



L-Università
ta' Malta

POLICY

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Policy

POL-004-01



Approved by Senate & Council on: 23.04.2026 & 07.05.2026

Effective Date: 07.05.2026

1. Preamble and rationale

The purpose of the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression¹ Policy is to set out the University of Malta's approach to protecting and promoting free speech and academic freedom. Unlawful speech, including hate speech, incitement or harassment is formally sanctioned by law and is not intended to be in any way protected by this policy.

As the leading higher education institution in Malta, the University of Malta is committed to advancing knowledge, empowering students and transforming society through high standards of research and teaching. Cognisant of its responsibility to both the academic and the wider community, the University of Malta ensures the highest standards of integrity and professionalism in its mission.

2. The Policy

- 2.1 In advancing the attainment of knowledge through research, dialogue and debate the University of Malta recognises its responsibility and that of society to respect the integrity and dignity of persons by respecting fundamental human rights and freedoms.
- 2.2 The University of Malta is committed to the *Magna Charta Universitatum* and in particular refers to its third principle whereby a university is recognised as a site for free enquiry and debate, distinguished by its openness to dialogue and rejection of intolerance.
- 2.3 The University of Malta upholds communication freedoms, particularly the right to freedom of thought, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association. It recognises that the right to communication freedoms comes with responsibilities. The University of Malta aspires to ensure the fulfilment of its academic, social and cultural mission in respect of these rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, the University of Malta shall at all times be guided in its interpretation of the fundamental

¹ *Academic freedom* refers to the freedom for academic staff to teach, research, speak and write on academic matters without fear of censorship or penalty, crucial for advancing knowledge. *Freedom of expression* refers to the right for all members (staff, students, visitors) to express opinions, ideas, and beliefs, even if unpopular or offensive, within legal boundaries.

right to freedom of expression by the European Convention on Human Rights and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights.

- 2.4 The University of Malta is mindful of its responsibility to ensure that it is not associated with the abusive exercise of these freedoms.

3. Declaration of Fundamental Values

- 3.1 The University of Malta expects its entire community (students, researchers, academic and administrative members of staff) as well as speakers or guests, whether visiting or invited for academic or scholarly matters or debate, to be responsible for upholding the fundamental values of:

- (a) integrity based on intellectual and personal honesty and trustworthiness;
- (b) academic freedom in research and training, where all members of the University of Malta community enjoy freedom of expression and of action, freedom to disseminate information and freedom to conduct research and distribute knowledge and truth without restriction except in any such cases as may be prescribed by law;
- (c) equality and non-discrimination, solidarity, and responsibility towards others;
- (d) institutional autonomy, good governance, accountability, and social responsibility;
- (e) scholarship on critical inquiry, discovery, research and service to the community based on the search for truth, knowledge and understanding; and
- (f) right of freedom of expression, including the exchange of a wide range of opinions, the engagement in constructive dialogue transparently, honestly and with integrity, and pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness in debate.

4. Enabling Environment for Debate

- 4.1 The University of Malta prides itself as being autonomous. This autonomy helps ensure that the community enjoys both freedom of expression and academic freedom.
- 4.2 The University of Malta is fully committed to the promotion of the right to freedom of expression. It fosters an enabling environment for its community members to engage in debate where all members are able to question and test received knowledge and

ideas, and to express new ideas including controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of losing their employment, or of being discriminated against.

- 4.3 The University of Malta expects its members to be tolerant, broadminded and show mutual respect towards differing opinions and to the diverse identities of others. The University of Malta expects all its members to engage with intellectual and ideological challenges in a constructive, questioning and peaceful way, and with integrity, even if they find the viewpoints expressed by others to be disagreeable, shocking, or offensive.

5. Meeting the Responsibilities under Freedom of Expression

- 5.1 Through its academic members of staff, the University of Malta prides itself with having directly contributed to the development of the Maltese nation in shaping its culture, language and politics. All members of the academic community are dutybound to contribute to the welfare and development of society through their research and reflection.
- 5.2 The University of Malta upholds the freedom of expression of its members in expressing opinions on any matter including, for example, issues of public interest, through participation in public debate, provided such expression is done explicitly in their own name and not in that of the University of Malta.
- 5.3 All community members are responsible for their comments and expressions. They shall abide with the fundamental values expressed in paragraph 5 above and with all other Statutes, regulations, agreements and policies of the University of Malta and to be respectful of the rights and freedoms of others.
- 5.4 All academics are reminded of their role in contributing towards society's development.
- 5.5 Persons who are known to express and promote speech which does not pursue a legitimate interest, or is harmful to the development of a democratic society, such as expression which promotes discrimination, hatred, violence, terrorism, harassment or prejudice towards others, may possibly be prevented from speaking on University of Malta premises or at University of Malta events in those cases where there may exist a

manifest risk/threat to public order, personal safety, property and security. The decision to prohibit anybody from entering University of Malta premises in such instances shall be taken only on the explicit recommendation of the Commissioner of Police or his delegate. However, the freedom to express offensive, controversial or unpopular views will not in itself constitute reasonable grounds for withholding permission for a meeting or event or participation therein.

- 5.6 The right to protest is recognised as a legitimate expression of ideas and opinions, provided it respects the rights and freedoms of others, does not block debate, and ensures neither speakers nor listeners have reasonable grounds to feel censored or intimidated.
- 5.7 The University of Malta has and shall keep up to date a Code of Practice setting out the procedures to be followed by the University of Malta community in connection with the organisation of meetings and activities taking place anywhere on the University of Malta premises in line with the principles set in this policy.

Policy title: Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Policy
Policy Code: POL-004-01

Next Review Date: 07.05.2030
Target Audience: Staff and Students
Access: External
Policy administered by: University Secretary and Academic Registrar
Policy Sponsor: Office of the Rector
Policy rendered obsolete on:

Policy Author:

Name & Surname: Professor Alfred J. Vella
Job Title: Rector
Office: Office of the Rector

Policy Document History

Version 1 New Policy