

Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

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Ownership	University Secretary
Contact	University Secretary
Approval	Goldsmiths' Council
Last review date	June 2025
Next review date	June 2026

1 Introduction

The mission and vision of the Goldsmiths, University of London (the “University”) Strategy to 2033 state the University’s promise to forge positive change through all its activities and partnerships: from education to research, creative and professional practice and knowledge exchange. We inspire transformative intellectual and personal development in students, creating an impact on society, culture, the economy and environment in the UK and around the world. As a progressive and dynamic university, we use innovation and creativity to challenge the status quo.

Without a commitment to freedom of expression and academic freedom, it would not be possible to achieve the University’s mission and vision, nor would it be possible to offer transformative experiences that foster intellectual and emotional growth and resilience, and which ensure that students develop an appreciation of complexity, subtlety and diverse perspectives.

This commitment also reflects the University’s legal obligations to take all steps that are reasonably practicable to secure and promote free speech and academic freedom within the law, and to balance these duties against other legal requirements which may qualify or limit freedom of speech where it is necessary to protect the legal rights and freedoms of others; and the fact that governing bodies of higher education providers must have particular regard to the importance of securing free speech and academic freedoms within their institutions.

Paragraph 2.7. of the Academic Manual provides a general overview of the University’s commitment to freedom of expression and academic freedom within the law.

In addition, the University’s statutes outline the guiding principle 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.

The Council of the University has approved and put in place this Code of Practice (the “Code”) as required by the Higher Education (Free Speech) Act 2023 to explain its values relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom. The Code sets out the processes that the University has put in place to positively support its duty to take all steps that are reasonable and practicable to promote and secure these rights for its students and staff and all other persons who are members of the University or authorised to be on its premises (including visiting speakers) and to ensure compliance with all relevant external legal and regulatory frameworks.

Any breach or departure from this Code may be considered by the University as a form of misconduct and an individual may have their conduct referred for consideration under the University’s student or staff disciplinary procedures as applicable.

2 Duties, and limits, with respect to Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

The Governing Body of the University has a legal obligation to take such steps that, having particular regard to the importance of free speech, are reasonably practicable to secure Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom within the law and ensure that access to its premises is not denied to any person(s) on the grounds of their ideas or opinions. In pursuance of its legal duties, the University is mindful of its obligations under the following legislation:

- a) The Criminal Damage Act 1971
- b) The Education (No.2) Act 1986
- c) The Public Order Act 1986
- d) The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- e) The Human Rights Act 1998
- f) The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
- g) The Equality Act 2010
- h) The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015
- i) The Higher Education and Research Act 2017
- j) The Public Order Act 2023
- k) The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023
- l) The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 ("Martyn's Law")

Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 the University has specific statutory duties to prevent individuals being drawn into terrorism and must consider whether any views expressed on its campus constitute extremist views that create that risk, or are shared by terrorist organisations. In the event that the University identifies a risk it must consider the cancellation of any event except where it is satisfied that the risk can be fully mitigated by less intrusive steps. However, these duties do not change the fact that the University must have particular regard to its obligations to secure free speech, or any presumption in favour of free speech within the law.

It is important to recognise that, at times, the ideas and views of different members of the University community, or those visiting the University, will differ and may come into conflict with one another. It may be that some members of the University community consider some of these opinions to be disagreeable, or even offensive. Universities are as diverse as the broader communities in which they are situated, and wider conflicts and disputes relating to, for example, ethnicity, religion or belief, personal identity or political convictions, sometimes find expression on campus amongst the student and staff body. It is not the role of the University to take a formal position on political or international issues or protect or shield people from ideas or opinions with which they disagree, or which make them feel uncomfortable. The goal therefore is not to eliminate disagreement, which is vital to a strong academic community, but to ensure the creation of conditions for productive

intellectual engagement, and the expression of views which are unpopular, controversial or provocative or which cause offense can be lawful and will not constitute grounds for curtailing an individual's rights under this Code.

The University will have particular regard to its legal obligations to secure free speech and academic freedom within the law. Within this context, the University will ensure that its teaching, curriculum, policies, and procedures reflect its duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law. Recognising that academic freedom and free speech are not absolutes or abstract, but constantly and deliberately regenerated through thoughtful policies and practices, the University will work to build a community where ideas can be freely exchanged, examined, challenged, and developed with academic rigour and scrutiny. This community will be built upon an understanding of mutual responsibilities – for academics, students, and professional services – and will create an environment where challenging concepts can be explored robustly and respectfully.

