

Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. This Code of Practice sets out the Blackburn College's approach to freedom of speech for the benefit of College students and staff as long as the pursuance of such freedoms remains within the law, and within College policies and is not so extremely articulated as to incite riot, insurrection, racial hatred, harassment, criminal activities or other unacceptable activities.
- 1.2. This Code of Practice is subject to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. This landmark legislation will ensure universities protect and promote freedom of speech on campus to bolster academic freedom and citizenship.

2. Reason for The Policy

2.1. Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

The Act requires universities, colleges and students' unions in England to take steps to ensure lawful freedom of speech on campus. This does not include unlawful speech, such as harassing others or inciting hate, violence, or terrorism.

It is for universities, colleges, and students' unions to consider whether the speech is lawful, by considering criminal law such as the Public Order Act 1986 and legislation such as the Equality Act 2010.

2.2. Article 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998

Article 10 of the Human Rights Act states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which is extended to children and young people under the UNCRC Article 13. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

2.3 Education (No 2) Act 1986

Section 43 of the Education (No 2) Act 1986 states that every individual and body of persons concerned in the government of universities and colleges shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students and employees of the establishment and for visiting speakers.

This includes in particular the duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the use of any premises of the establishment is not denied to any individual or body of persons on any ground connected with:

- a) The beliefs or views of that individual or of any member of that body or
- b) the policy or objectives of that body.

The Act requires that the Corporation, with a view to facilitating the discharge of this duty issue and keep up to date a code of practice setting out:

- b) The procedures to be followed by members, students, and employees of the establishment in connection with the organisation:
 - i) of meetings which are to be held on premises of the establishment, and which fall within any class of meeting specified in the code; and
 - ii) of other activities which are to take place on those premises, and which fall within any class of activity so specified; and
- c) the conduct required of such persons in connection with any such meeting or activity.

Additionally, the Act states that every individual and body of persons concerned in the government of the College shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable (including where appropriate the initiation of disciplinary measures) to secure that the requirements of the code of practice for the College are complied with.

2.4 Higher Education and Research Act 2017

a) Section 14 of the Act – Public Interest Governance Condition – states that “ ‘a public interest governance condition’ means a condition requiring the providers’ governing documents to be consistent with the principles in the list published under this section, so far as applicable to the provider”. Section 14(7) states “The list must include the principle that academic staff at an English higher education provider have freedom within the law:

- i) to question and test received wisdom, and
- ii) to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at the provider.”

b) Under the framework introduced by the Act the governing bodies of registered universities and colleges should take 'such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured within the provider.'

The above should be consistent and supportive of the role and remit of the Office for Students in this regard, including the promotion and use of the free speech complaints scheme.

2.4 PREVENT Duty

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 means the College must "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" (Section 26). The College must also "have particular regard to the duty to ensure freedom of speech" and "to the importance of academic freedom" (Section 31). Under Section 29, we must "have regard to any such guidance in carrying out that duty."

The College is complying with this duty in all its aspects, which in practice means striking a fine balance between concerns around extremism and concerns around censorship. The work in promoting British values and the College's values and its Single Equality Policy all aim to positively address this challenge. It covers many areas of activity, including pastoral support for students, staff training, information sharing and assessing speakers for Students' Union events. In the assessment of speakers for Students' Union events the College will have due regard to the Government's list of terrorist groups or organisations banned under UK law and details of proscription criteria.

3. Policy Objectives

The College supports the principle of freedom of speech and expression within the law as one of its fundamental principles. It also has regard to the need to ensure that students and staff have freedom to question, test and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves at any risk. Every person employed at the College and every student enrolling at the College should be aware that joining the College community involves obligations and responsibilities, which are consistent with the above principle and the law.

4. Policy

4.1 This Code of Practice sets out the rights and obligations inherent in supporting the principle of freedom of speech and expression within the law. The Code's obligations and rights apply to:

- a) the College (which includes all bodies or persons having authority to determine any matter relevant to this Code);
- b) all Governors and staff.
- c) all students.
- d) the Students' Union and its constituent societies, clubs, and associations.
- e) any visiting or guest lecturers.
- f) any alumnus invited by the College.
- g) all contractors and commissioned services,
- h) any person or organisation wishing to hire premises controlled by the College for an event.

In relation to the holding of any events on premises, the Code's rights shall also apply to persons invited or otherwise lawfully on the premises for the purposes of the event, subject to maintaining safety, security, order and an environment of mutual respect and tolerance of difference on campus; and

- j) persons who, if it were not for the provisions of this Code, would have been invited to the event.

