

Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech

(Effective from 7 July 2025)

1. Introduction

University of East Anglia

1.1. The University of East Anglia (“the University”) recognises that Freedom of Speech is a fundamental right, essential to upholding democracy, a free media, and political, artistic, and scientific development. The responsibility to protect and promote freedom of speech and academic freedom is one of the most fundamental and the University is committed to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law^[1]. This includes enabling the questioning and debating of the laws that constrain free speech provided that such activity is done in a way that is compliant with the law of England and Wales.

1.2. Other legal obligations also exist which may set limits on certain speech freedoms, to protect the safety, rights and freedoms of others. However, the governing bodies of higher education providers including the University have particular regard to the importance of securing free speech and academic freedoms.

1.3. The University has adopted this Code of Practice (“the Code”) to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is promoted and secured for staff, students and other members of the University (including honorary and visiting appointments) and for all persons authorised to be on University premises, including visiting speakers.

1.4. The Vice-Chancellor (“VC”) as advised by the Executive Team (“ET”) will be responsible for policy issues and decisions connected with the interpretation and implementation of this Code and will consider matters relevant to this Code as circumstances require. ET will review the Code from time to time and consult with Senate on significant changes to it. Council has approved the Code (and will approve any updates to it) and the Vice-Chancellor will ensure that it is brought to the attention of the University’s students and staff and is readily available to view on the University’s website. The VC has delegated his responsibilities for implementation under this Code to the Registrar and Secretary, but the VC may agree other delegations.

1.5. Council has approved this Code to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for students and staff of the University and for visiting speakers and academic freedom is secured for academic staff. This is in accordance with the duties imposed by Section 43 of the Education (no 2) Act 1986, as updated by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

1.6. In approving this Code, the Council of the University acknowledges that the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 is in the process of implementation and amendments to this Code may be required in accordance with caselaw and the regulatory framework as determined by the Office for Students.

2. Scope

2.1. This Code applies to all activities on any premises (wherever situated) of which the University has title or possession, by freehold, leasehold or otherwise, including its halls of residence, students' union premises and the faith centre (the "Premises").

2.2. This Code also applies to all activities of staff, members or current students in any other location when carried out in the name of the University or of the University of East Anglia Students' Union ("Students' Union") or its members. The Scope extends to activities undertaken both in physical and virtual locations.

2.3. This Code makes particular provision in respect of activities such as meetings and events, including public lectures, conferences, seminars, committee meetings, sporting events, awards presentations and musical, theatrical and other creative performances ("Events"). These are provided for in Section 6 of the Code. The principles of this Code also apply to online events held or hosted by the University on its IT systems.

2.4. The University's Memorandum of Understanding with the Students' Union commits to the provisions of this Code in events organised by its members which are held using the University's premises or sanctioned by the University or the Students' Union.

2.5. The principles contained within section 3 of this Code also apply to teaching and curriculum content.

3. Principles

3.1. The University operates with a strong presumption in favour of free speech. This is further supported by the University's [Statutes](#), notably the following:

- "8.4.1: ensure that academic staff 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 (Academic Freedom)"
- "8.5: Any policy or procedure made under paragraph 8.3 (employment relationship with academic staff), or paragraph 8.6 (discipline arrangements for academic staff), shall be construed in its application to give effect to the guiding principles set out in paragraph 7.4 and for the avoidance of doubt any member of staff to whom this statute applies may raise the principle of Academic Freedom as an issue to be taken into account in any investigation, hearing or appeal in

circumstances where these are relevant to the possibility of dismissal or a loss of privileges.”

3.2. The University provides a wide range of fora where free and frank intellectual exchanges take place. Within this both the diverse views of individuals are tolerated, as are the voices of those who wish to protest peacefully. This is central to the University’s culture and protected in law.

3.3. Except where expressly agreed by the Council in line with advancing the University’s charitable objects (as defined in the University Charter), the University does not take an institutional position on political, cultural and religious debates to ensure that individuals are not discouraged from expressing themselves freely within the law. Notwithstanding this the University endeavours to provide a platform to facilitate discourse on contemporary matters by encouraging critical debate, within the law, where the views of all parties are treated with respect.

