

# **Making Lancaster University Students' Union a Safe Space Through Policy Implementation**

**15<sup>th</sup> September 2020.**

## **Report from LGBTQ+ Officer**

### **Purpose of Report**

This paper is for approval.

This paper is unrestricted.

### **Recommendations**

**That the committee Approve the following:**

- 1. That the committee approve the attached policy (Appendices A and B) for implementation within the Students' Union Offices.**

**That the committee note the following:**

- 2. There are no current policies in place in Lancaster University or Lancaster University Students' Union to ensure the provision of safe spaces. As a Students' Union, we must aim to meet the needs of students and represent their interests.**
- 3. The charitable aims of the Union, listed as "Objects" in our Memorandum and Articles of Association include: "promoting the interests and welfare of students at Lancaster University during their course of study and representing, supporting and advising students" (Lancaster University Students' Union, 2016)<sup>i</sup>. If students are not safe within the Union, we cannot expect them to come to the Union for representation, nor can we claim to be effectively be promoting their welfare.**

### **Report**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. "Even with a non-discrimination policy in place, many people remain unaware of the facts about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender associates. This can lead to an uncomfortable or openly hostile environment where employees feel forced to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity or anything that might reveal it. Isolation and fear results in reduced effectiveness in the workplace." (EQUAL!)<sup>ii</sup>**
- 1.2. 42% of LGBT Students have hidden their identity at University for fear of discrimination. (Stonewall, 2018)<sup>iii</sup>**
- 1.3. 7% of trans students have been physically attacked by another student or member of university staff within one year in 2017-18 (Stonewall, 2018)**
- 1.4. 22% of students surveyed said they have experienced racism at Lancaster University (Ahmed & Bharucha, 2020)<sup>iv</sup>.**

- 1.5. 33% of students surveyed believe the Students' Union does not take issues of racism seriously (Ahmed & Bharucha, 2020).
- 1.6. 30% of Black and minority ethnic students surveyed feel there are not enough safe spaces to speak about race within Lancaster University (Ahmed & Bharucha, 2020).
- 1.7. In light of the above, the Students' Union has a moral responsibility to do more to ensure the safety of the student body. To fulfil this (alongside better fulfilling the Object listed in Recommendation 4), I recommend that we ensure a safe space is available for students within the Students' Union offices, by implementing the policy found in Appendices A and B.

## **2. Regarding Definition**

- 2.1. Safe spaces as a community movement trace their origin back to the US feminist and gay rights movements in the 1980s. As a community movement, there are varying definitions of what constitutes a "safe space". To effectively institute a safe space, we must have a working definition of what a safe space must be for our Union.
- 2.2. Cambridge Dictionary has two definitions:
  - 2.2.1. "a place or situation in which you are protected from harm or danger".
  - 2.2.2. "a place or room, for example at a university, where people can go if they feel upset or threatened".
- 2.3. Merriam Webster defines a safe space as: "a place (as on a college campus) intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations".
- 2.4. Oxford English Dictionary defines a safe space as "A place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm".
- 2.5. I propose adopting the Oxford English Dictionary definition (2.4) for our use due to its completeness and clarity.

## **3. Regarding Implementation**

- 3.1. As the lead policy making body for the Students' Union, the Executive Committee has the power to approve Students' Union policy. Once approved, this policy will come into effect as soon as students are able to access the Students' Union offices. The policy will govern the conduct of students and staff within the building, in order to foster a safe and welcoming environment.
- 3.2. In governing the conduct of students and staff, the policy should not impinge on academic freedoms, such as the freedom of speech. Conversely, it should enable students – especially those who are members of minority groups, or who have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (UK Government, 2010)<sup>v</sup> – to speak freely about their experiences in a safe environment – a "counterpublic" where members of oppressed groups can frame their experiences without oppression, with the eventual aim of returning to public spaces equipped to battle oppression (Waugh, 2019)<sup>vi</sup>.

