

## Removal of posters on permanent display from University premises

26 February 2024

On Tuesday 20 February, Queen Mary University of London removed a number of posters that were put on permanent display by the Queen Mary branch of the University and College Union (QMUCU). This statement explains the reason for this action and, in so doing, corrects some of the inaccuracies in QMUCU's claims about this matter.

Queen Mary has a strong and longstanding commitment to upholding freedom of speech. Everyone should feel able to discuss difficult issues and express their views within the law. The University maintains a [Code of Practice on Free Speech](#) to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is upheld and that the University acts in accordance with all relevant legislation.

The Code includes the following points:

- The University does not take an institutional position on political, religious and cultural debates to ensure that individuals are not discouraged from expressing themselves freely within the law (Section 5.3)
- The University reserves the right to impose conditions on the display of materials, symbols and images on University managed spaces or digital platforms outside the context of education, research and approved events where the display of such materials, symbols and images is in conflict with Section 5.3 of this Code (Section 7.11)

On Monday 19 February, we became aware of posters on prominent display on the Queen Mary premises used by QMUCU to undertake its duties as a recognised Trade Union. These posters related to the current conflict in the Middle East. One of these posters contained the slogan "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free". The University has been told directly by students, staff and visitors that they consider this slogan anti-Semitic and threatening, and a significant challenge to them feeling safe to be on campus and to express themselves freely. The fact that the posters were put on permanent display, rather than as part of a specific event, meant that they could be misconstrued as the institutional position on the conflict.

In order to uphold our Code of Practice on Free Speech, we first sought to work with QMUCU representatives to explain our position and have the posters removed. When this was not successful, we exercised the rights reserved within our Code and removed the posters displayed in the windows to help maintain the conditions for free speech and ensure that no student, staff member or visitor is discouraged from expressing themselves freely within the law.