4.2 Nothing in this Code will affect the rights of any person taking any steps pursuant to lawful industrial action.

4.3 Subject to clause 4.1, those who are under a duty to observe and uphold the principle of freedom of speech within the College shall do so at all times.

Academic Freedom

4.4 The principle of freedom of speech set out in this Code shall extend to the performance by all staff of their duties and responsibilities and to any visiting or guest lecturer invited by the College. It shall also extend to students presenting or exhibiting work produced during the course of their studies with the College.

4.5 Any person or body to which this Code applies shall not take any action (other than by reasonable and peaceful persuasion) to prevent the holding or continuation of any lecture, tutorial, exhibition, or other academic activity because of the views held or expressed or which are reasonably likely to be expressed, (whether or not within the College) by the lecturer or tutor or student concerned, except as provided for in paragraph 4.3.

4.6 Any person or body to whom this Code applies shall not take any action (other than reasonable and peaceful persuasion) to prevent any student or group of students from attending any academic activity required by, or

properly associated with, the course for which they are enrolled because of the views or beliefs held or lawfully expressed (whether or not within the College) by that student or because of the reasonable likelihood that such views will be expressed.

Events

- 4.7 Where any person or body subject to the obligations of this Code wishes to hold any event for the expression of any views or beliefs held or lawfully expressed on premises controlled by the College, consent shall not be unreasonably refused, providing it does not breach any College policy particularly in relation to safeguarding of students.
- 4.8 Save for the provisions in paragraph 4.9, it shall not be a reasonable ground of refusal of permission or facilities for any event that the views likely to be expressed there may be controversial or contrary to any policy of the College, the Students' Union, or Central or Local Government, provided that the expression of such views is lawful. Expression of opinions which are annoying, offensive, in bad taste, or ill-mannered are not automatically unlawful and should not be the sole ground for refusal unless this would result in the College failing in its wider legal duties (for example, to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups or in relation to safeguarding). The fact that disorder may result at any event is not in itself a ground for refusal of permission or facilities unless the creation of such disorder is the intention of the organisers of, or speakers at, any such event or public safety and order might be jeopardised.
- 4.9 It shall be accepted as reasonable to refuse consent, or withhold facilities for any event to which this Code applies where the College reasonably believes (from the nature of the speakers or from similar events in the past whether held at the College or otherwise) that:
- a) the views likely to be expressed by any speaker are contrary to the law;
 - b) the intention of any speaker is likely to be to incite breaches of the law or is to intend breaches of the peace to occur;
 - c) the views likely to be expressed by any speaker are for the promotion of any illegal organisation or purpose;
 - d) the views likely to be expressed by any speaker are for the promotion of any organisation subject to the College's "No Platform" policy as amended from time to time;
 - e) it is in the interests of public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime or the protection of those persons lawfully on premises under the control of the College, that the event does not take place.
 - f) the views of any speaker are widely known and published and do not align with the values of the College, regardless of focus of the event in question.

- 4.10 Subject to paragraphs 4.26 and 4.28, where the College is reasonably satisfied that the otherwise lawful expression of views at any event is likely to give rise to disorder, the College shall consider what steps it is necessary to take to ensure:
- a) the safety of all persons,
 - b) the maintenance of order; and
 - c) the security of premises.
- 4.11 The College may impose such conditions and requirements upon the organisers as are reasonably necessary in all the circumstances. These may include, but are not limited to, requirements as to provision of stewards, variation of location and time, and whether the event shall be open to the public at large.
- 4.12 Where the College concludes that imposing conditions would not be sufficient to prevent serious disorder within premises subject to their control, it may decline to permit such events to be held. Before doing so, however, the College will generally consult the police with a view to establishing whether the serious disorder can be prevented or otherwise dealt with appropriately by attendance of police officers or alternative conditions.
- 4.13 Where any person or body to whom this Code applies is engaged in the organisation of any event on College premises at which it is reasonably suspected that disorder is likely to occur, the organiser shall normally give the Vice Principal not less than 28 days' notice in writing of such a proposed event. The Vice Principal shall inform the person or body organising the event in writing within seven days of the date of the notice whether the meeting may go ahead.
- 4.14 If any person or organisation believes that the actions of the Vice Principal in refusing permission or facilities for the holding of any event, or the actions of the College in imposing conditions are unreasonable, it shall have a right to make representations. Any representation shall be made to the Principal and Chief Executive within seven days of the date of the letter confirming the original decision. The Principal and Chief Executive shall consider such representations and within seven days shall confirm in writing to the relevant person or organisation whether the original decision is to be upheld or varied. If the event organiser has been unable, for legitimate reasons, to comply with the normal requirement to provide 28 days' notice to the Vice Principal, the Vice Principal shall, at his/her absolute discretion, have the right to vary this procedure in order to ensure that a final decision is provided to the organiser prior to the date of the meeting.
- 4.15 Any person or body wishing to hold an event on College premises must complete the relevant room booking form and provide further details of the event if required. This requirement applies to both internal and external bookings. It will be a mandatory requirement that the organisers of any event indicate they accept the terms of this Code when making a venue booking.

