

Higher Education - Free speech and academic freedom policy

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To support our commitment to Sustainable Development Goals, the policy has identified three SDG's it is working towards. The full list of SDGs can be found here - [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/)
Please identify the goal, a target and current position.

Goal	Target	Current position
Quality Education	1	2
Reduce Inequalities	1	2
Gender equality	1	2

1. Sector leading
2. On target
3. Below target
4. Not started

Free speech and academic freedom policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out Leeds College of Building's commitment to uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom as required by the Office for Students (OfS) and in compliance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, and other applicable laws.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All students, staff, governors, and visiting speakers.
- Activities on College premises or held under the College's name.
- Online activities and communications related to the College.
- Student Union affiliated events and societies.

3. Policy statement

Leeds College of Building is committed to:

- Ensuring freedom of speech within the law for all members of its Higher Education community.
- Promoting an environment where challenging and diverse ideas can be expressed without fear of censorship or reprisal.
- Balancing freedom of speech with the need to uphold the law, safeguard individuals, and protect the College's reputation.

The College recognises that lawful free speech may include views that some may find offensive. However, this right is not absolute and may be limited in line with the law (e.g. hate speech, defamation, incitement to violence).

4. Legal and regulatory framework

This policy complies with:

- Education (No. 2) Act 1986, s.43 – duty to secure freedom of speech.
- Higher Education and Research Act 2017 – protection of academic freedom.
- Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 – additional OfS oversight and duties.
- Human Rights Act 1998 – Article 10 (Freedom of Expression).
- Prevent Duty – countering radicalisation in a proportionate and lawful manner.

5. Responsibilities

- Governing Body: Ensures compliance with legal duties and oversees implementation.
- Principal and Senior Leadership Team: Promote a culture of open debate and oversee operational management.
- Staff and Students: Expected to respect the freedom of expression rights of others and engage in dialogue responsibly.

- Student Union: Must also uphold the principles of free speech under this policy and relevant legislation.

6. External speakers and events

Events involving external speakers must:

- Be booked in accordance with the College's events and speaker approval procedures.
- Undergo a risk assessment if there is potential for protests, or security concerns.
- Not to be refused solely because views are unpopular, unless they breach legal limits

Where necessary, the College may impose conditions (e.g. moderated Q&A, security arrangements) to enable lawful expression while ensuring safety.

7. Academic freedom

Leeds College of Building supports academic staff in their rights to:

- Question and test received knowledge.
- Put forward new ideas or unpopular opinions within the law.

Academic freedom includes freedom from institutional censorship or discipline, provided the views expressed are lawful.

8. Complaints and breaches

Students, staff, or visitors who believe their rights to free speech or academic freedom have been unlawfully restricted may raise a complaint via the College's formal complaints procedure.

Where relevant, complaints may also be referred to the Office for Students or Free Speech Complaints Scheme.

9. Monitoring and review

The College will review this policy periodically and in line with statutory guidance. Amendments may be made to reflect changes in legislation or OfS requirements.

10. Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)

Leeds College of Building affirms its commitment to transparency, accountability, and the protection of free speech within our higher education provision.

As part of this commitment, the College will not require, request, or encourage students, staff, guest speakers, or third parties to enter into Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) that prevent the lawful disclosure of concerns, opinions, or experiences relating to matters of public interest, academic debate, freedom of expression, or personal safety and wellbeing.

This includes, but is not limited to, situations involving academic discourse, safeguarding concerns, harassment, or complaints. NDAs will not be used to silence individuals or restrict the lawful expression of views or experiences.

The College reserves the right to use confidentiality agreements where necessary for the protection of commercially sensitive information, intellectual property, or personal data, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Such agreements will not be used to inhibit free and lawful expression.