

**A Final Report by the Centre for Human Rights in Practice on the Future of Protest on the
University of Warwick Campus
21 April 2015**

1. Introduction

In January 2015, the Centre for Human Rights in Practice initiated an independent process to explore the future of protest at Warwick University. This process was primarily instigated as a result of high profile incidents in relation to protest on the university campus in December 2014, and was undertaken with the full support of the Students' Union and University management. The role of the Centre was to gather views from across the university and facilitate dialogue between key actors, based on the issues raised. The Centre's role in this process was not to take a position where there was a wide divergence of views.

In this short report we first specify the key elements of the process we undertook (section 2). We then set out the main issues raised and make recommendations for next steps where there appears to be potential for progress (section 3). We do this in relation to three key issues:

- (A) Dialogue and communication between university management and the student body
- (B) The conduct and management of protest on university campus
- (C) The role of police on campus.

2. Key Elements of the Process

There were two key elements of the process to examine the future of protest on the university campus:

- **A university-wide survey in relation to protest**, open to all staff and students for 2 weeks in January 2015. The survey asked people (1) what concerns they had about protest on campus, (2) what they wanted done differently in the future, (3) what questions they wanted answered and (4) who they wanted to answer those questions. The survey received 579 responses. Our review of the responses (together with a pdf of all responses received) is available on the Centre website at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/centres/chrp/protest/>
- **A summit on protest** to facilitate discussion on the key concerns and questions identified by the respondents to the survey. It took place on 12 March 2015. The summit panel was made up of the individuals/representatives identified in the survey as the most important people to speak in relation to protest issues:
 - Sir Nigel Thrift, University of Warwick Vice Chancellor
 - Cat Turhan, President of the Student's Union
 - Claire Bell, Chief Superintendent of Coventry Police
 - Callum Cant and Hope Worsdale, Representatives of Warwick for Free Education,
 - Jo Horsburgh, Deputy Registrar responsible for security and Mark Kennell, Head of Security Services.
 - Ken Sloan, University Registrar

In the first part of the summit, each speaker was invited to briefly respond to the questions and concerns emerging from the survey results. In the second half, the audience had the

opportunity to ask the panel questions related to student protest at Warwick University. A video of the summit is available at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/centres/chrp/protest/>

3. Key Issues Raised and Recommendations Made

The survey and summit on protest highlighted a range of concerns about (a) the police and/or university reaction to the protests (b) the protests/protestors themselves and (c) broader concerns about the university connected to the protests. The review of the survey and the video of the summit, available on the Centre website, are a comprehensive record of issues and questions raised, and the answers provided by the panellists.

In this final report, we concentrate on ideas for the future. There are three particular issues which were of central concern throughout the process and where there appear to be the potential for concrete steps forward to be taken. These are (A) dialogue and communication between university management and the student body (B) the conduct and management of protest on university campus and (C) the role of police on campus.

A. Dialogue and communication between university management and the student body

In the survey, the most popular suggestion for what people wanted done differently in the future was better dialogue between university management and the student body. At the Summit, the need to take action to tackle deficiencies in communication and dialogue between the student body and university management was highlighted by the panellists.

Cat Turhan, Student Union President suggested that “the University is seen as a distant corporate body which is out of touch with students”, leading to a “pressing need to address disconnect between students and University management”. The Vice Chancellor argued that there were a wide range of different ways in the university engaged formally and informally with students. But he recognised that the survey raised issues about students believing that “existing mechanisms of dialogue were failing in some respects.” The Free Education representatives on the panel argued that there was a widespread attitude of indifference to student views by central management, leaving protest and disruption as the only available means to have their voices heard. Concerns raised by the audience also included the need to ensure that student issues were taken more seriously in university decision-making.¹

The Vice Chancellor expressed his willingness to talk constructively to students through existing channels and in forums such as the summit on protest. Likewise, the Registrar and Deputy Registrar reaffirmed their commitment to dialogue with students. Cat Turhan argued that “it is essential that senior members of university management have a direct dialogue with students so that they can be held accountable where necessary.” With the support of incoming SU President Isaac Leigh, she proposed a termly Q&A session between the Vice Chancellor, Registrar and the student body. The

¹ A member of the audience pointed out that the recent advertisement for the new Vice Chancellor did not mention students who are the primary stakeholders of academic institutions.

Vice Chancellor said that he would consider this option, as long as it provided a genuine form of dialogue.

Recommendations:

1. A termly meeting should be arranged where the Vice Chancellor and Registrar can talk directly to the student body and address concerns raised. The meeting should be open to all students and should be publicised and organised in such a way that it is well attended by students from across the university. Consideration should also be given to other ways of university management engaging directly with the student body (e.g. online forms of dialogue such as live web chats etc.).
2. All other modes of dialogue and communication between university management and student representatives should be reviewed. The purpose of the review should be to ensure that existing mechanisms of dialogue and accountability are effective and are informing decision-making processes.

B. The conduct and management of protest on university campus

Events of 3 December 2015: There were a great number of concerns and questions raised in the survey and the summit that directly related to the events of 3 December 2014. Many of these concerns and questions could not be addressed at the summit because of ongoing investigations and criminal prosecutions. Both the Registrar, Ken Sloan and Chief Superintendent Claire Bell suggested that these issues could be considered at a later date by the university community when all criminal and disciplinary investigations were finished.

