

COMMITTEE: Union Council  
SUBJECT: Content Warnings  
APPROVAL DATE: 08/11/2016  
RENEWAL DATE:

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SHEFFIELD HALLAM STUDENTS UNION NOTES:

1. Academics at universities including Edinburgh, the London School of Economics (LSE), Goldsmiths, Stirling and Central Lancashire are warning students of material they think could be “disturbing”, giving them the option of leaving the lecture room if they decide to. The warnings have been issued ahead of lectures (Bulman, 2016)

2. Recent research suggests that 1 in 6 young people will experience an anxiety condition at some point in their lives, whether that be OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), social anxiety and shyness, exam stress, worry or panic attacks (Anxiety UK, 2019)

3. Content warnings are potentially lifesaving for people who have dealt with traumas like sexual assault, hate crimes or violence. Eliminating these advisories and zones on campus suggests that someone should have to listen to someone who questions their humanity or experience. (Holmes, 2016)

SHEFFIELD HALLAM STUDENTS UNION BELIEVES:

1. There are many students at Sheffield Hallam who come from difficult backgrounds and/or are going through a difficult time in their life, and they might experience discomfort or anxiety when certain topics are to be discussed or graphic material to be used.

2. That University is stressful enough with many deadlines’ exams and transitions from home and college becoming an adult. Students do not need to be reminded of stress and trauma experienced outside of the university.

3. That training session, lecture and seminar providers should warn students of any content that may cause emotional distress before or at the start of each session that they deliver. This should be part of trauma-informed practice.

4. Students have a right to act in the best interests of their own mental health and therefore teaching staff should accommodate this and be understanding of students’ learning needs.

SHEFFIELD HALLAM STUDENTS UNION RESOLVES:

1. Mandate full time elected officers to support this policy and implement content warnings on relevant Students' Union content.

2. Lobby the University and petition for content warnings to be put in place before teaching and encourage the University to make alternative learning options available. In doing so student voice should be consulted in addition to sabbatical officers, part-time and department representatives.

Anxiety UK, 2019

Key facts and figures

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Key-Facts-and-Figures-2019.pdf>

Bulman, 2016

UK universities issue ‘trigger warnings’ to warn students of potentially ‘upsetting’ material

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/trigger-warnings-universities-students-us-uk-a7353061.html>

Holmes, 2017

A quick lesson on what trigger warnings actually do

[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/content-warnings](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/university-of-chicago-trigger-warning_n_57bf16d9e4b085c1ff28176d?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9jb25zZW50LnlhaG9vLmNvbS92Mi9jb2xsZWN0Q29uc2VudD9zZXNzaW9uSWQ9M19jYy1zZXNzaW9uXzA5MWJmYmYyLTAxZGItNDM4Ni1iNmM4LWQ5YTEyMmRiNDdkOQ&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAABdlEvmgeWJ8Da01Txf0TZkCOApM_aHnVkK_i4Nu7jQmoDnPouCYyaiJggZCl1uPTXshfJbZnc6aK-tYufSXv544E6YP8DOTlbA3Nj_jeYFUWoGBdB5FBUFRGl7aHOXtFpNBX07FGP7PiotwPU79OSHeOIE2G8Hxcw0-3kqgymrz)