



# Freedom of Speech

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## Policy Owner: University Secretary

Version	Effective From	Amendments	Equality Analysis	Stakeholder Consultation (e.g. Disability & Dyslexia Team, Policy Review Group)	Approval Date	Author
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This Policy was approved by University Executive Board

# 1 Introduction

In accordance with the requirements of Section 1 (A1) of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

*“[the] Board of Governors of the University will take the steps that, having particular regard to the importance of freedom of speech, are reasonably practicable to take in order to achieve the objective in securing freedom of speech within the law for –*

- (a) staff of the provider,*
- (b) members of the provider,*
- (c) students of the provider, and*
- (d) visiting speakers.”*



## 2 Purpose and Scope of the Policy

### 2.1 Purpose

- 2.1.1 Our University believes that the maintenance of freedom of thought and expression within institutions of learning is essential to their claim to be such. To prevent the articulation of certain viewpoints for no other reason than that they are not accepted by some groups, or even by the majority, is to prevent equally the full understanding, and due analysis and criticism, of those views; in consequence it protects those who hold such views from having to defend them against the arguments of those who do not.
- 2.1.2 It is nevertheless recognised that the articulation of certain views or the use of certain expressions may also in themselves constitute incitement to riot, insurrection, racial hatred, sexual harassment, discrimination on such grounds as race or sex, or other criminal activities. Their mere utterance may itself be unlawful. On other occasions, the articulation of such views may make probable a breach of the peace. It is the clear duty of our university authorities to attempt to prevent any breach of the law where it is in their judgement reasonable to assume that this might occur.
- 2.1.3 There is an intermediate area where what those uttering them claim to be mere expressions of opinion are seen by others as abusive, threatening, intimidating, humiliating, degrading, or as 'verbal violence', even though their utterance is not itself a breach of the law. Such expressions should be met not by violence but by rational analysis and argument.
- 2.1.4 The suppression of points of view by violence or intimidation is contrary to the nature of institutions dedicated to learning, but so too is excessive insistence on expressing publicly views which are certain to cause offence or distress to others. Conflict of moral principles is never easy to resolve, even where one such principle is the right to freedom of lawful expression; self-restraint and consideration for the feelings of others are here the best guides.



## **2.2 Scope**

2.2.1 Accordingly, the University recognizes its statutory duty to ensure that the use of any premises is not denied to:

- (a) any individual on the grounds of their ideas or opinions; and
- (b) anybody on the grounds of its policy or objectives, or the ideas or opinions of any of its members.

2.2.2 The remainder of these Regulations addresses three types of event:

- (a) events on University premises arranged by University staff outside the normal teaching course (which latter term shall be held to subsume Special Courses as well as courses leading to awards of our University).
- (b) events arranged by the University of East London Students' Union (UELSU) or a society thereof, or on University premises by an individual student;
- (c) events outside the normal teaching course arranged by any person or group of persons not covered by (a) or (b) above but held on University premises.

## **3 Policy Statement**

### **3.1 Code of Practice**

3.1.1 The Vice-Chancellor and staff, and the sabbatical officers of UELSU and the Students' Union collectively, shall at all times do whatever is reasonably practicable to ensure that the use of University premises (including those occupied by UELSU) is not 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 policy or objectives of that body, subject only to the caveats in paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 below.



3.1.2 Where, at any of the events listed in paragraph 1.4 above, views may be publicly expressed, whether verbally or otherwise, adequate notice shall be given to the Vice-Chancellor or his or her designated officer (normally the University Secretary); a period of less than 14 days' notice shall be regarded as inadequate. Such notice shall include:

- (a) the date, time and place of the event
- (b) in the case of staff and student-organised events, the name of the individual or group responsible for them and, where it is a group, the name of the individual who will act as correspondent to the group
- (c) in the case of other events, the name of the individual or group responsible and, where it is a group, the name of the individual who will act as correspondent to the group, plus where possible the name of at least one member of staff or Students' Union officer connected with the group and willing to act as co-sponsor of the event, who together with the correspondent or organising individual shall sign an undertaking to comply with all lawful instructions of our university authorities regarding the organisation of the event
- (d) the arrangements proposed for security measures and for caretaking, if these are necessary.

