

Policy on Public Statements by the Rhodes Trust
Approved by Governance Committee and Rhodes Trustees June 2024

Purpose of this Policy

This policy provides guidance regarding public statements by the Trust, setting out key assumptions, core principles, and practical guidelines in the context of the Trust’s mission and values and legal status as a U.K. Charity.

Key Assumptions

The Rhodes Trust is a values-based organisation. Rhodes Scholars are selected for qualities including “truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness and fellowship.” We seek to support and bring together people who are “impatient with the way things are and have the courage to act.”

Our founder wanted the Rhodes Scholarship to help “render war impossible.” In our second century, we are striving to globalise the scholarship and to bring Scholars together across the world’s divides, working with them to foster friendship and community in a fractured world.

We also describe Scholars as “unlikeminded, yet likehearted,” acknowledging the value of divergent viewpoints within our community. We are committed to freedom of inquiry, free speech and the right to dissent, and seek to create a culture amongst Scholars of trust, learning, authentic dialogue, and thoughtful debate.

The Trust’s Role

The role and mission of the Trust is to act as a catalyst in the development of future leaders and influencers who exemplify the qualities we seek -- of truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness and fellowship.

While our Scholars are leaders and activists, the Trust is not an activist organisation. To borrow a phrase from the University of Chicago’s 1967 Kalven Committee Report, the Trust is “the home and sponsor of critics, not itself the critic.”¹

¹ Kalven Committee Report on the University’s Role in Social and Political Action, University of Chicago, 1967.

Guidelines on Public Statements

The Trust does not comment on political issues or controversies or promote, sponsor, endorse or criticise particular perspectives except in cases where it believes it is advisable in order to sustain the Trust's charitable mission.²

We do not make statements demanding, condemning or endorsing specific political or policy outcomes or actions by governments or other organisations except when these outcomes or actions directly impact our own mission and activities. We refrain in all cases from endorsing or supporting any political party.

As a global scholarship seeking to develop compassionate, innovative, and public-spirited people committed to solving humanity's challenges, we affirm and will publicly defend the right of Scholars to express their views, organise, and engage in critique and peaceful protest.

Appropriate Public Statements

Here are examples of situations where the Trust (or Trust leadership in their official capacity) might take a public stance because doing so aligns with our strategy and sustains our charitable mission:

- Affirm and defend our core values of academic freedom and free intellectual inquiry;
- Publicly oppose restrictive immigration policy proposals that threaten our ability to attract and support students from around the world;
- Contribute to public debates in defence of our commitment, as a merit scholarship, to excellence and inclusion;
- Contribute to public discussions about legacy, equity and inclusion in the context of the Trust's own practical efforts to engage our history.

Prioritising Action

The Trust seeks to embody our values in what we do, prioritising action over the issuing of statements. We seek to put our values into action in how we operate: how we form selection committees, how we allocate resources, how we incorporate sustainable practices in the operations of Rhodes House, and what programming we sponsor.

² This is in line with government guidance [Political activity and campaigning by charities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/political-activity-and-campaigning-by-charities)

Being a Platform for Diverse Ideas

The Trust seeks to be a platform for diverse ideas and important discussions and debates, without endorsing specific positions. Examples might include conferences, events and blogs featuring thought leadership on a diverse range of topics. In all these cases, we make it clear that these are the views of the speaker or author, not the Trust.

Warden Communication with Scholars in Residence

The Warden and Scholar team communicates regularly with Scholars in Residence, and may from time to time address public issues in such communications when these have substantial impact upon members of the Scholar community. The Warden will endeavour at all times to ground these communications in the Trust's core values, to be attentive to and respectful of diverse experiences and dissenting views within the Scholar community, and to model ways to build community and find common ground in a fractured world.

Consultation and Decision Processes

Any public statement by the Trust (for example, a message to alumni or the Oxford community, a statement on the website, or an op-ed) shall be vetted with Trustees as follows:

- Any statement that comes from the Trust or Trustees as a whole shall be vetted with the full Board;
- If the Warden, Board Chair, or other Trust official wishes to communicate publicly on any matter which might reasonably be expected to affect the Trust, they shall alert the Board Chair, Committee of Chairs, or if time permits the entire Board, to provide opportunity for input and will have reasonable regard to such input in making such communication.