

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Document Name:	HE Freedom of Speech Code of Practice and Statement of Expectations			
Approval body:	HE Academic Board			
Approval date:	Oct 25			
Review date:	Oct 28			
Document author	Claire Barton			
Document owner	Ruth Perry			
Applicability	Students	X	Staff	X
	Governors		Other	X
Summary	This document sets the rights of staff, students, members and external speakers to academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law.			

DOCUMENT CONSULTATION & APPROVAL

Consultation person / body	Date passed
NA	

Approval body	Date approved
HEAB	Oct 24
HEAB	Oct 25

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A significant negative impact has been identified in the following area and a full impact assessment / risk assessment is available.

Equality & diversity	No
GDPR	No
Health & safety	No
Safeguarding	No

Friendly version of policy available	No
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POLICY CHANGES

Key updates	Impact	Section reference
2024 New document		
2025 Inclusion of 'Code of Practice' in document name to reflect OfS terminology	NA	NA

Code of Practice and Statement of Expectations, Responsibilities, and Obligations Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

1. Nottingham College upholds the right of all staff, students, members and external speakers to academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law. Staff and students should be aware that by joining the College, these obligations and responsibilities apply.
2. The Board of Governors must ensure that members of the College 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 or losing privileges.
3. For students, our commitment includes but is not limited to no-detriment in retaining their rights and privileges, including the delivery of their programme of study, access to facilities, support mechanisms or other opportunities available to them as a member of the College Community. For staff, this commitment is framed within People Services Policies and Procedures.
4. Educational establishments play a pivotal role in society and for the sharing and advancement of knowledge. This requires a process of critical enquiry, in which both established and new ideas are questioned and tested, and consequently expressed ideas may frequently conflict. The College maintains that freedom of speech and academic freedom are most effectively promoted within a culture that values courteous language and behaviour, robust expression of views, tolerance of disagreement, openness to challenge to one's own beliefs, and academic rigour in exploring ideas and constructing arguments. Expectations of behaviour are framed within the Student Code of Conduct and students are therefore expected to voluntarily exercise their right to freedom of speech responsibly, respectfully, and constructively.
5. It is not the role of the College to shelter individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive, and therefore may not obstruct the expression of ideas that they disagree with – even if they consider those ideas offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed – but they may openly and vigorously contest such ideas within the context of free and open debate.
6. Freedom of speech is limited within the law, including limitations on speech that threatens public safety, discriminates, incites hatred or terrorism, defames individuals, or substantially invades privacy. Free speech cannot include threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behaviour intending or likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress, or a breach of the peace.
7. The College has legal duties including the prevention of harassment and discrimination against individuals and recognises its role in promoting dialogue and understanding between individuals and groups with differences in outlook, particularly for those within the broader College community.
8. The College's policies and procedures, including its Safeguarding Policy, External Speaker Policy, and disciplinary practices, while protecting freedom of speech within the law to the maximum extent possible, act to address harassment of individuals, to prevent unlawful expression by its community, and to address speech or actions that unreasonably disrupt the proper functioning of the College. The College is also committed to its values and will offer support to those staff and students who are distressed by the exercise of the lawful freedoms of others.

9. The College will not unreasonably deny access to its campuses or premises to any student, member of staff, visitor, or any individual or group/body invited to the premises by a student or member of staff, on any grounds relating to an individual's ideas, views, or beliefs, and in accordance with the External Speaker Policy. However, should expression of such ideas, views, beliefs, policies, or objectives be unlawful and it be reasonably anticipated that unlawful expression may occur on any relevant occasion, the College may deny access in accordance with the limitations of freedom of speech within the law.
10. Whilst this Statement affirms the College's commitment to, and promotion of, academic freedom and free speech, it also sets out circumstances where it is necessary and appropriate for the College to properly regulate the time, place and manner of academic freedom and free speech to:
 - 10.1 Discharge its legal obligations and those of the sector regulatory body
 - 10.2 Ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of students, staff, and others lawfully on its campuses/premises or otherwise engaged with college activities
 - 10.3 Prevent disruption of other academic activity
 - 10.4 Ensure the efficient conduct and administration of the College's operations are maintained and promoted.
11. This statement cannot be used to suppress freedom of speech or to prohibit the legitimate exercise of the right to protest by peaceful means, provided the expectations of College Policies are not contravened.
12. The College publishes a separate Safeguarding Policy and External Speakers Policy.