

# LUCAF

## *The London Principles for Academic Freedom*

- 1 Free enquiry and the pursuit of truth. Universities must prioritise the pursuit of knowledge and truth as the core principle underlying education and research. As an overarching principle, universities should have no policies and practices which may deter staff or students from asking pertinent questions, stating material facts, or collecting salient data. Restrictions on speech should be strictly limited to those that serve the purpose of creating the conditions for the free exchange of ideas, or complying with legal regulations, rather than being selectively applied to ideas, individuals, or groups.

Academic freedom and freedom of expression. Universities must actively promote freedom within the law in teaching, research, artistic expression, and speech. Academic staff must have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, and to encourage students to do the same, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their institutions. This freedom is broad, and not constrained by the boundaries of academic discipline or field. Academics should not be sanctioned or discriminated against for the expression of lawful views, including extra-mural speech and criticism of institutional policies and actions. Any consideration concerning reputational risk to the university must give way to the principle of academic freedom and free speech within the law.

- 3 Pluralism. Universities must actively encourage intellectual pluralism and should promote thoughtful engagement with a range of views. Institutions should rightly demand rigorous research and analysis and scholarly integrity, but they may not demand particular ideological, theoretical, or political commitments.

Civil discourse. Higher education must encourage open, honest, courageous, and reasoned discussion of controversial ideas, in and outside of the classroom. We must oppose harassment of and discrimination against university staff and students, including on the basis of their beliefs and lawful expression of their views. The expression of ideas, however controversial or even shocking, with the exception of speech that amounts to illegal harassment or unlawful discrimination, should not be regarded by the university as forms of harm or harassment.

- 5 The university (and its departments and formal units) must refrain from taking substantive positions in contested political debates. To do so would undermine its vital function as a forum for constructive disagreement. To protect the university as a pluralistic space, one must make a distinction between, on the one hand, supporting the rights and dignity of all students and workers within the university, and, on the other, taking institutional political, ideological or ontological positions. It is not possible to combine support for individual freedom of conscience with the imposition of a collective ideology. Taking a political stance includes not only overt statements but also the imposition of training for staff or students espousing particular ideological viewpoints, the adoption of political symbols and the flying of flags. Universities should not promote

as a matter of official policy any political agenda or affiliate themselves with organisations promoting such agendas. In sum: if an academic institution is not required to adopt a position in order to fulfil its mission of education and research, it is required not to adopt a position.

Freedom of belief and from compelled speech. While no-one in any walk of life should be subject to discrimination due to their lawfully protected beliefs, both religious and secular, such discrimination is particularly damaging in the context of a Higher Education setting. Compelled speech violates freedom of conscience and expression. Compelled speech includes the requirement or pressure to express agreement with political or social causes in words or deeds, as well as the obligation to provide certain answers to ideological questions, or signal (even if only implicitly) agreement with certain ideas in order to gain or retain employment or advance in rank or status. Neither education nor research can flourish where individuals are compelled to pretend to views which they do not truly believe. For the same reasons, universities should ensure that they do not mandate training which endorses particular political viewpoints. Recruitment and promotions policies must not reward or punish particular political perspectives. 6

7 Teacher autonomy. University teachers— not management, students, external bodies or others — should have authority in determining the content and delivery of their classes, curricula, assessments and reading lists.

Events and speakers. Universities have a vital role to play in convening discussions on challenging and controversial subjects. Holding events on difficult issues is a channel through which scholars may contribute to knowledge and understanding as a public good in a democracy. Universities must actively support academics in hosting controversial events, and endeavour to provide such assistance as is necessary to allow such events to proceed. 8

9 No heckler's veto. The university has an obligation to protect all lawful speakers and, crucially, to protect the rights of those who wish to listen and engage. Universities must support the right to peaceful protest, but this does not imply a right to silence others. The "heckler's veto" is a shorthand for attempts to silence speakers and to prevent others from hearing particular views, including through material disruption, physical force, or obstruction. The heckler's veto should not be treated as protected free speech or expression. Freedom of expression outside the classroom, either by invited speakers or in communication among students and faculty, is essential to a vibrant educational culture.

Academic governance and academic autonomy. Standards of quality and acceptability in research and teaching, are matters for the academic community and governance structures should reflect this. Democratic governance by the community of academics within an institution protects the scientific, scholarly and educational mission of the university. Other goals of the university should always be subservient to this central academic mission. No arm of the university administration should be empowered to restrict academic freedom, whether in teaching, research, or other intellectual endeavours. 10