

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM AT BRUNEL UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The Council, Senate and Executive Board of Brunel University of London has approved the following statement.

- 1. *Everyone has the right to freedom of speech and access to premises within the law whatever their opinion or beliefs;***
- 2. *Brunel University of London always looks to widen debate and challenge, never to narrow it;***
- 3. *Decisions about speakers and events are taken with a presumption in favour of free speech, a presumption that an event will proceed unless mitigations are not reasonably practicable and seek to promote and protect the right to freedom of expression;***
- 4. *Peaceful protest is a protected form of expression but will never be allowed to shut down debate or infringe the rights of others; and***
- 5. *Freedom of expression will not be abused for the purpose of unchallenged hatred or bigotry. Brunel University of London will always aim to encourage balanced and respectful debate.***

Brunel University of London has therefore endorsed the five core ideas expressed by the Equality & Human Rights Commission¹.

In addition, Brunel's Royal Charter contains the following statement:

"Academic staff of the University shall have freedom within the law both to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves at risk of losing their jobs or privileges."²

All University staff, members, students, visiting speakers and persons invited or being lawfully present on University premises shall at all times assist the University to uphold the principles of this statement within the University.

The rights and freedoms expressed above are qualified by reference to what is lawful. Part A1 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 places duties on the University to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure freedom of speech within the law for members, students and employees of the University.

Brunel University of London will support freedom of speech that may be controversial or unpopular or that may shock, offend or disturb. Brunel University of London will not support unlawful speech, which for example, may incite violence or hatred towards individuals with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, amount to a terrorism related offence or cause harassment, alarm or distress contrary to the law.

Brunel will balance these restrictions with the obligation within its Royal Charter and with the law to protect and promote academic freedom.

¹ "Freedom of expression: a guide for higher education providers and students' unions in England and Wales", Equality and Human Rights Commission February 2019 (the "EHRC Guidance").

² Article 13.1, [Royal Charter](#).

Academic members of staff at the University shall be supported to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without risk of losing their jobs, privileges or having their prospects of promotion reduced.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the University's [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom](#). The Code of Practice governs the process for ensuring this statement represents practice at the University and for managing events involving external speakers. The presumption is that all speakers should not be denied access to University premises on grounds of their opinions and beliefs and that all such events can proceed unless a particular risk is identified and cannot be mitigated.

Staff, students and members of the University are therefore required to carefully consider whether any prospective speaker is likely to seek to promote views that are capable of being verified by reference to empirical evidence. The glorification of terrorism, for example, cannot be so verified and should never be promoted. The promotion of views that are unlawful, for example by a member of a proscribed group, can similarly never be permitted at the University.

Brunel has established a Free Speech Panel to consider any concerns that may be raised by staff, students, members of the University or by invited speakers. Concerns may, without limitation, relate to events that are proposed or have taken place on University premises; or concerns may relate to curriculum content. The Panel may refer concerns received for consideration under either the staff or student disciplinary procedure. The Panel may also make recommendations to Council, Senate or Executive Board.