

Introduction

1. The College values its obligation and role as a critic and conscience of society and supports and encourages academic staff and students to responsibly practise the tenets of academic freedom of expression as central to the proper conduct of teaching, administration, research and scholarship. Implicit within this role is the freedom of academic staff and students to critique ideas both within and beyond the College itself.
2. It is acknowledged that the exercise of academic freedom of expression is core to the role and function of the College. As with all rights and obligations, academic freedom carries with it certain responsibilities, expectations and accountabilities, and is exercised within a relationship of trust and confidence. The policy covers all College students whether they are based on campus, on a visit, at a work placement or in workplace learning; it covers all aspects of a student's programme regardless of where it takes place. It is the responsibility of all staff to understand their role in supporting safeguarding across all aspects of provision and for familiarising themselves with the appropriate procedures and other policies that support this overarching document.

Defining Academic Freedom

3. Academic staff at an English higher education provider have 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 privileges they may have at the provider.[Education Reform Act 1988, section 202(2)(a)]

The College will follow the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (UNESCO, 1997). UNSECO (1997) recommends the following related to Academic Freedom:

- Higher Education teaching personnel like all other groups and individuals, should enjoy those internationally recognised civil, political, social and cultural rights applicable to all citizens. Therefore, all higher-education teaching personnel should enjoy freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association as well as the right to liberty and security of the person and liberty of movement. They should not be hindered or impeded in exercising their civil rights as citizens, including the right to contribute to social change through freely expressing their opinion of state policies and of policies affecting higher education. They should not suffer any penalties simply because of the exercise of such rights.

- The maintaining of the above international standards should be upheld in the interest of higher education internationally and within the country. To do so, the principle of academic freedom should be scrupulously observed. Higher-education teaching personnel are entitled to the maintaining of academic freedom, that is to say, the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies. All higher-education teaching personnel should have the right to fulfil their functions without discrimination of any kind and without fear of repression by the state or any other source. Higher-education teaching personnel can effectively do justice to this principle if the environment in which they operate is conducive, which requires a democratic atmosphere; hence the challenge for all of developing a democratic society.
4. In order to give expression to this commitment, so far as is reasonably practicable, access to the premises of the College shall not be denied to any registered student or employee of the College or to any individual or body of persons invited to the premises of the College by a registered student or employee of the College, on any grounds relating to:
 - the beliefs or views of that registered student, employee or person so invited; or
 - the policies or objectives of that body; except insofar as the expression of such belief, views, policies or objectives shall be unlawful and where it is reasonably anticipated that the unlawful expression of such beliefs, views, policies or objectives might occur on the relevant occasion.
 5. Subject to section 6, it shall be contrary to the policy for any person or body to whom this policy applies to take any action other than by reasonable and peaceful persuasion or peaceful protest, to prevent any student or group of students from attending any lecture, tutorial or other academic activity required by, or properly associated with, the course for which they are duly enrolled because of the lawful views held or expressed or which are reasonably likely to be expressed as part of that academic activity, whether or not it takes place within the College.
 6. However, this commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law is not absolute. In addition to affirming the College's commitment to promoting academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law, this policy also specifies circumstances in which academic freedom and freedom of speech might properly be restricted. The College may itself apply restrictions in circumstances where they are necessary for the College:
 - to discharge its obligations under the Education (No 2) Act 1986, The Education Reform Act 1988, or the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015; or
 - to safeguard the safety, health and welfare of its registered students, employees and other persons lawfully upon the premises or engaged in activities associated with the College, including giving effect to the safeguards set out in the Equalities Act 2010; or
 - to enable use of the College's premises to be consistent with maintaining and promoting the efficient conduct and administration of the College's functions.
 7. Just as the College will not restrict debate or deliberation simply because the views being expressed might be considered unwise or even offensive, it also expects members of the College community to show commitment to this same principle by not obstructing or interfering with the rights of others to express views with which they might disagree profoundly.
 8. The principle of freedom of expression set out in this policy shall extend to the performance of the proper functions by academic staff including visiting and guest lecturers legitimately present by invitation of the College in accordance with its approved policies and processes.

Approval of external speaker and events on and off campus

9. Where any person or organisation subject to this policy (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 this policy on premises which the College or the students' union control, the College or students' union (as the case may be) shall not unreasonably refuse consent. The College reserves the right to refuse consent to any meeting or like event which involves or is reasonably expected to involve the expression of views that are in breach of this policy or there are other reasonable grounds for refusal. All such requests should be made and will be considered in accordance with the College's policy governing the organisation of external speakers and events which is available via Staffnet.