A Code of Conduct: In both the survey and in the summit, there was extensive mention of the drafting of a Code of Conduct in relation to protest on the university campus. Cat Turhan, Jo Horsburgh, Mark Kennell and Ken Sloan all referred to the fact that the drafting of a Code of Conduct was underway. Comments from survey participants, the panellists and from the audience stressed the importance of the Code Of Conduct being the subject of widespread and meaningful consultation, particularly given divergent views on protest among key stakeholders (see below for more on this).

University Communication: Both the Registrar and the Vice Chancellor recognised that there were lessons that needed to be learned in relation to the way in which the university communicated on issues of protest. The Registrar acknowledged that university communications could have been managed more effectively and there was a need to communicate better with all those directly affected by protests. He said that procedures for managing events on campus had been updated so that this was taken seriously as at an institutional level in the future. Cat Turhan also queried whether there should have been specific communication to students affected by the protests to inform them that student support services were available to them in the aftermath of the protests.

On the broader issue of the appropriateness of the university's email communication after the protests, there was a divergence of views. The Registrar argued that email communication in relation to the protests did not show any bias against any of the parties involved. Cat Turhan stated that many students felt that the university should have condemned police violence. Warwick for

Free Education representatives and members of the audience demanded an apology from the Vice Chancellor in relation to this issue. Criticism of the university's email communication also featured heavily in the survey.

Disagreement on core issues: While all panellists stressed the importance of rights related to peaceful protest and freedom of expression, on many of the specifics of what those rights entail, and how protest should be handled, there was a great divergence of views.

For instance, does the right to protest involve a right to disrupt life at the university? The Registrar and Deputy Registrar argued that all members of the Warwick community should be able to carry on their lives at Warwick without the threat of disruption. The indefinite campus-wide injunction obtained by the university in relation to protest was deemed necessary and justified, partly to prevent such disruption. The Deputy Registrar and the Head of Security also stressed that it was important that the University received formal advanced warning of all protests, again partly to avoid disruption to university life. Online comments submitted to the summit and survey responses questioned the use of Senate House as a site for the protests, because of its disruption to staff and students.

On the other hand, Warwick for Free Education representatives stressed the importance of occupation style protests for putting economic pressure on university management. They stated that "protest is reliant on disruption" because students lack "institutional authority" and as such enjoy limited bargaining power in negotiations. A number of responses to the survey and questions from the audience were critical of the use of injunctions as a mechanism for managing protest and thought the university should do more to facilitate protest on campus.

There was also divergence over what attitudinal change was required. University management representatives on the panel focused on intimidation by protestors and its effects on members of staff working at the university. They argued that protestor representatives had failed to acknowledge this intimidation. On the other hand, members of Warwick for Free Education and members of the audience argued that the Vice Chancellor had failed to acknowledge issues of bias in email communications (see above). Overall, there was a sense that a much more extensive process of reflection and dialogue would be required if key actors wish to make headway in tackling these issues.

Recommendations:

1. A full report into the incidents of 3 December should be published once all investigations have been completed. This should present all of the facts and evidence in relation to incidents on 3 December 2014 that are not currently available or able to be disclosed.
2. Widespread and meaningful consultation should be undertaken in relation to the Code of Conduct that is proposed in relation to the issue of protest on the university campus. This means that consultation should start an early stage, and be inclusive of the perspectives of all those affected by issues of protest including academic and administrative staff, students and front-line staff affected by protests. Such a code must be viewed as legitimate and acceptable by all the above groups if it is to be a progressive step.

3. University communication processes in relation to protest on campus should be reviewed in order to make sure that they consider the welfare of all stakeholders.
4. Key stakeholders at the university should consider more extensive forms of reflection and dialogue to make headway on issues where there is currently a great divergence of views.

C. The role of police on campus

The role of the police on campus and the use of force in relation to protestors emerged as one of the most contentious issues in both the survey and the summit.

Discussion and survey responses emphasised the need to carefully review the limits of the use of force in relation to protest situations, as well as the need to reflect on the role of police on campus in general. Acknowledging that there are lessons to be learnt from recent events, the Chief Superintendent of Coventry Police recalled that there are codes of conduct and ethics regulating the legal, proportionate and justified use of force by the police. She stated that, in addition, an “attendance protocol” has been developed since the protests in December 2014 with a view to ensuring a graduated and proportionate police response in future.

Superintendent Claire Bell, Registrar Ken Sloan, and SU President Cat Turhan all emphasised the need for police to come onto campus at certain times to ensure personal safety and protection from crime, for instance when assaults have occurred, to deal with fascist groups etc. On the other hand, Free Education representatives and some members of the audience called for the implementation of a ‘cops off campus’ policy at Warwick in light of the police conduct at student protests in December 2014. The vast majority of survey respondents who argued for less police presence on campus advocated a much more nuanced approach (e.g. that police only be called for particularly serious issues).

The Chief Superintendent expressed a willingness to provide additional information and statistics on police conduct, and to participate in further discussions in order to improve the relationship with students and rebuild relationships with all sections of the Warwick community.

Recommendations:

1. A detailed analysis should be undertaken of the current role of police on the university campus, and the range of events for which they are called to intervene. This role should then be explained to the student and staff community, and it should be used as the basis for an informed discussion about the future role of police on the university campus.
2. Chief Superintendent Claire Bell and other relevant police representatives should be taken up on their offer to enter into further dialogue with staff and student groups so that they better understand concerns and can explain in more detail how procedures have been revised since incidents on 3 December 2014.