## **4. Policy Wording**

- 4.1. See appendix A for the proposed Policy. This policy is based on the layout of other Students' Union policies found on [lancastersu.co.uk/policy](http://lancastersu.co.uk/policy).

- 4.2. See appendix B for the proposed Easy-Read Policy. This is a simplified version of the above policy. Should any dispute be brought over the wording of the policy, the above (4.1) takes precedence. The easy read version is slimmed-down for presentation on signage and for students with access requirements which may affect the accessibility of the policy (4.1)

## **5. Conclusion and Implications for the Students' Union**

- 5.1. To better meet our charitable aims, we – as an Executive – need to look into how we can change the way we work to better represent and promote the welfare of students at Lancaster University in the long-term. The attached policy (Appendices A and B) is one small step towards doing so. I implore the Executive Committee to approve Recommendation 1 from this paper to ensure that policy is enacted.
- 5.2. In terms of the implications on the future of the Students' Union of implementing this policy:
- 5.2.1. The Students' Union is currently seen as uncaring and unreachable by many members of minority groups, as evidenced by the report referenced by Ahmed and Bharucha. By not implementing this policy, the Students' Union will continue to fail in representing and promoting the welfare of these students (as is required by our Memorandum and Articles of Association).
- 5.2.2. By implementing this policy, the Students' Union will be one step closer to succeeding in achieving this aim.
- 5.2.3. By implementing this Students' Union Policy (as presented on [lancastersu.co.uk/policy](http://lancastersu.co.uk/policy)), everyone (including but not limited to: staff and students) within the Students' Union offices would be held to the policy until such time as a future Executive Committee deem it to be no longer necessary.

### **LGBTQ+ OFFICER COMMENTS**

Not Applicable.

### **BAME OFFICER COMMENTS**

[Officer Comments Here]

### **SWD OFFICER COMMENTS**

First of all, this policy is fantastic, and very important! I can't commend it enough.

The one thing I would suggest adding is an implications section – exactly what this means for the SU in future, and how it could help people. This would be to ensure that the 'rules' are clear not only to us, but to any future officers and staff.

*Thank you for your response, I hadn't considered this previously. In response to your point, I have amended point 5 (above – see the amendment of the section heading and the addition of point 5.2) to include implications for the future of the Students' Union.*

### **MATURE STUDENTS' OFFICER COMMENTS**

I wholeheartedly support.

Just 3 comments to make:

Under this Union believes no 1 I think this should be more expansive - suggest add 'everywhere and particularly in our Students' Union'.

Do you have particular space in mind? How about clear signage?

Do we need to press the Uni to adopt a similar policy - esp in shared spaces where students meet - learning Zone, JCRs, Library etc?

*Thank you for your support, and for highlighting these points. I wholeheartedly agree with the spirit of them. I have amended the policy as per the first suggestion above. In terms of the space referred to, I am – currently – only referring to the building in use as Students' Union Offices located within Bowland College (with signage as described in point 5 of Appendix A). In terms of pressing the University to adopt a similar policy, I have had some brief conversations with various members of University Staff (although not formally as of yet, merely canvassing for opinion) on the subject. They have – on the whole – taken it well. I look forward to the possibility of working with the University in extending this policy (or a similar one) to public spaces within the University once it has proven to be a success within the SU.*

#### **INTERNATIONAL OFFICER COMMENTS**

[Officer Comments Here]

#### **WOMENS'+ OFFICER COMMENTS**

I'm sorry for the late reply but I was just thinking about this policy document actually! I support this policy completely and I believe it would be a vital tool in ensuring students feel relaxed on campus. Just a quick question, where would these spaces be? It could be good to outline for incoming freshers in the future, especially as they enter new environments and meet new people which can be incredibly overwhelming.

