

Freedom of Speech Code of Practice

POLICY DETAILS	
Policy Category	Governance
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Approving Authority	Governing Body; updates by the Results Consortium Executive Team
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Author	Quality Manager
Owner (if different from above)	Principal
Version Changes	1. Reference to section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 removed: it no longer applies to registered higher education providers in England. 2. Regulatory Advice 24 citation updated to the version last updated 5 August 2026. 3. Section 12 rewritten: the OfS free speech complaints scheme opened on 1 September 2026. 4. New section 7: procedures for organising meetings and events, as required by HERA section A2(2)(b). 5. New section 8: conduct required at meetings and events, as required by HERA section A2(2)(c). 6. New section 9: criteria for decisions on the use of premises and for exceptional circumstances on security costs, as required by HERA section A2(2)(d). 7. New section 10: recruitment, promotion and academic freedom. 8. New section 11: records, monitoring and the relationship with the Prevent duty. 9. Annual notification to all students, and written notice to staff, stated explicitly at 6.2. 10. Duplicate clause numbering at 7.4 corrected; sections renumbered. 11. Duplication with the Visiting Speakers and Events Policy removed; new clause 7.6 sets out which document applies.
Related Policies / Procedures	Visiting Speakers and Events Policy Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy Student Complaints Policy Prevent Policy
Effective Date	October 2026

1. Purpose and Values

- 1.1 Results Consortium (hereafter 'the College') affirms that freedom of speech and academic freedom are fundamental to higher education. These principles support the exchange of ideas and the advancement of knowledge, including views that may be unpopular or controversial.
- 1.2 In line with statutory duties under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which inserted Part A1 into the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA), the College will protect lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom for staff, students, visitors and visiting speakers.
- 1.3 This Code sets out how the College will uphold freedom of speech in line with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and the Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Advice 24 (OfS 2025.35).

2. Definitions

- 2.1 Freedom of Speech: the right to express lawful views, ideas and information, in any medium, subject only to legal limits (for example national security, prevention of crime, safeguarding the rights of others). Lawful expression is protected even where it is shocking, disturbing or offensive to others.
- 2.2 Academic Freedom: the freedom, under HERA section A1, of academic staff within the law to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves at risk of losing their jobs, privileges or promotion.
- 2.3 Reasonably Practicable Steps: the steps the College is required to take to secure freedom of speech, judged by what is reasonable in the circumstances, taking account of the College's size, resources and the nature of the activity.
- 2.4 Visiting Speaker: any person invited to speak at a College event who is not a member of staff or a student of the College.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This Code applies to all College staff, students, governors and visiting speakers, and to all College activities, on campus, online or at partner premises.

4. Principles

- 4.1 The College will:
 - Secure lawful freedom of speech for staff, students, visitors and visiting speakers, by taking the steps that are reasonably practicable.
 - Secure academic freedom for academic staff.
 - Protect free speech only within the law. Expression that incites violence, terrorism, hatred or unlawful harassment will not be permitted.
 - Ensure free speech rights are exercised consistently with duties under the Equality Act 2010, safeguarding dignity and respect.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Governing Body	Holds ultimate responsibility for compliance with the statutory duties and approves this Code.
Principal	Ensures this Code is implemented and reports to the Governing Body. Decides events referred under paragraph 7.4.
Quality Manager	Provides advice and oversight on implementation of the Code.
All Staff and Students	Respect the lawful free speech rights of others.

6. Institutional Measures

- 6.1 The College will ensure that teaching, curriculum, policies and procedures comply with the legal duty to secure freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law.
- 6.2 The College will:
- Bring HERA section A1 and this Code to the attention of all students at least once each year, and give written notice of them to all staff.
 - Provide training for staff on freedom of speech and academic freedom.