There is, however, no requirement to provide a platform for speech or academic expression which constitutes a breach of the law. The statutory right of freedom of speech can be limited to secure legitimate aims, for example, by laws to protect national security and public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, and to prevent the disclosure of information received in confidence.

The University will not tolerate unlawful acts against its community, property or the institution itself, whether through speech or physical action. Nothing in the University's commitment excuses abuse, bullying, discrimination, harassment, hatred, intimidation, vandalism, violence or any act prohibited by law. Anyone who engages in conduct of this kind – be they a speaker, an event attendee, or a protester – will have stepped beyond the boundaries of freedom of speech and may be subject to sanction. Equally, assemblies of persons, even if originally directed to lawful purposes, will cease to be lawful if they cause serious public disorder or a breach of the peace, or themselves result in the suppression of lawful freedom of speech or academic freedom of others.

It is important to note that although the University operates with a presumption in favour of freedom of speech within the law and will take all steps reasonably practicable to secure free speech and academic freedom on its campus, there may be exceptional circumstances where it is necessary and permissible to limit or curtail free speech or academic freedom, as long as any interference with those rights is for legitimate reasons and proportionate, i.e., it must impose the least possible restriction on freedom of speech necessary to secure such legitimate aims. To ensure this is the case, the University will always undertake a proportionality test when considering imposing limits on freedom of speech, such as when developing policies around staff or student conduct. Similarly, when making any decision under such policies, the University will again undertake a proportionality test or risk

assessment to ensure any action taken is legitimate and goes no further than is necessary.

Protests or demonstrations are recognised as an important means of exercising freedom of speech and the University respects the right of all members of the University to protest on campus. This includes acts of demonstration such as marches, occupations, online activism, and other forms of protest or demonstration. However, it is vital that such acts of protest or demonstration take place in line with the University's values, policies, and within the law. To help ensure this is the case, in addition to the Guidance on Conduct of Meetings contained in Section E of this Code, the University has produced separate [Guidance on conduct of protests and demonstrations available](#).

3 Practical considerations

The University operates with a strong presumption in favour of free speech and academic freedom and, having particular regard to the importance of free speech, will take all steps which are reasonable and practicable to secure free speech within the law in the context of all the University's activities.

With respect to the planning of teaching, learning, and research activities, the Executive Deans of the academic faculties are responsible for ensuring that the principles underpinning this Code of Practice are embedded in the University's research culture and teaching curriculum. In particular, the University assumes that exposing students to materials, statements, views or discussions about any subject matter connected with course content as part of teaching, learning, and/or research is unlikely to constitute unlawful harassment, unless clearly demonstrated otherwise.

The Code applies to all of the premises within the University's control wherever situated, including any premises which the University has title or possession of on a temporary or permanent basis and whether by way of freehold, leasehold, licence or otherwise including all buildings and grounds that constitute the Goldsmiths' campus in New Cross, the Caroline Graveson Building, the Ken Langley Building, Asquith Gibbes Building, Loring Sports Ground. The Code applies to all use of these premises, including the organisation and conduct of meetings, demonstrations, protests, and other events organised by a member of staff or student of the University or using the University name, funding, branding, or facilities. Meetings, in this context, include all public meetings, whether arranged internally or externally, and held physically or virtually.

The University has produced guidance on expected behaviours in relation to the organisation and execution of: i) meetings where external speakers will be present; and ii) protest activities. The guidance outlines the steps and considerations that will be made to ensure that freedom of expression and the right to free assembly can be upheld. The guidance will also be reviewed and communicated regularly with the intention of making clear the commitment to ensuring that all members of the

University can make their voices heard on matters of concern. The University's Memorandum of Understanding with Goldsmiths' Students' Union ("GSU") will commit GSU to adhere to the requirements of the Code in relation to events organised by its members which are held on the University's premises or sponsored or sanctioned by the University.

4 Freedom of speech complaints

Students

Where a student believes that inappropriate behaviours in relation to the manner and/or content of expression have occurred as part of an event or protest, they can report these via the Report and Support system.

Where a student wishes to make a complaint about the organisation or limitation of an event or protest, they should report this using the University's [Student Complaints process](#).

University Staff members

Where a University Staff member believes that inappropriate behaviours in relation to the manner and/or content of expression have occurred as part of an event or protest, they can report these via the Report and Support system.

Where a University Staff member wishes to make a complaint about the organisation or limitation of an event or protest, they may raise this informally with their line manager in the first instance, or lodge a formal grievance under the University's Grievance Procedure.

External parties

Where a visiting speaker or other party external to the University wishes to make a formal complaint about the organisation or limitation of an event or protest they should follow the guidance on this web page: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/contact/public-complaints>.

