

Academic Freedom, Freedom of Speech, and Collegiality Policy

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy sets out London Brookes College's commitment to upholding and promoting the principles of academic freedom, freedom of speech, and collegiality in all areas of academic, professional, and community life.

It applies to:

- All staff (academic and professional services)
- Students and apprentices
- Visiting lecturers, researchers, and associates
- External speakers invited to curriculum-related events
- Contractors and partners engaged in academic or educational activities on behalf of the College

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the *Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom*, which sets out the detailed procedures and responsibilities by which the College fulfils its statutory duties under section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 and Condition E2 of the OfS regulatory framework.

As a small, teaching-focused higher education provider, the College does not host public or non-curriculum-related events; this Policy is therefore proportionate to that context.

2. Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Statement

London Brookes College unequivocally upholds the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law.

The College believes that open, rigorous, and lawful debate is essential to learning, scholarship, and democracy. Accordingly:

- **Freedom of Speech:** Every member of the College community which includes staff, students, and approved external speakers, have the right to express lawful opinions, question ideas, and engage in discussion, even where views may be controversial or unpopular. The College will take all reasonably practicable steps to secure and promote this right.
- **Academic Freedom:** Academic staff and students have the freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, develop and disseminate new ideas, and pursue research and teaching without risk to their employment, privileges, or academic standing.

These freedoms carry corresponding responsibilities: to respect the rights of others, to avoid unlawful speech or conduct, and to uphold the values of intellectual honesty, evidence-based reasoning, and mutual respect.

London Brookes College will not restrict lawful speech or academic inquiry solely because it is challenging, controversial, or politically sensitive.

3. Legislative and Regulatory Context

This policy is informed by and compliant with:

- Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023
- Education (No. 2) Act 1986, section 43
- Equality Act 2010
- Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Prevent Duty)
- Human Rights Act 1998, Article 10 (Freedom of Expression)
- Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework and free speech guidance
- OIA Good Practice Framework

4. Commitment to Academic Freedom

London Brookes College affirms that academic freedom is essential to the pursuit of knowledge and critical inquiry.

Within the law, the College guarantees that academic staff and students have the right to:

- a) Question and test received wisdom and established orthodoxies.
- b) Develop, research, and disseminate new ideas, including those that may be controversial or unpopular.
- c) Publish findings and express academic opinions freely within their area of competence.
- d) Participate in academic and professional associations without fear of disadvantage.
- e) Critically examine institutional or sectoral matters responsibly and lawfully.

No staff member or student shall be penalised or disadvantaged for exercising these rights responsibly.

5. Freedom of Speech

The College recognises and protects freedom of speech within the law for all members of its community and visiting speakers.

It will take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that lawful expression is not inhibited, provided that such expression:

- I. Does not constitute unlawful speech (e.g. incitement to hatred, harassment, or violence);
- II. Does not breach the College's safeguarding or legal duties; and
- III. Respects the rights and dignity of others under the Equality Act 2010.

Freedom of speech includes the right to express lawful opinions that others may find controversial, offensive, or unpopular.

6. External Speakers

The College may invite external speakers to take part in curriculum-linked or educational activities.

To ensure compliance with this policy and relevant legislation:

1. **Approval:** An External Speaker Request Form must be submitted to the Principal (or nominee) at least ten working days before the event.
2. **Assessment:** The proposed speaker and topic will be reviewed for compliance with this policy, the Prevent Duty, and other legal obligations.
3. **Conditions:** Reasonable conditions (such as chairing, balance, or moderation) may be applied to ensure lawful and constructive discussion.
4. **Record-keeping:** A register of approvals and refusals will be maintained and reviewed annually by the Academic Board.

Speakers will not be refused solely because their lawful views may be controversial or unpopular.

7. Collegiality

London Brookes College fosters a culture of collegiality, ensuring mutual respect, inclusion, and shared decision-making.

The College guarantees that:

- Staff and students are consulted on academic policy, planning, and strategy.
- Decision-making processes promote open dialogue and shared governance.
- All members are encouraged to participate actively in academic and institutional life.

8. Responsibilities of Staff and Students

All members of the College community are expected to uphold this policy by:

- Engaging in open-minded, evidence-based inquiry.
- Respecting others' rights to hold and express lawful opinions.
- Avoiding discriminatory or harassing behaviour.
- Complying with College policies on research ethics, equality, and data protection.
- Distinguishing clearly between personal views and official College positions.

Failure to uphold these responsibilities may lead to disciplinary action in line with the College's procedures.

9. Governance and Oversight

The Academic Board is responsible for ensuring the effective implementation and annual review of this policy.

It will:

- Oversee compliance with relevant legislation and OfS conditions.
- Review annual reports on external speaker activity and related matters.
- Recommend updates to maintain sector alignment and good practice.

Ultimate responsibility for compliance rests with the Board of Governors, with operational oversight delegated to the Academic Board

10. Raising Concerns or Complaints

Individuals who believe their freedom of speech or academic freedom has been restricted may raise the issue through the College's Complaints and Grievances Procedure.

- Complaints will be considered impartially and in accordance with natural justice.
- Where a student has exhausted internal procedures and remains dissatisfied, they may escalate the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).
- Staff may raise unresolved matters through appropriate internal or external mechanisms.

The College will cooperate fully with any external review conducted by the OIA or the OfS.

11. Review and Publication

This policy is reviewed annually by the Academic Board to ensure continued compliance with legislation and OfS requirements. It is approved through the College's governance cycle and published on the College website for staff, students, and partners. Together with the *Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom*, it forms part of the College's governance and quality assurance framework.

Version	Owner	Approved By	Next Review
2	Principal	Academic Board	October 2026