7. Organising Meetings and Events on College Premises

- 7.1 This section applies to any meeting or event on College premises, or online in the College's name, that involves a visiting speaker, is open beyond a single teaching group or addresses a subject likely to attract significant public attention.
- 7.2 The organiser must book the room and register the event with the Principal at least 15 working days before the date, using the booking process in the Visiting Speakers and Events Policy.
- 7.3 Late requests will be considered and will not be refused solely because they are late, but the College may be unable to put the necessary arrangements in place in time.
- 7.4 Most events will be approved without further enquiry. Where a member of staff considers that an event may raise a risk to the safety of those attending or to the College's legal duties, it is referred to the Principal for a decision under section 9.
- 7.5 The College will not require an organiser to disclose the content of a speech in advance, to submit slides for approval or to justify the choice of speaker by reference to the speaker's views.
- 7.6 The Visiting Speakers and Events Policy sets out the practical arrangements for visiting speakers, such as booking, site access, health and safety and fees. Where it differs from this Code, this Code applies.

8. Conduct Required

- 8.1 Those attending or organising a meeting or event must not prevent a speaker from being heard, or prevent others from hearing them. Peaceful protest and the expression of disagreement are legitimate; disruption that stops an event proceeding is not.
- 8.2 Those present must comply with any reasonable direction given by the chair of the event or by a member of College staff, and with the Student Code of Conduct or staff conduct requirements as applicable.
- 8.3 A breach of this section may be dealt with under the Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures or under staff disciplinary procedures. Disciplinary action will not be taken against any person for the lawful expression of a view.

9. Decisions on the Use of Premises and Security Costs

- 9.1 Access to College premises will not be refused, and conditions will not be imposed, because of the ideas, beliefs, opinions or policy objectives of the speaker or of the organising body.
- 9.2 Where a decision is required under paragraph 7.4, the Principal will consider whether the speech concerned is within the law; what steps are reasonably practicable to allow the event to proceed; and whether any restriction is prescribed by law and proportionate. Restriction is a last resort.
- 9.3 The College will not pass the cost of security to the organiser, the speaker or any attending body except in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances arise only where the cost is substantial in relation to the College's resources and does not arise from the expected reaction of others to the views to be expressed. Cost will not be used as a means of preventing an event.

- 9.4 A decision to refuse an event, to impose conditions or to charge for security will be given in writing with reasons and recorded under section 11.

10. Recruitment, Promotion and Academic Freedom

- 10.1 The College will not require an applicant for an academic post, or a member of academic staff seeking promotion, to commit to a particular viewpoint or to provide evidence of such a commitment.
- 10.2 Academic staff will not suffer detriment in appointment, probation, promotion, workload or renewal of contract because of the lawful expression of a view, including within their field of expertise.

11. Records, Monitoring and Prevent

- 11.1 The College will keep a record of every event referred under paragraph 7.4, the decision taken, the reasons for it and any conditions imposed. Records will be retained for three years.
- 11.2 The Principal will report annually to the Governing Body on events referred and complaints received.
- 11.3 In discharging its duty under section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the College will have particular regard to its duty to secure freedom of speech under HERA section A1. The Prevent duty will not be used as a reason to refuse an event where the speech concerned is lawful.

12. Complaints and Appeals

- 12.1 The OfS free speech complaints scheme opened on 1 September 2026. Staff, applicants for academic posts and visiting speakers may complain to the OfS. Students are not eligible under the OfS scheme and should use the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) instead.
- 12.2 A complaint about a restriction on free speech should first be raised with the College under the Student Complaints Policy or, for staff, the staff grievance procedure. The College will aim to conclude its internal process within 90 days, because a complainant may take a complaint to the OfS once 90 days have passed since the internal process began.
- 12.3 No person will be disadvantaged for making a complaint under this Code in good faith.

13. Review and Publication

- 13.1 This Code will be published on the College website.
- 13.2 It will be reviewed annually, or earlier if required by changes in legislation or OfS guidance.
- 13.3 The Governing Body approves this Code. The Executive Team will approve updates to this Code.