

Freedom of Speech Code of Practice 1.0

Enabling Policy Statement; Sponsor	Our Colleagues - Chief People Officer - Operations Committee
Is the Procedure for internal use only (Non-disclosable) ?	Disclosable
Associated Policy Statements:	Our Education - Pro-Vice Chancellor, Education Our Operations – Chief Operating Officer Our Research and Innovation - Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research and Innovation Our Partners and Reputation - Vice-President Global Our Students - Chief Student Officer
Authorised Owner:	Provost
Authorised Co-ordinator:	Katy Huetson, Associate Director (People Services)
Effective date:	1 December 2025
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Sub documentation:	N/A

Approval History

Version	Reason for review	Approval Route	Date
1.0	First publication	Council	20 Nov 25

1. Purpose

This Code of Practice (the Code) sets out the policies and procedures that the University of Surrey (UoS) have put in place to secure and promote freedom of speech within the law, for all members of our community including staff, students, applicants and visiting speakers (actual or invited), as well as academic freedom for all applicable members of our community.

This Code has been drawn up in accordance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (as amended) (the Acts) and addresses the University's responsibilities under the Acts and our commitment to taking all reasonably practicable steps to secure and promote freedom of speech and academic freedom.

Under the Acts, Council must take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.

2. Scope and Exceptions to the Procedure

The Code applies to all of the University of Surrey and its subsidiaries' activities including but not limited to Surrey Sports Park, Cervus +, and Operate Surrey.

In relation to overseas operations, the University's ability to secure Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom is subject to local laws and to what is reasonably practicable in the circumstances.

The Code sets out practices in several areas of the University's operations as required by the Acts.

- Admissions and induction of students
- Appointment, probation and promotion of staff
- Disciplinary matters such as employment contracts (that may include conditions on speech)
- Equality, diversity and inclusion, including Public Sector Equality Duty
- Procedures designed to limit and prevent harassment and bullying
- IT, including acceptable use policies and surveillance of social media use
- Prevent duty
- Principles of curricular design
- Research policy and ethics
- Speaker events
- Staff and student codes of conduct
- Complaints

3. Definitions and Terminology

Freedom of Speech: the freedom within the law to impart ideas, opinions or information by means of speech, writing or images (including electronic form). This right includes freedom of artistic expression. Free speech may include ideas that are shocking, disturbing or offensive. However, exercising freedom of speech comes with responsibilities to act within the law. Freedom of speech may, for example, be restricted in the interests of national security, public safety, prevention of crime and disorder, or for the protection of the reputation or rights of others.

Academic freedom: the right of academic staff to intellectual freedom including the right within the law to question and test received views and wisdom, and to put forward new ideas including controversial or unpopular opinions, and to do so without placing themselves at risk of being adversely affected in their roles, such as by loss of their jobs or privileges at the University, or the likelihood of their securing promotion or different jobs at the University being reduced.

4. Procedural Principles

4.1 Values

The Acts require us to state our values relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom.

The University has clearly defined values which inform and guide our actions including our commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech;

Inclusion: to value everyone in our community

Inspiration: to find it in ourselves and in each other

Innovation: to work together to make tomorrow better than yesterday

Integrity: to do the right thing individually and collectively.

We have, by including the following statements in our Charter and through the development of this Code and relevant policies and procedures, made clear our commitment to protect the principle of freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law for all members of our community equally, whether they are staff, students, alumni, applicants, and visiting speakers (actual or invited).

“The University shall uphold the right for Staff and Students to express lawful views and opinions freely, in speech or in writing, without interference.”

“The University shall protect the intellectual independence of [Academic] Staff . . . to question and test received views and wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in danger of losing their job or privileges or reducing the likelihood of them securing promotion or different roles at the University.”

As an academic institution, we do not take a position on ideas or viewpoints within the law. Rather, we seek to establish a space in which all members of our community feel able to question and test received wisdom, and to express controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of intolerance or discrimination. We recognise that freedom of speech within the law may include ideas that are controversial, shocking, disturbing or unpopular and that could cause offence. We thus expect our staff, students, and visitors to be tolerant of views that differ from their own. This means ensuring that all members of our community respect each other’s rights to free speech so that each of us can express lawful ideas freely and engage in robust, challenging, and civil debate.