*Thank you for your support. I've outlined the space in question in my response to Amy (included above), I wonder whether a clarification of the space included is best discussed as part of the presentation of this policy to the Exec (whether a map should be made public, or a friendly amendment to the policy to precisely outline which buildings are involved may be necessary. I support either idea in principle.).*

#### **Contact Officer:**

Email: [su.lgbtq@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:su.lgbtq@lancaster.ac.uk)

Facebook: [facebook.com/LUSULGBTQOfficer](https://facebook.com/LUSULGBTQOfficer)

## **Appendix A**

### **Safe Space Policy**

#### **This Union Notes:**

1. "Even with a non-discrimination policy in place, many people remain unaware of the facts about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender associates. This can lead to an uncomfortable or openly hostile environment where employees feel forced to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity or anything that might reveal it. Isolation and fear results in reduced effectiveness in the workplace." (EQUAL!). This policy aims to combat this openly hostile environment in our Students' Union.
2. 42% of LGBT Students have hidden their identity at University for fear of discrimination. (Stonewall, 2018)
3. 7% cent of trans students have been physically attacked by another student or member of university staff within one year in 2017-18 (Stonewall, 2018)
4. Under the memorandum and Articles of Association of Lancaster University Students' Union, we should aim to: "[promote] the interests and welfare of students at Lancaster University during their course of study" (Lancaster University Students' Union, 2016).
5. 22% of students surveyed said they have experienced racism at Lancaster University (Ahmed & Bharucha, 2020).
6. 33% of students surveyed believe the Students' Union does not take issues of racism seriously (Ahmed & Bharucha, 2020).
7. 30% of Black and minority ethnic students surveyed feel there are not enough safe spaces to speak about race within Lancaster University (Ahmed & Bharucha, 2020).
8. The above findings are just some examples of the vast array of metaphorical barriers students at Lancaster University face.

#### **This Union Believes:**

1. Students should be safe to express themselves and talk about their experiences everywhere and particularly in our Students' Union.
2. Without guaranteeing the safety of students, the Union cannot claim to effectively promote the welfare of students, nor to effectively represent students.
3. This policy should enable students – especially those who are members of minority groups, or who have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (UK Government, 2010) – to speak freely about their experiences in a safe environment where members of oppressed groups can frame their experiences without oppression, with the eventual aim of returning to public spaces equipped to battle that oppression (Waugh, 2019).

#### **This Union Resolves:**

1. To ensure the Students' Union offices are a safe space, that is: "a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm".
2. To implement the following regulations within the Students' Union offices:
  - 2.1. Don't make comments or jokes which could be viewed as racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, antisemitic, ableist, or otherwise discriminatory against minority groups

- 2.2. Don't assume anyone's sexuality, gender, or pronouns. Where appropriate and necessary, ask politely.
- 2.3. Don't "out" LGBTQ+ people who share their identity with you.
- 2.4. Any sensitive information (including, but not limited to LGBTQ+ identity, experience, disability, etc.) shared in this space is shared in confidence, unless explicitly stated otherwise. Don't share this information outside this space without the permission of the people involved.
- 2.5. Trans+ individuals should always be addressed using their chosen name and pronouns, regardless of legal name or name on Lancaster University's IT systems (unless they tell you otherwise – there may be situations where individuals choose to use a different name, IE: for legal documents, or when someone is not out).
- 2.6. Accept human error. If someone makes a mistake in following these regulations and apologises, we ask that you forgive them. Similarly, if you're aware you've made a mistake in following these regulations, apologise and move on.
- 2.7. Converse consensually – actively listen to the views of others: challenge your views, accept challenges from others, and challenge others' views where appropriate. Use this space to grow as an individual and a community.
- 2.8. Accept everyone as an individual and an equal, regardless of ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, age, or disability. Don't pass judgement on others.
3. Anyone breaching these regulations may be asked to leave the Students' Union offices for the duration of the day by agreement of two Students' Union Officers. Where an individual has been asked to leave for breaching these regulations three or more times within one week (7 days), they may be asked to leave the Students' Union offices for one month (30 days).
4. To make both printed and electronic copies of this policy available within the Students' Union offices upon request.
5. To keep visible signage near the main entrance to the Students' Union offices bearing the Safe Space Emblem (an inverted pink triangle within a green ring), and a copy of the easy-read version of this policy.