3.1.3 The Vice-Chancellor or designated officer shall within seven days of the receipt of such notice, where no objection is made to the arrangements proposed, signify consent. Changes required to the arrangements shall similarly be notified within seven days.

3.1.4 Where it seems to the individual or group organising the event that views may be expressed which are unlawful, or that other unlawful actions may take place, this must be notified to the Vice-Chancellor or designated officer at the same time as the notice described in paragraph 2.2 above is delivered, or if suspicion that this may occur arises thereafter, immediately.



- 3.1.5 When for this reason or otherwise the Vice-Chancellor or designated officer reasonably believes that an unlawful act may be committed, he or she may refuse permission for the event to take place on University premises.
- 3.1.6 In accordance with the same procedure specified in paragraph 2.4, the organiser(s) of an event must notify the Vice-Chancellor or designated officer if he/she/they judge that a breach of the peace may occur during/before/after the event. When for that reason or otherwise the Vice-Chancellor or designated officer reasonably believes that there may be a breach of the peace during/before/after the event, he or she shall as soon as is practicable consult the Senior Police Officer (or his/her nominee) in the Metropolitan Police Division within which the event is to take place.
- 3.1.7 After such consultation, permission for the event may be refused. Where it is not, the Vice-Chancellor or designated officer shall act in concert with the Senior Police Officer and the organiser(s) of the event to ensure that freedom of speech is maintained and that no breach of the peace occurs.
- 3.1.8 Whenever an event falling within the provisions of Regulation 2.4 or 2.5 is proposed, the Vice-Chancellor or designated officer shall inform of his or her actions and decision the Chair and Deputy Chair of Governors.
- 3.1.9 Our University will not unreasonably refuse permission for events to be held on its premises. To ensure this, the Vice-chancellor or designated officer shall, before refusing permission for an event to take place, inform themselves upon the following questions:
- (a) whether there is likely to be incitement of those attending the event to commit a criminal act
  - (b) the likelihood of the expression of views contrary to the criminal law
  - (c) whether the event is in direct support of an organisation whose aims and objectives are illegal
  - (d) whether the event could give rise to any breach of the peace based on the advice of the Senior Police Officer of the appropriate Division of the Metropolitan Police) which may also extend to the safety of persons attending and members of the University community.



- 3.1.10 Any breach of these Regulations shall, in the case of a student or group of students, fall to be handled under the Student Disciplinary Regulations. A breach by UELSU or one of its affiliated clubs or societies shall be considered by the Board of Governors (or by the Chair or Deputy Chair acting on its behalf), which shall decide what action to take. A breach by a member of staff shall be handled in accordance with the disciplinary procedures agreed with the relevant trade(s) unions.
- 3.1.11 A student signing upon enrolment an undertaking to observe our University Regulations shall be deemed formally to have accepted both the letter and the spirit of these Regulations. Similarly, UELSU and its affiliated clubs and societies shall in the exercise of the functions given them in the constitution approved by the Board of Governors have due regard to the rights of freedom of speech and lawful assembly.
- 3.1.12 An appeal against a refusal of permission to hold an event involving an external speaker may be brought by the event organiser in accordance with the appeal process set out in the External Speakers' Procedure. Other complaints relating to freedom of speech or academic freedom may be lodged using the University's complaints procedures.

## **3.2 Delegation**

- 3.2.1 The Board of Governors delegates its powers in respect of the matters dealt with in these Regulations to the Vice-Chancellor or his/her designated officers, except insofar as the latter may deem it desirable to seek advice or a decision from the Governors, their Confidential Policy Committee, or their Chair and Deputy Chair, where this is reasonably practicable.

# **4 Links to other Institutional Policies and Procedures**

## **4.1 Internal Policies**

Prevent Statement and Policy