Through the implementation of this code of practice, and the policies and procedures referenced within it, we will communicate and uphold these principles. Responsibility for freedom of speech and academic freedom lies with the Provost (or delegate), supported by a Senate Sub-Committee.

4.2 Admissions

The University undertakes that no one will be excluded from admissions processes on the grounds of expressing controversial or unpopular ideas or opinions, including when this speech may have caused offence.

The University may refuse to admit students or visiting academics whose place at the University is subject to restriction of their, or others’, academic freedom or freedom of speech as a result of (a) conditions outlined in their funding arrangements and/or (b) content relating to the criteria used for the award of a scholarship that is in contradiction to these principles. In assessing whether (a) and (b) will infringe academic freedom and freedom of speech while studying at the University of Surrey in the UK, the University officer will need to apply a reasonableness test given the likelihood of imperfect evidence.

The University has set out its commitment to freedom of speech within the law and to academic freedom, as it relates to admissions, in the following codes of practice;

[Code of Practice for undergraduate admissions](#)

[Code of Practice for post graduate taught admissions](#)

[Postgraduate research admissions policy](#)

The University's commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom is stated in our prospectus and this Code and the documents listed above are published on our website.

Information about the complaints that the OfS can review is available on its website [Raising concerns about free speech - Office for Students](#).

4.3 Appointment, reappointment and promotion of staff

The University has set out its approach to protecting and promoting academic freedom and freedom of speech in appointment, reappointment and promotion processes in the following documents and resources;

[Recruitment Guidelines NEW February 2024.pdf \(surrey.ac.uk\)](#)

[Promotion Process for Academic Staff](#)

[Promotion & Appraisal - Human Resources | SurreyNet](#)

These are available to all staff through the University's intranet, [SurreyNet](#).

Human Resources (HR) records of decisions relating to academic appointments, reappointment and promotions will include, where necessary, evidence that candidates have not been penalised for exercising academic freedom.

4.4 Conduct or disciplinary matters

The University's commitment to protect academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law includes an undertaking that staff and students will not be disciplined for exercising freedom of speech or academic freedom (as applicable) within the law. The following procedures set out how the University will uphold that commitment in following its processes on disciplinary matters;

[Capability Procedure](#)

[Staff Disciplinary Procedure](#)

[B3 Student Disciplinary Regulations](#)

[C5 Procedure for managing behavior in respect to Student Regulations and Procedures](#)

[Procedure for Complaints \(students\)](#)

[Regulations for Fitness to Practise \(students\)](#)

[Grievance Procedure \(staff\)](#)

<https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/public-interest-disclosure-procedure.pdf>

Where appropriate records of decisions relating to disciplinary matters, including dismissal, will include evidence that the University did not penalise a member of staff for exercising academic freedom or freedom of speech.

The Senate Sub Committee for Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression has a role in grievance and complaints processes where academic freedom is in question. Specifically, the committee will, "consider an issue or concern raised by a staff member implying that their Academic Freedom or Freedom of Speech has not been protected and to produce a recommendation to the Vice-Chancellor, through the Chair, to inform a decision on the matter." Usually, such matters will be referred to the Committee before a decision is reached in complaints, grievance or disciplinary processes.

Where a concern relating to Freedom of Speech or Academic Freedom is raised via a Public Interest Disclosure Procedure, the investigator may refer those aspects to the Senate Sub-Committee for their academic consideration and recommendations. Any such referral will not affect the operation of the

Public Interest Disclosure Procedure nor the statutory protections it confers.

4.5 Employment contracts

The University does not include conditions on freedom of speech or academic freedom in employment contracts. Limited exceptions may apply where there are legal reasons for restricting speech, for example national security or commercial sensitivities relating to specific areas of work.

4.6 Equality, diversity and inclusion, including Public Sector Equality Duty

The University is clear that our commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law should not conflict with our commitment to the Public Sector Equality Act or to our ongoing work to build a culture which values diversity and inclusion across our University community.

This Code, and related policies, seek to ensure that our principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law apply equally across the University community.

The following policies and resources have been reviewed and updated to reflect this commitment;

[Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Procedure](#)

[Faith and Belief](#)

[Trans and Gender Identity Procedure](#)

4.7 Harassment and bullying

The University's procedure to prevent and respond to reported incidents of harassment and bullying has been reviewed and updated to reflect the requirements of the Acts and our commitment to upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law. The procedure can be found on our web pages [Harassment and Bullying Procedure](#).

