freely within the law. That is why the display of materials, symbols and images in ways that could be construed as an institutional position on such debates, and have a chilling effect on freedom of speech, is not permitted on our campuses and digital platforms outside the context of teaching and research activities and approved events.

Heads of Schools and Institutes are accountable to the President and Principal for ensuring that the principles of freedom of speech are applied consistently across all student- and staff-led activities and spaces under their management. The Students' Union is also accountable to the President and Principal through the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech for events organised by recognised clubs and societies. Accountability in this context means:

- communicating clear expectations to students, staff and visitors in relation to freedom of speech;
- engaging constructively and consistently with individuals who display materials, symbols or images inappropriately, explaining the University's approach and exploring alternative routes for them to express their views;
- engaging constructively and consistently with individuals who raise concerns about the display of materials, symbols or images, explaining the University's approach and signposting relevant resources;
- reporting any breaches so they can be logged and addressed appropriately.