

Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech

1. Introduction

1.1 The Institute supports the principle of freedom of speech and expression within the law. It also has particular regard to the importance of ensuring that staff, students and visiting speakers are free to question, test and express new or controversial ideas without placing themselves at risk.

1.2 Every person employed by the Institute and every student enrolled at the Institute should understand that membership of the Institute community carries with it responsibilities to uphold this principle and comply with the law.

1.3 This Code of Practice is adopted by the Institute in compliance with its statutory duties under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. The Code applies to:

- all staff, officers and governors of the Institute;
- all students of the Institute;
- any visiting speakers, guest lecturers or alumni invited by the Institute; and
- any individual or organisation hiring premises controlled by the Institute.

2. Legal Background

2.1 The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 places a statutory duty on registered higher education providers in England to take reasonably practicable steps to secure lawful freedom of speech within the law for staff, members, students, and visiting speakers, and to promote the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom.

2.2 In particular, this includes the duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the use of any premises of the Institute is not denied to any individual or body on the basis of:

- a. the views, beliefs or opinions of that individual or of any member of that body; or
- b. the policy or objectives of that body.

2.3 The Institute's governing body must, with a view to facilitating this duty, issue and keep up to date a Code of Practice which sets out:

- a. procedures to be followed in connection with the organisation of:
 - i. meetings or other events held on premises of the Institute that may reasonably require additional oversight or regulation due to their potential to affect freedom of speech or public order; and
 - ii. other relevant activities on those premises; and
- b. the conduct expected of those attending or participating in such events or activities.

2.4 All individuals and bodies involved in the governance of the Institute must take reasonably practicable steps—including, where appropriate, disciplinary action—to secure compliance with this Code.

2.5 Article 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998 guarantees the right to freedom of expression. This includes the right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority, subject to such restrictions as are lawful, necessary and proportionate in a democratic society (e.g. for the protection of national security, public safety, or the rights of others).



2.6 Freedom of speech does not protect unlawful expression, including but not limited to:

- incitement to violence, terrorism, or hatred on the basis of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (such as race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or gender reassignment);
- threatening, abusive or insulting speech likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress;
- expression likely to breach the peace or incite unlawful acts.

2.7 Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the Institute must “have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism,” and also “have particular regard to the duty to ensure freedom of speech” and to “the importance of academic freedom.”

2.8 As a registered provider with the Office for Students (OfS), the Institute is subject to the free speech registration condition introduced by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. This condition requires the Institute to comply with its duties relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom, and enables the OfS to take regulatory action if those duties are not met.

3. Ensuring Academic Freedom

3.1 The Institute affirms that academic freedom includes the right of academic staff to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves at risk of losing their job or privileges. This also extends to students, visiting speakers, and others engaging in academic debate under the auspices of the Institute.

3.2 No person or body to whom this Code applies shall take any action (except by lawful, reasonable, and peaceful means) to prevent the holding or continuation of any academic activity—including lectures, seminars, tutorials, or exhibitions—on the grounds of views that may be or are likely to be expressed by the participants.

3.3 Likewise, no person or body shall seek to prevent any student or group of students from attending or participating in such activities on the grounds of the actual or perceived views or beliefs of any participant, provided those views are expressed lawfully.

4. Events at the Institute

4.1 Anyone wishing to hold an event for the expression of views or beliefs on premises controlled by the Institute must follow the procedures set out in this Code. The Institute will not unreasonably refuse consent for such events, provided they comply with the law and this Code.

4.2 The Institute recognises that lawful expression may include views that are unpopular, controversial, or offensive to some. The fact that a view is unpopular or in disagreement with the Institute’s policies, or those of any external body, shall not in itself constitute grounds for refusal of an event.

4.3 However, the Institute may refuse permission for an event where there are reasonable grounds to believe that:

- a. the views likely to be expressed are unlawful;
- b. any speaker intends to incite violence, terrorism, or breaches of the peace;
- c. the event would promote a proscribed or unlawful organisation;
- d. the event would fall within the scope of a No Platform Policy in accordance with lawful criteria (see section 5); or



e. the event presents an unacceptable risk to public safety or the security of individuals or property.

4.4 If there is a risk of disorder associated with the event, the Institute shall assess what steps are reasonably practicable to allow the event to proceed safely. This may include requiring changes to the time, location, access arrangements, provision of security or stewards, or cooperation with police authorities.

