

Higher Education Academic Freedom Code of Practice

Review

Formal Review Cycle	Every three year (or earlier as required by legislative or regulatory change)		
Latest Formal Review (date)	February 2025	Next Formal Review Due (date)	February 2028
Policy Owner	Associate Principal Quality, Teaching and Assessment		
Policy Author	Associate Principal Quality, Teaching and Assessment		

Approvals

Board of Corp Y/N	Y	Committee	CQSE	Date Board approved	18.03.2025
ELT Y/N	Y	ELT date approved		Additional committee	HE Board

Publication

Website Y/N	Y	Unify Y/N	Y	Student VLE Y/N	Y	Other	
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Change History

Version	Date Reviewed/ Revised	Description of Change	Reviewed by	Approved by
1.0	01/08/24	New Academic Freedom COP	HE Board	

Higher Education Academic Freedom Code of Practice

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Code of Practice (CoP) is a CoP of City of Sunderland College, trading as Education Partnership North East (which includes Sunderland College, Hartlepool Sixth Form College and Northumberland College). These colleges will be referred to as “the College” throughout this document.
- 1.2 The College is committed to and finds fundamental to an academic setting the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom. We recognise this may mean our students, staff and invited visitors may put forward ideas challenging current thought and controversial or unpopular opinions, and that the College is a place these can be respectfully challenged.
- 1.3 Our College values support our belief that academic freedom is an important part of academic life. The College fosters an environment where its staff can feel able to question, debate and express ideas, including controversial or unpopular opinions, within the law and without fear of intolerance or discrimination.
- 1.4 Our commitment to academic freedom is preserved in Section 11 of our Articles of Government and intertwined with our commitment to freedom of expression, academic integrity, and rigour in recognising the importance of fact and evidence.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This CoP applies to all academic staff of Higher Education provision at the College in the conjunction with their academic work.

3. Aims of the Code and Regulations

- 3.1 This CoP sets out the rights and obligations inherent within the principles of academic freedom, and the CoP shall be construed and applied in the spirit of upholding and promoting those principles wherever reasonably practicable within the law.
- 3.2 This CoP adopts the definition of ‘academic freedom’ contained in the Office for Students Public Interest Governance Principles and defines academic freedom as the ability for academic staff within the law to
 - question and test received wisdom; and
 - forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions

without placing themselves in jeopardy of dismissal or loss of privileges they may have at the College.

4. Arrangements

- 4.1 Steps taken to ensure staff rights within academic freedom are maintained:
 - a) Ensure that staff’s rights of academic freedom and this code of practice is brought to the attention of students and staff through induction.
 - b) Annually refresh student and staff knowledge and understanding of academic freedom and what it means within the College.
 - c) Support staff to understand and exercise their responsibilities towards academic freedom.

- d) Utilise internal and external staff and student surveys to secure views on academic freedom taking into account the findings.
- e) Ensure there are appropriate methods in place to raise concerns about academic freedom.
- f) Monitor any concerns raised about academic freedom and address so far as is practicable within the law.

5. Concerns/ complaints about academic freedom

- 5.1 Students: concerns and complaints regarding academic freedom can be raised through the College’s Concerns, Complaints and Appeals procedure.
- 5.2 Staff: should raise concerns initially with their line manager or senior leader.

6. Associated Documents

- 6.1 Instruments and Articles of Government
- 6.2 The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023
- 6.3 [OfS Public Interest Governance Principles](#)
- 6.4 Concerns, Complaints and Appeals Policy
- 6.5 Freedom of Speech Code of Practice [Freedom-of-Speech-Code-of-Practice-V1-05.24-1.pdf \(educationpartnershipne.ac.uk\)](#)
- 6.6 Social Media Policy
- 6.7 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Statement
- 6.8 Dignity at Work
- 6.9 Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy

7. Policy Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 The HE Board will receive on an annual basis a summary report of:
 - Steps taken regarding academic freedom and any concerns/ complaints received regarding academic freedom.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

Have you sought consultation on this policy?		Consultation has taken place with Programme Leaders and the HE Board.		
Details:				
Could a particular group be affected	Impact Y/N	Description of Impact	Evidence	Mitigation/Justification

(negatively or positively)?				
Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010				
Age	N			
Disability	N			
Gender Reassignment	N			
Marriage and Civil Partnership	N			
Pregnancy and maternity	N			
Race	N			
Religion or belief	N			
Sex	N			
Sexual Orientation	N			
Additional characteristics to consider				
Young Persons in Care & Care Leavers	N			
Young Carers & Care Givers	N			
Young Parents	N			
Youth Offenders	N			
Those Receiving Free School Meals	N			
If there is no impact, please explain:	The entire premise of Academic Freedom is to allow HE academic staff to teach or conduct research freely without concern for their job or rights within the College to be negatively affected. However, the College is mindful of its duty found within the Equality Act 2010 and its commitment and duties to ensuring freedom of speech and academic freedom.			