## **Appendix B**

### **Safe Space Policy: Easy-read Version**

The Students' Union offices are a safe space: "a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm".

Regulations:

1. Don't make comments or jokes which could be viewed as racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, antisemitic, ableist, or otherwise discriminatory against minority groups
2. Don't assume anyone's sexuality, gender, or pronouns. Where appropriate and necessary, ask politely.
3. Don't "out" LGBTQ+ people who share their identity with you.
4. Any sensitive information (including, but not limited to LGBTQ+ identity, experience, disability, etc.) shared in this space is shared in confidence, unless explicitly stated otherwise. Don't share this information outside this space without the permission of the people involved.
5. Trans+ individuals should always be addressed using their chosen name and pronouns, regardless of legal name or name on Lancaster University's IT systems (unless they tell you otherwise – there may be situations where individuals choose to use a different name, IE: for legal documents, or when someone is not out).
6. Accept human error. If someone makes a mistake in following these regulations and apologises, we ask that you forgive them. Similarly, if you're aware you've made a mistake in following these regulations, apologise and move on.
7. Converse consensually – actively listen to the views of others: challenge your views, accept challenges from others, and challenge others' views where appropriate. Use this space to grow as an individual and a community.
8. Accept everyone as an individual and an equal, regardless of ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, age, or disability. Don't pass judgement on others.

Anyone breaching these regulations may be asked to leave the Students' Union offices for the duration of the day by agreement of two Students' Union Officers. Where an individual has been asked to leave for breaching these regulations three or more times within one week, they may be asked to leave the Students' Union offices for one month.

Copies of the full policy are available upon request, and on the Students' Union website.

In case of disputes or disagreements, the full policy takes precedence over the easy-read version.



## References

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- <sup>i</sup> Lancaster University Students' Union (2016). *Memorandum and Articles of Association*. Available at: [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/35592/81e111031a532eace1eb059069663ed9/Signed\\_Articles\\_of\\_Association.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/35592/81e111031a532eace1eb059069663ed9/Signed_Articles_of_Association.pdf) [Accessed 20 Aug. 2020].
- <sup>ii</sup> Equal! (n.d.). *Safe Space – EQUAL!* [online] EQUAL! - the Nokia LGBT+ Employee Resource Group. Available at: <https://equal.org/safe-space-program/> [Accessed 10 Aug. 2020].
- <sup>iii</sup> Stonewall (2018). *University Report - LGBT in Britain*. [online] Stonewall. Available at: [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt\\_in\\_britain\\_universities\\_report.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_universities_report.pdf) [Accessed 10 Aug. 2020].
- <sup>iv</sup> Ahmed, A. and Bharucha, D. (2020). *Built-In Barriers: The Role of Race in Shaping BME Student Experiences at Lancaster University*. [online] Lancaster University: Why is My Curriculum White? Available at: [https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Aascds%3AUS%3Aa586e8ab-16b5-4156-b275-101fe2aa4cb2&fbclid=IwAR1P\\_UohQiLhhKpJ6yPyH2ng\\_1V5LZwqiTKEVp5jozBJuNlzPZ4KRB4MFrI#pageNum=4](https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Aascds%3AUS%3Aa586e8ab-16b5-4156-b275-101fe2aa4cb2&fbclid=IwAR1P_UohQiLhhKpJ6yPyH2ng_1V5LZwqiTKEVp5jozBJuNlzPZ4KRB4MFrI#pageNum=4) [Accessed 20 Aug. 2020].
- <sup>v</sup> GOV.UK (2010). *Equality Act 2010*. [online] Legislation.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2020].
- <sup>vi</sup> Waugh, C. (2019). In Defence of Safe Spaces: Subaltern Counterpublics and Vulnerable Politics in the Neoliberal University. *Time and Space in the Neoliberal University*, pp.143–168.