

## No Platform for Hate Speech on Campus

The purpose of this Contemporary Resolution is for students at Royal Holloway to collectively decide the policy statement for external speakers at Students' Union events and activities on campus. If approved, it will last until the end of the 2022/23 academic year, unless it is either repealed or amended by a further referendum.

### A. The Union Notes

This first section sets out some of the important context behind the policy, and background information to it.

1. Royal Holloway Students' Union (RHSU) is a registered independent charity, and is governed by a constitution approved by students. This constitution clearly gives student members the right and responsibility to make collective decisions over matters of policy pertaining to their Union.
2. Collectively, students therefore have the right to determine who they invite to their activities and events, and conversely, who they choose not to – in the same way as any other membership-based organisation can do.
3. The decision to offer someone a platform to speak implicitly classifies their views as a legitimate position, and requires resources and capacity to support any activity or event at the opportunity cost of another. As a charity, the Students' Union must be mindful of its resources, and how they are spent in furtherance of its charitable objectives.
4. Free speech is an important feature of both democracy and higher education. The exchange of ideas helps to educate, inform and clarify people's opinions. However, free speech is not the same as unlimited speech.
5. Society has always established rules regarding what is acceptable, and what types of speech should be prohibited. It is entirely democratically legitimate for students at Royal Holloway to make the same determination with respect to their own activities and events – balancing the free exchange of ideas, with a moral responsibility to restrict speech that directly causes harm.
6. Incitement to violence is the most obvious example of where speech causes harm, and is prohibited for this very reason. Legislation is well developed in this area.
7. Hate speech is another example where society has made a decision to place limits and, within England and Wales, laws prohibiting it can be found in a number of different pieces of legislation. However, this work has been identified by both the legal and political community as unfinished. The Law Commission<sup>1</sup> has explicitly acknowledged this, and at the time of writing this motion, is mid-way through a 'wide ranging review' of hate crime legislation.
8. Previously, 'No Platform' policy has focused on matters of affiliation to defined groups. For example, a 1974 'No Platform' policy adopted by NUS was specifically aimed at limiting the speech of members of organisations who were associated with, or openly supported racist or fascist views. Nowadays, individuals are able to express themselves without having the need to associate themselves with groups – largely due to the prominence of social media. Previous iterations of 'No Platform' policies are therefore a product of outdated times.

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<sup>1</sup> An independent statutory body, responsible for keeping the law of England and Wales under review and to recommend reform where it is needed.

## **B. The Union Believes**

9. The free exchange of ideas and facilitation of a healthy, civil, and safe debate amongst students is essential for the operation of the Students' Union.
10. Collectively, as members, students have the right to determine the rules that govern the exchange of ideas in their Union, and to impose restrictions that safeguard the wellbeing of members.
11. Hate speech is harmful in itself, and creates a culture that perpetuates further harm to both the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals who are the subject of it.

## **C. The Union Resolves**

12. To adopt the following definition of hate speech:

An expression of hatred toward someone on account of that person's colour, race, disability, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origin, religious belief, sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The expression should be threatening or abusive, and is intended to harass, alarm, or distress another individual or community of individuals.

13. To prevent any individual with a sustained history of making statements that can reasonably be interpreted as hate speech from:
  - i. Entering Students' Union premises
  - ii. Speaking at Students' Union events or activities in any capacity, including affiliated groups to the Students' Union
14. To mandate the Students' Union to develop a clear internal process in order to enforce this policy.