3.4. Subject to the provisions of this Code and in particular clause 6, the use of the Premises shall not usually be denied to any individual or body of persons on any ground connected with the beliefs or views of that individual or of any member of that body; or the policies or objectives of that body except if there are reasonable grounds (as determined by the VC) to suspect that unlawful activity is likely to occur or there is felt to be a significant health and safety, or security risk, or the costs of supporting the Event are unreasonable, or short notice means appropriate arrangements cannot readily be put into place.

3.5. The University adopts a presumption in favour of the position that exposure of students to course materials, and statements made, and views expressed by a person as part of teaching, research or discussions about any subject matter that is connected with the content of a course, are unlikely to constitute harassment.

3.6. The University reserves the right to take appropriate and proportionate action to protect and promote the freedom of speech as set out in this Code including invoking appropriate disciplinary procedures and applying appropriate sanctions against individuals or groups of persons where the VC determines this is warranted.

4. Legislation

4.1. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 places a duty on the University to secure freedom of speech, within the law, for staff, members, students and visiting speakers.

4.2. It also places a duty to secure academic freedom for academic staff. This means freedom within the law to question, and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular questions, without placing themselves at risk of losing their jobs or privileges or reducing their likelihood of securing promotion or different jobs at the University for reasons unrelated to their academic performance.

4.3. Activity may be deemed unlawful under a range of legislative provisions, including but not limited to the Equality Act 2010, the Public Order Act 1996 and the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. Examples, which are not exhaustive, of unlawful activity include the following:

4.3.1. Expression of racial hatred or religious hatred, or incitement to such hatred or to violence or other criminal acts;

4.3.2. Direct support or an organisation that is proscribed in the United Kingdom;

4.3.3. Contravention of counter-terrorism legislation;

4.3.4. Breach of the peace;

4.3.5. Public order offences

4.3.6. Contravention of health and safety legislation.

4.4. Under the statutory duty derived from the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the University has a legal obligation to consider whether the views to be expressed, or that are likely to be expressed, by a speaker on campus constitute extremist views that risk drawing people into terrorism or are shared by terrorist groups; and in such circumstances not to allow Events to proceed except where the University is entirely convinced that such risk can be fully mitigated without cancellation of the Event. However, the Counter Terrorism and Security Act and the statutory duty do not in any way change the definition of free speech within the law or presumption in favour of free speech within the law. Support for or promotion of terrorism is already illegal under previous legislation and as such the University will not allow it to take place on the Premises.

4.5. The expression of views which are unpopular, controversial or provocative or which cause offence does not, if lawful, constitute grounds for the refusal or cancellation of an Event or an invited speaker.

5. Interaction with other policies and procedures

5.1. The University will take necessary and appropriate steps that have particular regard to the importance of freedom of speech. In undertaking work to achieve this objective it will need to consider other duties and matters, for example but without limit its duties on Prevent and Health and Safety.

5.2. The principles, duties and obligations arising from this Code will be considered in the context of relevant University activities and the adoption of relevant policies and procedures, for example but not limited to People and Culture policies for academic staff and the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion [policies](#).

6. Procedures in respect of Events

6.1. Advance booking of at least ten working days is required for most University venues or locations which are suitable for Events. Detailed guidance applicable from time to time is provided for both [open spaces](#) and events using University [facilities](#).

6.2. The organisers of any Event for which a venue is booked through the University's "Room Bookings" system are required to appoint an individual, who must be a currently registered and attending student booking on behalf of a registered Students Union Society or an employee of the University, to act as "Principal Organiser" of the particular Event for the purposes of this Code. The Principal Organiser shall be responsible, as far as is reasonably practicable, for ensuring that the organisation of the Event and the conduct of those attending it, whether from the University community or outside, is lawful and conforms to the provisions of this Code, to all relevant University guidance and to any condition relating to the Event imposed by ET, the Head of Security and Transport and the Authorised Officer under this Code. This includes ensuring that the Event chair and the Authorised Officer are properly briefed. For the avoidance of doubt, a registered student for the purposes of this Code is a student who is pursuing a programme of study for which they are actively receiving teaching or supervision or both and those who are intercalating or suspended from a programme of study whether in the UK or elsewhere in the world.

