

Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom

The Open University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas.

“By being places of debate universities are one of our most important pillars of civil society and represent a safeguard against forces that divide and undermine society. If universities are to be the innovative and dynamic organisations that push back the boundaries of knowledge in areas of science, social sciences and the humanities, they must also be places where differing and difficult views can be brought forward, listened to and challenged.”

Source: Universities UK 2011

All members of the Open University's academic community, both students and staff, have freedom within the law to:

- Hold and express opinions.
- Question and test established ideas or received wisdom.
- Develop and advance new ideas or innovative proposals.
- Present controversial or unpopular points of view.

In the exercise of this freedom we acknowledge, in line with our Student Charter, that as members of a welcoming and inclusive community we have responsibilities to each other and to the wider society to:

- Value diversity and recognise that different people bring different perspectives, ideas, knowledge and culture and that this difference brings great strength.
- Treat others with courtesy and respect, challenge inequalities, and anticipate and respond positively to different needs and circumstances.
- Respect the rights of individuals to hold different beliefs and views and to express them through appropriate contribution to discussion and academic debate.
- Communicate in ways that are clear, relevant, respectful, accurate and timely, and exemplified by transparency and constructive dialogue.

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This means that:

- We will be academically rigorous, justify our views with evidence and academic argument and be willing to recognise the gaps and weaknesses in our own arguments.
- In promoting our ideas, we will make every reasonable effort to minimise the risks of any harm, either physical or psychological, arising for any person, institution or community.
- We will be aware that some academic opinions and arguments may cause offence to some people but that this is not, of itself, a sufficient reason not to express those opinions and arguments. We will, nevertheless, be sensitive to the views of others and we will not present or challenge views in a way that is hostile or degrading.
- We respect the right of others to challenge our views, provided that it is based on accurate evidence, facts or reasonable argument and that it is thoughtful and made in appropriate fora.
- We will always be careful to distinguish between our personal views and those of The Open University or any other person, group of people or organisation with which we may be associated.
- We will consider the legal implications of our actions. We recognise that there may be consequences if we act in breach of the law and will only involve others with their express consent.
- We will reflect upon and apply these principles in our teaching, research, study, and debate.
- We will be proactive in protecting academic freedom for ourselves and for others and use it responsibly for the promotion of knowledge and understanding.

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