

Content Warning Policy



1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent and University wide approach for the provision of content warnings to ensure the establishment of a safe and inclusive learning and teaching environment for students.
- 1.2 To provide an overview of the range of topics which may require a content warning, prior to being taught.
- 1.3 To explain what content warnings are and provide guidance on how a content warning can be given and other considerations.
- 1.4 To clarify the value of content warnings and how they contribute to inclusive pedagogy.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Discussion of difficult subjects in higher education is key to enable students to develop their critical thinking and knowledge of issues and debates. However, a lack of warning before difficult or distressing content can cause distress to students and result in them disengaging from the subject, particularly because of experiences they may have had in their past.
- 2.2 It is impossible to take into account all topics that may act as a trigger for someone, however broad acknowledgements provided to students will help to build trust and understanding that their best interests are being considered.

3. Definition

- 3.1 A content warning is a verbal, visual or written warning given prior to exposure to material which some may find disturbing, distressing or that may evoke a strong emotional response.

4. Application

- 4.1 Content warnings are a part of everyday life. They are given prior to watching television, a film at the cinema, on content included on streaming services such as Netflix, on the radio and television. Signposts to support services are often flagged after a sensitive topic has been discussed and, on social media, content warnings are often given by users or by a social media platform themselves.
- 4.2 Examples of the sort of content which should receive a content warning include:

- Sexual Assault
- Abuse
- Child abuse/paedophilia/incest
- Animal cruelty or animal death
- Self-harm and suicide
- Eating disorders, body hatred, and fat phobia
- Violence
- Pornographic content
- Kidnapping and abduction
- Death or dying
- Miscarriages/Abortion
- Blood
- Mental illness, addiction and ableism
- Racism and racial slurs
- Sexism and misogyny
- Hateful language directed at religious groups (e.g., Islamophobia, antisemitism)
- Transphobia and trans misogyny
- Homophobia and heterosexism
- Stalking
- Explicit images

4.3 A content warning should be given at least once and in advance of the session. Examples of how this can be done include:

- Written warning in Handbook
- Slide at beginning of presentation – including guidance that students themselves should be mindful of the impact of sensitive content they may share to both their peers and staff
- Email prior to a session
- Verbal warning at beginning of session or in a previous session
- Content warnings attached to reading lists
- On relevant module pages and posted as an announcement on Ultra
- Dedicated document available to students with relevant warnings included
- Verbal or written warning in advance of a student presentation, performance or display or in a dedicated document should be highlighted at the beginning of the academic year. Students should be encouraged at this point to go through the resources available to them and identify as early as possible any material that they may find difficult. This allows time for the student to prepare themselves and to discuss concerns with academic staff if needed.

- 4.4 At the beginning of the academic year staff should highlight that if a student feels distressed unexpectedly during a class, they may leave the room for either a short period of time or the entire session. If a student has to leave a session, staff are encouraged to check-in with the student and highlight relevant support services.
- 4.5 Giving a content warning is not always possible due to the nature of academic discussion and it is important to acknowledge that topics may arise that cannot be anticipated.
- 4.6 Should topics which are distressing to a student or referenced by a student arise unexpectedly, for example in-group discussion, their ability to leave a session for either a short period of time or the entire session should also apply. After the discussion of difficult material with an entire group, staff should remind students of the various support services available.
- 4.7 Regardless of how the content warning is given, the aim is for students to know what to expect, and they have agency to act in their own best interest.

Document Details

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