Section 6 of the procedure recognises the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom and states that 'vigorous speech, comment and academic debate can be distinguished from the behaviour outlined in this procedure.'

4.8 IT, including acceptable use policies and surveillance of social media use

The following policies have been reviewed and updated to reflect the requirements of the Acts and our commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law. This includes recognising that freedom of speech within the law may include ideas that are controversial or unpopular or that cause offence.

[IT Acceptable Use Procedure](#)

[Social Media \(Staff Procedure\)](#)

[Social Media \(Student Personal Accounts\)](#)

[Social Media \(Student Account Administrators\)](#)

4.9 Prevent duty

The University's policy, training and guidance on Prevent has been reviewed and updated in line with the Acts and to ensure that there is clear advice on differentiating freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law from extremism.

The processes for future reviews or updates of these documents includes the governance processes for freedom of speech and academic freedom.

The relevant documents and resources are listed here and staff should refer to these for direction on upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom with the law alongside our Prevent duties.

[Prevent Policy](#)

[Prevent Policy Action Plan](#)

[Prevent – SurreyNet content](#)

4.10 Principles of curricular design, teaching and learning

The University is committed to ensuring that decisions about the curriculum, and the way it is delivered, safeguard the ability to teach and communicate ideas that may be controversial or unpopular but lawful, and opportunities for students to be exposed to such ideas.

The University upholds the intellectual independence of academic staff and the principle of freedom of speech within the law for all in our community.

Our policies, procedures and supporting resources addressing curriculum design and delivery of teaching and learning have been reviewed to ensure that they reflect our commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom.

The processes for future reviews of these documents include the governance processes for freedom of speech and academic freedom. They will also be reviewed following the conclusion of any complaints relating to academic freedom, or freedom of speech, in the context of curriculum design and content.

The relevant policies, procedures and resources are;

[Code of Practice for programme life cycle processes](#)

[Code of Practice for collaborative provision](#)

[Roles and responsibilities for Faculty staff involved in learning, teaching and postgraduate research student support](#)

[Ethics for Teaching and Research Procedure](#)

[Starting to teach in HE](#)

4.11 Research Ethics

The University is committed to upholding academic freedom in research and the communication of research. The following documents set out the University's policies and procedures supporting research and research ethics. They have been reviewed to ensure they comply with the Acts and the University's values relating to academic freedom.

[Ethics for Teaching and Research Procedure](#)

4.12 Events

The University is committed to freedom of speech for visiting speakers and speakers from within our University community. To support this commitment policies and processes relating to room bookings, external hire of premises and campus safety have been reviewed and updated and are set out in the [Events, VIP Visits and External Speakers Procedure](#) This covers;

- Use of premises - including the principle that the University will not deny use of its premises to any individual on the grounds of their opinions or ideas or to any body on the basis of its lawful policies, objectives or the ideas or opinions of any of its members.
- General principles for room bookings that apply to all University spaces that are available to book by staff, students and external users. These principles do not apply to students requiring specialist space for study or rehearsals or for non-bookable spaces such as the Hive.
- Risk management and security, including principles for charging where additional security costs are may be incurred.
- Processes for agreeing requests for events to go ahead in a timely way, including a decision making process for controversial events under the principle that wherever possible reasonably practicable steps should be taken to ensure an events can go ahead.

4.13 Complaints

Complaints relating to academic freedom and freedom of speech will be handled through the University's normal complaints processes for staff and students. Concerns can also be raised via [Report and Support](#).

[Procedure for Complaints \(students\)](#)
[Grievance Procedure \(staff\)](#)

The University commits to process complaints in a timely way, and to move quickly to dismiss complaints about free speech that are vexatious or lack merit.

The Senate Sub Committee for Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression has a role in grievance and complaints processes where academic freedom is in question. Specifically, the committee will, *“consider an issue or concern raised by a staff member implying that their Academic Freedom or Freedom of Speech has not been protected and to produce a recommendation to the Vice-Chancellor, through the Chair, to inform a decision on the matter.”* Usually, such matters will be referred to the Committee before a decision is reached in complaints, grievance or disciplinary processes.

If a complaint about academic freedom or freedom of speech has not been resolved satisfactorily it may be referred to the Office for Students. The OfS is developing a complaints process to support complaints relating to academic freedom and freedom of speech and more information is available here [Raising concerns about free speech - Office for Students](#)

5. Governance Requirements

5.1 Implementation: Communication Plan

This Code of Practice will be published and communicated in line with guidance from the Office for Students and in accordance with the Acts.

