

## **Free Speech Code of Practice for HE students**

### **1. Purpose**

This Code demonstrates the college's commitment to **freedom of speech within the law**. It ensures that all HE students can express lawful views, engage in academic debate, and hear a wide range of perspectives.

The college recognises that free speech is a fundamental part of learning and personal development. The college will not restrict speech solely because it is controversial, provided it remains within legal boundaries.

### **What is academic freedom?**

Academic freedom: teachers and students are able to teach, study, research, and express ideas without unreasonable restriction from law, college regulations, or public pressure. It includes:

- The freedom for teachers to explore any subject of intellectual concern
- The right to present findings to students, colleagues, and the public
- The ability to publish conclusions without censorship
- The freedom to teach in a professionally appropriate manner

### **2. Legal Framework**

This Code is underpinned by the following legislation:

- **Education (No. 2) Act 1986** – Duty to secure freedom of speech on campus
- **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023** – Requirement to publish and uphold a free speech code
- **Human Rights Act 1998** – Right to freedom of expression
- **Equality Act 2010** – Protection against unlawful discrimination
- **Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Prevent Duty)** – Duty to prevent support for terrorism

### **3. Scope of the Code**

This Code applies to:

- All HE students enrolled at the college
- Staff and governors involved in HE activity
- External speakers and organisers of HE-related events
- Student societies that use the college premises

The code covers meetings, lectures, seminars, practical's, debates, and digital forums facilitated by the college.

### **4. Expectations of Conduct**

All members of the college community are expected to:

- Respect the right of others to express lawful views
- Engage in debate constructively
- Avoid behaviour that constitutes harassment, intimidation, or unlawful speech
- Recognise that discomfort or disagreement is not grounds for censorship

## **5. Organising Events and Speakers**

HE students wishing to host events or invite speakers must:

- Submit a request to their HE Course Coordinator
- Provide details of the topic, speaker, and expected audience
- Comply with any reasonable conditions set by the college

*\* The college will not deny access to premises based on the speaker's lawful views, but may regulate time, place, or format to ensure safety and compliance.*

## **6. Examples of Illegal Speech**

The following are not protected under this Code:

- Speech inciting violence or terrorism
- Hate speech targeting protected groups
- Harassment or threats against individuals
- Speech that breaches criminal law or public order

## **7. Balancing Rights and Responsibilities**

The college may take proportionate steps to balance free speech with:

- The safety and wellbeing of students and staff
- Its duty to prevent discrimination and promote equality
- Its obligations under the Prevent Duty

Any restrictions will be exceptional and based on evidence.

## **8. Communication and Review**

- This Code will be published on the college website and included in the HE student handbook
- It will be reviewed annually
- Students will be inducted and receive a refresher session of the Code during the induction period each academic year