

Freedom of Speech Policy

Policy Ref (to be assigned by IPG)	VCAG Policy Owner: Dan Shaffer
Approving Body: VCAG	VCEG Lead: Graham Pollard
Date Approved: 12 th December 2024	Review Date: December 2026

Policy Statement

The Royal Agricultural University is strongly committed to supporting, promoting and protecting freedom of speech within the law, and encourages wide-ranging ideas and views in the spirit of respectful debate and enquiry.

In actively promoting freedom of speech, the Royal Agricultural University will work closely with the RAU Student Union, which are separate legal entities, but which are subject to clear legal expectations with regard to the protection of freedom of speech when hosting events on University Property.

Scope

This policy applies to:

1. All members of the University community (whether or not employed by the University), which includes students, staff (including agency staff and contractors), the Students' Union, the Governing Council, and any person who wishes to hold an event that is in any way affiliated with the University.
2. All members of the University community in relation to their use of the internet, or similar digital platforms, including social media. Due consideration shall also be given to the University's Acceptable Use Policy.
3. External speakers approved via the University's External Speakers Policy.
4. All events or meetings that occur on University premises, including those organised by external parties, or that occur off premises that are affiliated with or otherwise endorsed by the University.

Relevant legislation / guidance

In ensuring the active promotion of freedom of speech within the law, the University will be mindful of the following legislation:

- Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023
- Section 43 of the Education Act 1986
- The Education Act 1994
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Charity Law (mainly Charities Act 2011)
- The Equality Act 2010 (including the public sector equality duty)
- Terrorism Act 2001
- Health and Safety Law
- The Prevent Duty

Policy details

The Royal Agricultural University is proud to offer all our staff, students, members and visitors, the opportunity to engage with a democratic teaching and learning environment that encourages rational debate.

We have chosen five values to underpin our learning community: Collaborative; Open-minded; Resourceful; Responsible; and Inclusive. These values underpin our education, research and engagement activities.

As a truly global institution, the University values diversity and is committed to the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech and expression. In support of these values, an atmosphere of tolerance, where personal and academic growth take place, is fundamental. This enables open discussion to debate a wide variety of ideas, to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas, some of which may be controversial or unpopular.

All staff, students and visitors have the right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas so long as they do not break the law.

The University regards the following as examples of illegal speech:

- Speech that encourages or supports violence against specific groups or individuals.
- Speech that encourages support for or participation in terrorism as defined by the Terrorism Act 2001.
- Speech that encourages or supports any other form of criminal activity.

The University recognises that its legal duties must on occasion be balanced against one another, particularly with regard to our general duty of care to staff and students, to ensure all exchanges happen peacefully and none involved feel intimidated or censored. We will ensure that any decision taken is subject to a reasonableness test (for example: where a complaint is made about a speaker or event on the grounds of perceived harassment or offence). This will include an assessment of the potentially disproportionate impact upon those who are vulnerable and protected under the Equality Act 2010.

Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the RAU to ensure that this policy is upheld and that staff, students and visitors do not receive repercussions for carrying out this policy, as long as speech does not break the law.

The Board of Governors is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the RAU meets its legal obligations.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The University values diversity and is committed to the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech and expression. In support of these values, an atmosphere of tolerance, where personal and academic growth take place, is fundamental.

Other related policies / procedures

We will ensure that there is no unfair hindrance placed on a member of the University's right to freedom of speech through any relevant policy or procedure, particularly the following:

- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure for Staff
- Our contractual arrangements for staff.
- Our contractual arrangements with students.
- Student Discipline Policy and Procedure
- Student Complaints Procedure
- Student Fitness to Study Policy
- Student Code of Conduct
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Prevent Policy
- External Speakers Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy

Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years.

Version control

Version number	Change	Name and job title	Date
1.0	-	Sara Papps, Head of Planning, Data & Business Intelligence	02.12.24