The code will be published on the University of Surrey web site, in line with the University’s publication scheme, and available to the public.

The University’s intranet will host a page that includes.

- A statement briefly setting out the University’s responsibilities under the Acts, our values relating to academic freedom and freedom of speech and our approach to upholding those values.
- A link to the Code and other relevant resources, including Report and Support as the process by which complaints about academic freedom and freedom of speech will be handled.

At the start of each academic year the Provost’s Office, HR and Chief Student Officer will arrange for written communication to all staff and students with a statement about the Code that includes a brief summary of its contents and how to access it. This communication may take the form of a news article on the University and SSU intranets or whichever channel is deemed most appropriate at the time.

The Code will be brought to the attention of new staff and students with content on the Code and the Acts added to existing induction materials.

The Code will be included, and linked to, in any policy or procedure documents that may relate to freedom of speech and academic freedom. This includes policies relating to the following;

- Admissions, appointments, reappointments and promotions
- Disciplinary matters
- Employment contracts (if conditions of speech are included)
- Equality or equity, diversity and inclusion, including the PSSED
- Fitness to practice policies and procedures
- Harassment and bullying procedures

- IT, including acceptable use procedures and procedures relating to acceptable use of social media
- Prevent duty
- Principles of curricular design
- Research ethics
- Speaker events
- Staff and student codes of conduct.

5.2 Implementation: Training Plan

Training on the University's responsibilities under the Acts will be included in induction training for new staff from the 2025/26 academic year onwards.

Key staff, with responsibility for policies and procedures have already received training on relevant aspects of the Acts. This process will continue, utilizing existing meetings, fora and communication cascades to share key information.

Existing training on EDI, complaints, appointments, promotions, and key policies is being updated to reflect the University's responsibilities under the Acts.

5.3 Review

This document will be reviewed at least every three years. It will also be reviewed in response to further changes in legislation or following feedback on implementation.

5.4 Legislative Context and Higher Education Sector Guidance or Requirements

[Communications Act 2003](#) [Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015](#)

[Education \(No. 2\) Act 1986](#)

[Equality Act 2010](#)

[Higher Education and Research Act 2017](#)

[Higher Education \(Freedom of Speech\) Act 2023](#)

[Human Rights Act 1998](#)

[Malicious Communications Act 1988](#)

[Online Safety Act 2023](#)

[Protection from Harassment Act 1997](#)

[Public Order Act 1986](#)

[Public Order Act 2023](#)

[Terrorism Act 2000](#)

[Terrorism Act 2006](#)

5.5 Sustainability

There are no anticipated impacts on energy consumption and/or associated carbon emissions. This code of practice informs the University's work to integrate the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

6. Stakeholder Engagement and Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1. An Equality Impact Assessment was completed on **26/08/2025** and is held by the Authorised Co-ordinator.

6.2. Procedure communicated to all subsidiaries on **05/09/2025**.

6.3. Stakeholder Consultation was completed, as follows:

Mandatory Stakeholders	Nature of Engagement	Request EB Approval (Y/N)	Date	Name of Contact
Governance	Review of document	Yes	5 September 2025	Kelley Padley
H&S	Review of document	No	8 September 2025	Matt Purcell
Sustainability	Review of document	No	11 September 2025	Martin Wiles
Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression	Review of document	No	27 August 2025	Josh Andresen (Associate Professor, Surrey Law School).
Additional Stakeholders	Nature of Engagement		Date	Name of Contact
Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Task and Finish Group Includes representation for associated policy statements.	Consultation and engagement on development of this Code and review for associated processes and procedures.		July 2023 to September 2024	Provost (Co-Chair) Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education (Co-Chair)
Senate and Senate Sub Committee for Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression	Consultation of principles and approach, establishment of Senate Sub-Committee Reviewed at Committee		Established June 2023 23 May 2025	Provost (Chair) Membership: Ex-officio members • University Secretary & General Counsel • Chief Operating Officer • Chief Student Officer • Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education • Pro-Vice-Chancellor, R&I • President of SSU • VP Voice of SSU

				Nominated members: three academic representatives nominated from Senate
University Council	Briefing and consultation		23 May 2023	University Council