4.5 In cases where serious disorder cannot reasonably be prevented, the Institute may refuse permission for the event. Before doing so, the Institute will consult the police where appropriate.

4.6 The organiser of any such event must normally give the Head of Institute, or nominee, at least 28 days' written notice. The Head of Institute, or nominee, shall confirm the Institute's decision in writing within seven days of receiving a complete application.

4.7 If a request is refused or conditions are imposed, the organiser may appeal in writing to the Head of Institute (or nominee) within seven days. The Head of Institute shall provide a written response within seven days. If timing prevents adherence to this process, the Head of Institute may vary the timescales at their discretion to allow a decision to be reached before the proposed event date.

4.8 All room bookings for events on premises controlled by the Institute (whether internally or externally organised) must be managed by a member of Institute staff. All organisers must confirm they have read and agreed to comply with this Code as a condition of booking.

4.9 Event organisers must take reasonable steps to ensure that their events are conducted lawfully and that speakers and attendees behave responsibly. Systematic or organised disruption that prevents lawful expression of views—such as shouting down speakers—is a breach of this Code.

4.10 Organisers must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that:

- the audience and speakers comply with the law during the event;
- stewards or police intervene in cases of unlawful conduct;
- no dangerous or illegal items are brought to the event; and
- the event remains orderly and respectful of others' rights.

4.11 The Head of Institute retains ultimate authority to refuse or halt any event where they believe there is a serious threat to safety, legality, or institutional reputation.

5. No Platform Policy

5.1 The Institute adopts a No Platform Policy, applicable to all events, speakers, and activities conducted by the Institute, or on premises controlled by the Institute. This policy is designed to ensure that the Institute complies with its legal obligations while promoting and protecting lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom.

5.2 Under this policy, the Institute will not permit any individual or organisation to speak at, or otherwise participate in, any Institute event where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the individual or organisation:

- a. advocates or promotes violence or hatred against others based on protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010;
- b. incites or encourages terrorism, criminal activity, or public disorder;
- c. has been proscribed by UK law (under the Terrorism Act 2000 or other relevant legislation);



d. has previously engaged in conduct at another institution that resulted in disciplinary or legal action for the unlawful suppression of freedom of speech, including through intimidation, silencing, or the organised disruption of lawful speakers or events;

e. promotes the violent overthrow of democratic institutions or the rule of law.

5.3 The application of this policy shall not be based solely on the expression of controversial, unpopular, or offensive opinions. A decision to deny a platform must be based on objective evidence and a proportionate assessment of the risk posed to safety, public order, or legal compliance.

5.4 A list of individuals or organisations who are currently subject to this No Platform Policy may be maintained by the Institute. This list shall be reviewed at least annually by the Institute's senior leadership and shall be open to challenge, correction, or appeal by any person affected.

5.5 Any decision to apply this policy to a proposed event or speaker must be taken by the Head of Institute (or nominee), in consultation with legal and academic staff where appropriate. A written record of all decisions, and the reasons for them, will be retained for audit and compliance purposes.

5.6 Organisers of events affected by this policy may appeal the decision in writing to the Head of Institute (or nominee), who shall make a final determination within seven calendar days of receipt.

5.7 Nothing in this policy shall be construed so as to conflict with the Institute's duties under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, or Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In the event of any conflict, the presumption will be in favour of allowing lawful free expression subject to legal constraints.

6. Breaches of the Code

6.1 Any breach of this Code may result in disciplinary action under the Institute's procedures for staff or students.

6.2 All persons subject to this Code are required to cooperate with the Institute in upholding lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom.

6.3 In cases of serious breach, all reasonable steps must be taken to identify those responsible and prevent recurrence.

6.4 Where criminal law is breached, the Institute shall cooperate with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. Disciplinary proceedings relating to the same matter may be paused pending the outcome of legal processes, at the discretion of the Head of Institute.

7. Review and Amendment of the Code

7.1 In accordance with its statutory duties, the governing body of the Institute shall keep this Code under regular review and shall formally review its effectiveness at least annually.

7.2 Revisions shall be made as necessary to reflect changes in legislation, regulatory guidance, or the operational needs of the Institute, while maintaining compliance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

Version: 1.0

Approved by Academic Board: 30/07/25