Responsibilities for the Code and Monitoring

The University Secretary will be responsible for this Code, any policy issues connected with its interpretation and implementation, and any other matters relevant to this Code as they arise. The University Secretary will review the Code and consult as appropriate if significant changes or updates are required to this Code. The University's Council is responsible for approving the Code and ensuring that it brings the Code and its duties under the Higher Education (Free Speech) Act 2023 to the attention of the University's students annually.

5 Guidance on conduct of meetings

To ensure that any meetings or other activities ('meetings'), including events where external speakers may be present, can appropriately take place on Goldsmiths' premises and/or using Goldsmiths' facilities, the following procedures shall apply.

- 5.1 Bookings for in-person meetings must be made via the standard room bookings processes for which Estates and Facilities are responsible. This will require the provision of sufficient and accurate detail and a risk assessment where required. Where requests are assessed as potentially higher risk by Estates and Facilities these will be escalated for consideration by an appropriate member of Executive Board (other than the Vice Chancellor and the University Secretary). Factors that may warrant escalation include the topic of the meeting or the identity of speakers or participants, or where it is anticipated that a speaker may not be able to enter or leave the building safely or deliver their speech. The Executive Board member will review the proposed arrangements and determine whether the proposed meeting may proceed, and if so lay down any additional requirements or stipulations. The Executive Board member will seek advice as appropriate to inform their decision.
- 5.2 A single person must be designated to be the principal organiser for any meeting. For all meetings other than external bookings, the principal organiser must be a Goldsmiths' student or staff member. The organiser is responsible for ensuring that the organisation of the meeting and the conduct of those attending (whether from the University or external) is lawful and complies with the requirements of the Code and all relevant University policies and guidance as well as any specific conditions that may be set under the Code for the meeting. They are also responsible for ensuring the appropriate booking form is correctly completed and all relevant information provided to the University in advance (including completing any required risk assessments). Where meetings have been assessed as higher risk and escalated to a member of Executive Board, they may stipulate that an alternative more senior principal organiser must be appointed.
- 5.3 The principal organiser must notify the University of proposed meetings or other activities within the following time limits:
 - a) At least ten working days in advance of the proposed date of the meeting in the case of speakers invited by staff or students of the University
 - b) At least twenty working days in advance of the proposed date of the meeting in the case of external bookings
- 5.4 The notification of the meeting must contain:
 - a) a written statement of the name(s) of the speaker(s)

- b) the subject of the address
- c) the scope or objectives of the meeting
- d) and the precise timing of arrival and departure of the speaker(s)

Where there are multiple speakers, details for all speakers should be given.

Where the meeting is to take the form of a debate, in addition to the subject of the address, details of the position or stance each speaker is expected to take should be outlined.

- 5.5 The University will provide formal notification to the principal organiser granting or withholding permission for the use of University premises and/or facilities for the proposed meeting, normally within five working days of the University receiving notice of the proposed meeting. Where meetings have been escalated, the Executive Board member may first make reasonable requests for further information or request to liaise with the principal organiser, including to:

- a) consider the time, location, duration, and other operational requirements for the meeting
- b) advise on the University's expectations for a risk assessment
- c) determine any additional actions necessary to ensure that the meeting meets the University's requirements
- d) inform Security (and other staff, or relevant external agencies as necessary) to ensure that they are aware and can take any reasonable action

- 5.6 Where permission for a meeting is refused, clear reasons will be provided to the principal organiser. The University will also work with the principal organiser to enable, as far as possible, the meeting to take place at a future date.

- 5.7 In accordance with the University's commitment to freedom of speech, the University will, as far as possible, look to ensure that meetings can be supported to take place. However, it is reasonable for the University to refuse permission for the meeting, or to impose conditions on the meeting to enable it to take place, where it is believed that:

- a) The views likely to be expressed by the speaker(s) will be unlawful
- b) The intention of the speaker(s) is likely to be to incite breaches of the law
- c) Adequate arrangements cannot be made to ensure the safety of attendees of the meeting or other people in the vicinity of the meeting
- d) Adequate arrangements cannot be made to ensure that public order is maintained
- e) Exceptional circumstances will mean that the costs required to ensure the safe facilitation of the meeting are disproportionate to the scope or objectives of the meeting
- f) Failure to provide sufficient notice of the meeting, or the withholding of material information about the meeting, means the University has not had

adequate opportunity to properly consider the risks associated with the meeting, or what measures could be put in place to secure free speech.

