

Freedom of Speech at the University of Glasgow

The University is a place where debate and discussion of ideas should happen as a matter of course. Freedom of expression, the right to disagree, the protection of all staff and students in their right to hold views and of academic freedom¹ are at the very heart of our mission.

The University supports the right of individuals, groups and societies to arrange events, conferences, lectures and seminars on challenging topics with speakers who may be controversial. We will seek at all times to enable and encourage free speech, as long as this takes place within the law and without incitement of violence, discrimination or hatred.

Staff, students and members of the public can be assured that their safety and wellbeing is paramount at the University of Glasgow. However, freedom of speech can sometimes mean upholding the right of some to offend others through their publicly expressed views or beliefs. This does not mean supporting the right to abuse. We encourage open and honest dialogue and we require that this takes place at all times within a tolerant and respectful environment.

The abuse of the principle of free speech can take a number of different forms. At its most extreme it can involve direct or incitement to violence. Actions which are intended to provoke hatred on grounds of a protected characteristic as defined in the Equality Act 2010 (for example based on an individual's and/or groups race, religion, sexual orientation, or transgender identity) or to encourage or draw people into terrorism will not be tolerated at the University of Glasgow.

It is incumbent on all staff and students to demonstrate awareness of these issues both within their normal daily lives and when inviting, promoting – or demonstrating at – speakers or events.

¹ Part 2 of the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016, paragraph 19, defines academic freedom as follows:
For the purposes of this section [on academic freedom], academic freedom in relation to relevant persons includes their freedom within the law to do the following things:
(a) hold and express opinions,
(b) question and test established ideas or received wisdom,
(c) develop and advance new ideas or innovative proposals,
(d) present controversial or unpopular points of view.

As an institution, the University is mindful of its responsibilities to ensure that our premises are not being used for unlawful purposes, including those which may compromise the enjoyment of the freedom of speech of others.

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 requires the University to have clear procedures regarding the management of events and external speakers. The University's policy on speakers and events sets out how we comply with the statutory obligations contained within the legislation whilst upholding and ensuring freedom of speech on campus.