- 4.16 All event organisers shall ensure proper security and organisation (including stewarding and chairing) of the event for the purpose of protecting the right of freedom of speech. Whilst the heckling of speakers is a right not to be disturbed, it shall be contrary to the Code to seek, by systematic or organised heckling or disruption of such activity, to prevent the lawful expression of views.
- 4.17 It shall be contrary to this Code for any person or body subject to the Code to organise, engage in or become associated with, any conduct with the intention of preventing (other than by reasonable and peaceful persuasion) any event subject to this Code from being held or from continuing.
- 4.18 The organisers of the event shall have a duty so far as is reasonably practicable to ensure that both the audience and the speaker act in accordance with the law during the event. In the case of unlawful conduct, the event organiser shall give appropriate warnings, and, in the case of continuing misconduct, the event organiser shall require the withdrawal or removal by the stewards, or if necessary by the police, of the person(s) concerned.
- 4.19 It shall be the responsibility of the organisers of the event to ensure that no articles or objects shall be taken inside the venue where the event is being held in circumstances, which are likely to lead to injury, damage, or breach of the law. Any security arrangements will need to be discussed and agreed by the Vice Principal.

No Platform Policy

- 4.20 The College will offer no platform to those who are intolerant of the free speech of others both generally and where it includes the denial of the right to hold or express an opposing opinion. This also includes those who engage in the active prevention of permitting others to speak, such as the interruption - violent or otherwise - of meetings (see 4.3 f)). Those who offer no platform to others, without any reasonable or justifiable basis for doing so, should not benefit from the freedom to speak at the College.
- 4.21 The College will offer no platform to those who advocate or engage in violence in the furtherance of their political, religious, and philosophical and/or other beliefs (see 1.3).
- 4.22 The College will offer no platform to those who hold and disseminate views which are repugnant to the maintenance of liberty under the rule of law in the UK or who advocate or engage in the violent overthrow of democracy in the UK or elsewhere.
- 4.23 The College reserves to itself the right to debar speakers or organisations from the College where the College reasonably believes that their presence on College property is not conducive to the good order of the College, or where it would offend the principles of scholarly inquiry, or where it would

put at risk the safety of students, staff or the general public. The College further reserves the right to list the names of individuals or groups which it debars either under this general reserved right or in accordance with the principles above.

- 4.24 The College will maintain a list of organisations considered to be within the scope of the provisions in 4.20-4.22. Any amendments made to the list from time to time by the College shall be deemed as included or excluded as appropriate with effect from the date that the amendment is made.

General

- 4.25 Any breach of the provisions of this Code by staff, students or Governors will be punishable under the applicable Disciplinary Procedures.
- 4.26 It shall be the duty of all those subject to the Code to assist the College in upholding the rights of freedom of speech set out in this Code.
- 4.27 Where a breach of this Code occurs, it shall be a duty of all to whom this Code applies to take all reasonable steps to secure the identification of persons involved in that breach.
- 4.28 Where breaches of the criminal law occur, the College shall, where appropriate, assist the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service. In respect of any criminal charges, the College, shall not, unless the Principal and Chief Executive determines otherwise, proceed with any disciplinary proceedings in respect of the same matters, until the conclusion on any ongoing criminal proceedings.
- 4.29 The operation of the Code shall be monitored by Policy and Procedures Committee.

Review

Section 43(3) of the Education (No.2) Act 1986 requires that the Corporation shall issue, and keep up to date, a Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. In order to comply with this duty, the Corporation will review annually, the code and its operation.

5. Definitions

By 'speaker' this Code means any organiser or other person invited to address the meeting other than members of any audience at that meeting.

6. Dissemination of an Access to the Policy

6.1. The Policy/Code will be made available to/on:

- The College's internet site
- All College staff
- Parents

- Students
- Visitors to the College

Author:	Chris Hepworth (original); Liam Doherty (review); Scott Lumley (review)
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