Freedom of Speech Policy

In effect from the beginning of the Academic Year 2026/27.



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1. Introduction

1.1. The University endorses and adopts the principle of freedom of speech and expression within the law as one of the cardinal principles upon which all institutions of learning should be founded. It also has regard to the need to ensure that academic Staff of the University have the freedom, within the law, to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or any privileges they may have at the University. Every person employed at the University and every Student registering at the University should be aware that joining the University community involves obligations and responsibilities which are consistent with the above principle and the law.

1.2. This Code of Practice sets out the rights and obligations inherent within the above principle and shall be construed and applied in a spirit of upholding the principle of freedom of speech wherever reasonably possible within the existing legal framework. The Code is also drafted to comply with the University's statutory obligations outlined above. The Code's obligations shall apply to:

- The University (which shall include all bodies or people having authority to determine any matter relevant to this Code).
- All Staff of the University (whether academic Staff or otherwise) and those whose normal place of work is on the University premises.
- All Students of the University (whether full or part-time).
- The Students' Union, including its constituent societies and associations.
- Staff and Students of the University should bring this Code to the attention of any outside organisations that are providing speakers or are responsible for organising meetings.

1.3. The Code's rights apply to:

- All Staff, Students and visiting speakers.
- And in relation to the holding of academic activities within paragraph 2.1 or meetings or events within paragraph 3.1 on premises controlled by the University or the Students' Union or an organisation affiliated to the Students' Union, the code shall apply to:
- Persons invited or otherwise lawfully on the premises.
- Persons who, if it were not for the provisions of this Code, would have been invited to the

event.

1.4. Nothing in this Code shall be deemed to affect the rights of any person taking any steps pursuant to lawful industrial action or peaceful protest.

2. Academic freedom

2.1. The principle of freedom of speech set out in this Code shall extend to the performance of the proper functions by academic Staff (which expression shall include visiting and guest lecturers lawfully present by invitation of the University or of any academic tutor). It shall be contrary to this Code for any person or body to which this Code applies to take any action (other than by reasonable and peaceful persuasion or peaceful protest) to prevent the holding of, or continuance of, any lecture, tutorial or other academic activity because of the lawful views held or expressed or which are reasonably likely to be expressed, (whether or not within the University) by the lecturer or tutor concerned, unless the expression of those views is reasonably decided by the University to be likely to jeopardise public safety and order and/or the safety of Staff and Students.

2.2. It shall be contrary to this Code for any person or body to whom this Code applies to take any action (other than reasonable and peaceful persuasion or peaceful protest) to prevent any Student or group of Students from attending any academic activity required by, or properly associated with, the course for which they are duly registered because of the views or beliefs held or lawfully expressed (whether or not within the University) by that Student or because of the reasonable likelihood that such views will be expressed.

3. Meetings

3.1. Where any person or organisation subject to this Code (or, in the case of the Students' Union, any constituent society, club or association) wishes to hold a meeting or like event for the expression of views as set out in paragraph 2, on premises which the University or the Students' Union control, the University or Students' Union (as the case may be) shall first receive consent from the Heads of the University.

3.2. It shall not be a reasonable ground of refusal of permission or facilities for a meeting or like event that the views likely to be expressed there may be controversial or contrary to any policy of the University, provided the expression of such views is lawful. The expression of opinions that are annoying, offensive, tasteless or rude is not unlawful in itself unless they amount to incitement to violence or incitement to racial hatred or they would otherwise constitute unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of protected characteristics.

3.3. It shall be accepted as reasonable to refuse consent, or withhold facilities for a meeting or

similar event to which this Code applies, where the University or Students' Union reasonably believes (from the nature of the speakers or from events at similar meetings in the past, whether at the University or otherwise) and/or reasonably anticipates that:

3.3.1. The views likely to be expressed by any speaker are contrary to the law.

3.3.2. The intention of any speaker at the event or meeting is likely to be to incite breaches of the law or to intend breaches of the peace to occur.

3.3.3. The views likely to be expressed by any speaker are for the promotion of any illegal organisation or purpose.

3.3.4. It is in the interests of public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime or the protection of those persons lawfully on premises under the control of the University or the Students' Union or affiliated organisations that the event does not take place.

3.4. By 'speaker', this Code means any organiser or other person invited to address the meeting other than members of any audience at that meeting.

3.5. Meetings or other related activities may be terminated early by the University where, in the course of that meeting or activity, it becomes apparent that any event under 3.3.1 to 3.3.4 is likely to occur, or has occurred.

3.6. Subject to paragraphs 3.3 and 3.5 where the University or Students' Union or affiliated body is satisfied upon reasonable grounds that the otherwise lawful expression of views at any meeting or event, the subject of the Code is likely to give rise to disorder, the University or Students' Union or affiliated body shall consider what steps shall be taken to ensure the safety of all persons, the maintenance of order and the security of premises controlled by the University, the Students' Union or any affiliated organisation, and may impose such conditions and requirements upon the organisers as it considers are reasonably necessary in all the circumstances. These may include, but are not limited to, requirements as to the provision of stewards, variation of location and time, and whether such a meeting shall be open to the public at large.

3.7. Where the University or Students' Union or affiliated body is of the opinion that its powers to regulate meetings and events by condition are insufficient to prevent serious disorder in premises subject to its control, it must decline to permit such meetings to be held. Before doing so, however, the University may consult with the University Security team and/or the Police with a view to establishing whether the serious disorder can be prevented or otherwise dealt with appropriately by attendance of police officers or some other conditions.

3.8. Where any person or body to whom this Code applies is engaged in the organisation of any meeting or like event on premises controlled by the University or Students' Union or any affiliated body at which, because of, for example, the nature of the speaker or their

views expressed in the past or likely to be expressed at such a meeting or the cause they represent, it is reasonably suspected that disorder is likely to occur, the organiser shall give the appropriate the Senior Management of the University immediate notice in writing of such a proposed meeting.

3.9. It shall be the duty of any lead person organising a meeting or like event under the Code to ensure the proper security and organisation (including stewarding and chairing of that meeting or like event for the purpose of protecting the rights of freedom of speech contained herein. Whilst the heckling, or like activity, of speakers is a right not to be disturbed. Systematic heckling, or other activity to disrupt, that has the effect of preventing the lawful expression of views, will be considered to be in breach of this Code. It shall be contrary to this Code for any person or body subject to the Code to organise, or engage in or in any way to be or become associated with, any conduct with the intention of preventing (other than by reasonable and peaceful persuasion or protest) any meeting the subject of this Code from being held or from continuing.

4. General

4.1. Any breach of the provisions of this Code may result in action being taken in line with the relevant Staff and Student behavioural and disciplinary codes and policies.

4.2. It shall be the duty of all those subject to this Code to assist the University in upholding the rights of freedom of speech recognised in this Code.

4.3. The Head refusing permission to hold a meeting is not subject to challenge.

4.4. Where a breach of this Code occurs, Students may raise this through the Student Complaint Procedure.

5. Document and version control information

Version control information	Details
Policy number	SDS-04
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Author	Head of Student Development Services
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