The above list is non-exhaustive, and discretion remains with the University to make decisions with regard to conditions appropriate to the assessed level of risk and concern related to the proposed meeting.

The Director of Estates and Facilities or the Head of Security or an appropriate nominee is responsible for providing any security advice and recommendations with regard to the management of any meeting. Potential security risks would be considered as part of the overall determination by the Executive Board member as to whether a meeting is granted permission to proceed, including with any conditions and actions to mitigate the risks. Security risks include risks to life, physical health of persons or any damage to premises or theft or damage to property or disruption of meetings to the extent that good order is threatened. The Director of Estates and Facilities or the Head of Security or an appropriate nominee is responsible for the operational management of such meetings, which includes, as necessary, arrangements to manage access to a meeting and liaison with the Police. They have authority to make decisions and impose restrictions at short notice as necessary to ensure the safety and security of attendees including cancel, postpone, close a meeting or exclude attendees. This would normally be done in agreement with the principal organiser and/or meeting chair. The University Security team are solely responsible for making all security arrangements for meetings.

- 5.8 Where the Executive Board member considers it reasonable to set conditions in order to enable the meeting to take place, these will be proportionate and only applied to the extent believed necessary to facilitate the safe, lawful and efficient conduct of the meeting. In this situation one or more from the following non-exhaustive list of conditions may be applied:
- a) Impose requirements with regards to the provision of security or stewards
 - b) Engage the University Security team to ensure appropriate security arrangements are in place for the meeting (and there may be circumstances where the University looks to charge organisers to cover security costs)
 - c) Impose limitations on attendees, potentially including the requirement that the meeting be formally ticketed and/or restricted to specific groups
 - d) Declare the meeting as public in order to permit a police presence
 - e) Ensure an appropriate risk assessment is completed in good time;
 - f) Require the appointment of a chair, separate to the principal organiser. They may also require that this chair be an independent party from the organiser and/or any group with an interest in the meeting
 - g) Appoint a member of University staff as a controlling officer for the meeting
 - h) Require the addition of other speakers to broaden the scope of the meeting
 - i) Vary the time, date, location, and/or scope/objectives of the proposed meeting
 - j) Require that the meeting be filmed

- k) Require that observers independent of the organising party be in attendance at the meeting
- l) Require the admission or exclusion of press, television or broadcasting personnel

Where appropriate and required, the Executive Board member shall have discretion to lay down further conditions, potentially after consultation with other parties including the Director of Estates and Facilities or the Head of Security or an appropriate nominee and the Police.

- 5.9 Where conditions are set, these will be shared with the principal organiser as part of the statement granting permission for the meeting. The principal organiser can discuss the conditions where they feel that the conditions imposed will make the meeting more difficult to deliver. However, the final judgement with regards to conditions rests with the Executive Board member. The principal organiser and every other person involved in the organisation of a meeting for which permission has been granted shall be required to comply with any and every condition laid down subject to the right of appeal set out below.
- 5.10 The principal organiser of the meeting (and/or the Chair of the meeting where one has been put in place and is a different individual to the principal organiser) shall have a duty, so far as possible, to ensure that both the audience and any speaker at the meeting act in accordance with the law during the meeting and that all attendees have the right to lawfully express their views including any criticism or challenge to those expressed by the speaker(s). In case of unlawful conduct, the principal organiser and/or Chair is required to give appropriate warnings and, in case of continuing unlawfulness, will move to suspend the meeting.
- 5.11 For the purposes of good order, the University regards as expected conduct of speakers and attendees including not engaging in the following activities (non-exhaustive list):
 - a) preventing participants from accessing or leaving meetings safely
 - b) preventing speakers from being heard clearly
 - c) chanting or using foul or abusive language including racial or other abuse
 - d) refusing reasonable requests from the meeting chair, meeting steward, or other University staff involved in managing an meeting
 - e) displaying flags, banners, placards or similar items at a meeting
 - f) throwing any item
 - g) acting in any other way which is threatening or abusive or which could deny others their right to legal free speech

No person should be censured for exercising their legal right to free speech.

- 5.12 No article or objects may be taken inside the building where the meeting is taking place or taken or used elsewhere on University Premises in circumstances likely to lead to injury or damage.
- 5.13 Premises used for meetings or activities must be left in clean and tidy condition, in default of which the organisers shall be charged for any additional cleaning and repairs that are subsequently required. Payment in advance or evidence of ability to pay these costs may be required in addition to any other condition imposed to enable the meeting to take place.
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6 Appeals against decisions related to the conduct of meetings

Appeals against the rulings of the Executive Board member may be made to the Vice-Chancellor, whose decision shall be final.