6.3. The Authorised Officer in respect of events on campus is the current Head of Security and Transport from time to time or where he or she is absent from work due to illness or absence or other reason then it will be the Registrar and Secretary or Deputy Secretary of the University. The role of the Authorised Officer is to have full knowledge and oversight of the Event in question and together with the Principal Organiser shall have ultimate accountability for the Event in question.

6.4. The Vice-Chancellor and/or Authorised Officer reserves the right to impose such conditions upon the use of the Premises as are reasonably necessary for the discharge of its obligations relating to the safety and health and/or security of its registered students, employees, academics and other persons lawfully upon the Premises or for the efficient conduct and administration of its functions. Conditions for a particular Event(s) will usually include (but without limit):

6.4.1. the Principal Organiser of the Event in question appointing a stipulated number (stipulated by the Authorised Officer) of named stewards, as to whose suitability the Authorised Officer must be satisfied, in addition to any security staff that the Authorised Officer may feel should be present to maintain order;

6.4.2. the wording of leaflets and notices advertising the activity being subject to approval by the Authorised Officer;

6.4.3. admission to the event is confined to members of the University unless agreed otherwise by the Authorised Officer);

6.4.4. tickets are issued by the Principal Organiser or Authorised Officer;

- 6.4.5.** admission is confined to ticket holders;
 - 6.4.6.** nominated senior members of the University are present;
 - 6.4.7.** the activity is recorded;
 - 6.4.8.** the admission of press, television and broadcasting personnel is restricted;
 - 6.4.9.** the access and exit routes of the speaker are subject to approval by the Authorised Officer;
 - 6.4.10.** the Authorised Officer ultimately decides which room(s) are used;
 - 6.4.11.** detailed arrangements are agreed between the Principal Organiser and a member of staff nominated by the Authorised Officer;
 - 6.4.12.** there is adequate opportunity for a wide range of views to be expressed and challenged;
 - 6.4.13.** an experienced and respected individual approved by the Authorised Officer chairs the activity.
- 6.5.** The Vice-Chancellor reserves the right at their absolute discretion to decide that safety, security or practical considerations such as the cost, short notice period or difficulty of providing the necessary level of security may require an Event to be modified, curtailed, postponed or, in exceptional circumstances, cancelled.
- 6.6.** Where the Authorised Officer has decided and directed that an Event should be modified, curtailed, postponed or cancelled then the Principal Organiser may appeal (which should be made in writing to the Registrar and Secretary or Deputy Secretary) against such decision. Any appeal will be considered by the Vice-Chancellor or their delegate (normally the Deputy Vice-Chancellor) whose decision will be final.

7. Complaints

- 7.1.** Any contravention of or material departure from the provisions of this Code by a student or an employee of the University may render the individual(s) responsible liable to appropriate sanctions under the disciplinary procedures of the University.
- 7.2.** ET will ensure that appropriate procedures are in place to allow its stakeholders to report any concerns to be investigated and determined promptly and thoroughly. Any concerns should be reported and raised promptly in writing to the Registrar and Secretary or Deputy Secretary. Such complaint will be acknowledged and the stakeholder contacted to let them know how their complaint will be dealt with and by whom.

Changes to any complaints procedures may be made by the V-C as required from time to time without the need for further Senate or Council Approval although both

Senate and Council will be notified of any procedure changes and the receipt and outcome of any significant stakeholder complaint.

Approval mechanism for this Code and any amendments from time to time:

1. V-C approval and recommendation to Council.
2. Senate review and feedback to the V-C.
3. Council – Final approval.

This version of the Code was approved by Council on **7th July 2025**.

[1] Where reference is made to the law, this will refer to the laws of England and Wales, unless otherwise specified.