

## Proposed Amendment 1 to Grace 2 of 28 September 2020:

Change paragraph 2 of the ‘Statement’ proposed in the Grace from:

The University fosters an environment in which all of its staff and students can participate fully in University life, and feel able to question and test received wisdom, and to express new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of **disrespect** or discrimination. In exercising their right to freedom of expression, the University expects its staff, students and visitors to be **respectful** of the differing opinions of others, in line with the University’s core value of freedom of expression. The University also expects its staff, students and visitors to be **respectful** of the diverse identities of others, in line with the University’s core value of freedom from discrimination.

to:

The University fosters an environment in which all of its staff and students can participate fully in University life, and feel able to question and test received wisdom, and to express new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of **intolerance** or discrimination. In exercising their right to freedom of expression, the University expects its staff, students and visitors to be **tolerant** of the differing opinions of others, in line with the University’s core value of freedom of expression. The University also expects its staff, students and visitors to be **tolerant** of the diverse identities of others, in line with the University’s core value of freedom from discrimination.

### Flysheet

This amendment aims to make the [University Statement on Freedom of Speech](#) clearer and more liberal. Demanding ‘respect’ for all beliefs and identities makes the current statement restrictive, vague and inconsistent.

1. **Restrictive:** ‘Respect’ can be taken to imply appreciation or admiration; it rules out giving offence.<sup>1</sup> We should not be expected to respect patently false opinions concerning e.g. vaccination or climate change. Nor should the University demand respect for all political or religious identities, from white nationalism to Islamic fundamentalism.

But we must permit them to exist. That is exactly what ‘tolerance’ means: ‘willingness to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them’.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/respect>

<sup>2</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tolerance>

2. **Vague:** Many political, philosophical and scientific views are arguably ‘disrespectful’ towards the beliefs or identity of someone or other. UK universities have recently conducted lengthy and hostile investigations into, or taken disciplinary actions against, expressions of belief including support for Palestinian rights<sup>3</sup> and for gender-critical feminism<sup>4</sup>. In one current case more than 500 students petitioned Oxford University to force two Professors to include trans women in their research into women’s equality, so as not to create a ‘hostile and exclusionary atmosphere’.<sup>5</sup> One could easily imagine a public commitment to ‘respect’ being invoked to create similar pressure here. ‘Tolerance’ is more sharp-edged. Any research or speech that simply *accepts the existence* of a belief or identity counts as tolerant of it.
3. **Inconsistent:** the first paragraph of the original Free Speech Statement of 2016<sup>6</sup> commits to ensuring that ‘staff are able to exercise freedom of thought and expression within the law without placing themselves at risk of losing their job or any University privileges and benefits they have.’ This commitment offers little reassurance if preceded – as Council is now proposing – by demands that we ‘respect’ the beliefs and identities of others. Nothing in the proposed Statement settles what happens in the event of a clash between freedom of research or belief on the one hand and ‘respect’ for people’s identities on the other. Such clashes are already occurring (see the examples in 2). By deleting ‘respect’ in favour of ‘tolerance’ this amendment signals unequivocally that the University prioritizes freedom of research and belief.

In its response to this proposal Council agrees that not all views are equally worthy of respect but says it ‘remains content with the use of the word “respectful”, reflecting an expectation that debate should be open, robust and challenging but should be mindful of diversities of both opinion and identity’. ‘Mindfulness’ is as vague as ‘respect’ and potentially as restrictive and inconsistent with freedom of speech.

Given the danger of research being stifled and of academic careers being destroyed it is vital that there be no unclarity at all around our protection for free speech. We are fast approaching the point where one of our colleagues is sacked from the University for research or beliefs that ‘disrespect’ a religion, a political position or (say) a foreign regime from which Cambridge gets funding. The proposed amendment, though modest, at least removes one of the pretexts on which that could happen. We urge you to support Amendment 1.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/28/uk-students-face-disciplinary-action-over-bds-protest/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/are-academics-freely-able-to-criticise-the-idea-of-gender-identity-in-uk-universities-67b97c6e04be>

<sup>5</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-uEcZBwCylYqn1EF12Y2UuYGuFhOkBi8kaFkDEpkVWU/edit>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.governanceandcompliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/governance-and-strategy/university-statement-freedom-speech>

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