

DECLARATION

Freedom of expression for Aarhus University staff and students

Introduction

In a democracy, freedom of expression is a fundamental right. It is equally decisive for the universities, for their function as one of the pillars of society. Freedom of expression is inextricably bound to academic freedom and freedom of research.

Freedom of expression, academic freedom and freedom of research are guaranteed by a legal and policy framework that includes the Danish Constitution, the University Act, the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Aarhus University's policy for research integrity, freedom of research and responsible conduct of research, as well as Aarhus University's staff policy.

This declaration builds on the above and was drafted in response to recommendations from the Danish committee on freedom of expression, stated in its 2020 report. The committee asked universities to take steps to strengthen freedom of research and expression, to the benefit of democracy in Denmark. This declaration clarifies the overall principles for freedom of expression at Aarhus University which apply to all staff and students.

Freedom of expression at Aarhus University

Aarhus University is committed to safeguarding freedom of expression and the individual's opportunity to realise their potential. Open dialogue and tolerance for different views constitute the very foundation of the university's activities. Universities have always been places where beliefs and knowledge are unceasingly explored and contested in a free exchange of ideas and thoughts in open and respectful debate.

Academic freedom is the foundation of the university's activities. Freedom of research, thought and expression are closely linked with academic freedom, the essence of which is the search for and dissemination of knowledge, insight and understanding. This applies to research, education and collaboration.

Aarhus University is committed to teaching young people to reflect and think critically, and to providing them with a learning environment in which they can express themselves freely and assemble to debate and learn. Students must be free to ask open, challenging and critical questions. The character and intellectual skills of the individual are cultivated and developed through the encounter with different perspectives and opinions, inside and outside the classroom.

The university is a central institution of knowledge and culture and must contribute to a democracy in which opinions are freely and openly debated. There must be room for curiosity-driven invention and an open exchange of knowledge to the benefit of society as a whole. Aarhus University's staff must be free to engage in public and political debate within the limits of the law. This also applies to scientific and scholarly debate within their fields. Through their participation, staff contribute to ensuring that important decisions in our society are made on the basis of knowledge.

At Aarhus University, there must be scope for a diversity of viewpoints and opinions. In academic debate, in research and in teaching, it must be possible to explore and discuss ideas and thoughts freely. This also applies to ideas and thoughts that some may find unpleasant, wrong or even offensive. It is up to the individual to challenge ideas or thoughts with which they disagree.

All members of the university community have a responsibility to contribute to a culture of civility. In all contexts – academic as well as social – everyone must demonstrate courtesy and mutual respect, and must make an effort to understand the views and opinions of others. However, freedom of expression must never be subordinated to such considerations.