



Policy on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

If you are reading a printed version of this document, you should check the online document link (<https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=76485>, this will include a reference number, allocated by the online document system. This reference number can then be used to identify each specific document, which can be helpful if there are name changes.) to ensure you have the most up to date version.

1. Introduction and Purpose

This document sets out the University's commitment to securing and promoting the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom within our community.

2. Scope and definitions

- 2.1. This policy is applicable to all staff and students at the University and anyone invited to speak or otherwise take part in events to be held or organised by the University.
- 2.2. **Academic freedom** means the freedom of academic staff to question and test received views and wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, within the law, without placing themselves at risk of losing their jobs or privileges or reducing the likelihood of them securing promotion or different roles at the University.
- 2.3. **Freedom of speech** means the freedom, within the law, to impart ideas, opinions or information by means of speech, writing or images (including in electronic form).

3. Securing and promoting the importance of Freedom of Speech

- 3.1. The University is committed to securing and actively promoting the importance of free speech within our community.¹ It is fundamental to our purpose to advance education, knowledge and wisdom for the good of society. As is set out in our Charter, the work of the University is carried on in a spirit of tolerance and collegiality, freedom of opinion, mutual respect and concern, and openness responsibly exercised within the law.² We support with enthusiasm and vigour the principles of freedom of thought and speech, which is one of our core values.³ As members of

¹ [Statute XVI](#)

² III)4) of the [Charter](#)

³ [Our Values - Academic freedom](#)

the University community, we each have our own role to play in securing free speech across all the University's work and activities.

- 3.2. We embrace and celebrate difference, diversity and debate and strive to provide a safe environment for students, staff or speakers invited to the University to be able to express freely their ideas, however polarising they may be. As a university, we pride ourselves on being a place of education and learning and our community must be one in which we are able, within the law, to question and test received wisdom, express new ideas and explore controversial or unpopular topics and opinions.
- 3.3. We recognise that this will not always feel comfortable because such freedom must apply not only to information or ideas that are favourably received or uncontroversial, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb⁴. As such, we believe that promoting and securing free speech must go alongside embodying our values of mutual understanding, respect and tolerance towards each other when sharing our views and ideas.⁵ Staff and students who have been affected by the free speech of others can access a range of support at the University⁶.

4. Speech that is not protected or which may be restricted/regulated

- 4.1. Our commitment to freedom of speech extends only to speech within the law (speech that breaches either civil or criminal law is not protected). The University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech identifies some of the civil and criminal laws which are likely to be most relevant.
- 4.2. In addition, freedom of speech is a 'qualified' right, and there may be circumstances in which it is legitimate and proportionate for the University to restrict or regulate lawful speech in line with the principles established through the legal and regulatory framework. Whilst we operate under a very strong presumption in favour of permitting lawful speech, the qualified nature of the right is addressed further under the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

5. Securing and promoting the importance of Academic Freedom

- 5.1. The University is committed to securing and promoting the importance of academic freedom. In accordance with the definition at paragraph 2.2, this means that our academic staff shall have the freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new

⁴ European Court of Human Rights – See [Guide on Article 10 of the ECHR](#)

⁵ [Our Values - 'Humanity'](#)

⁶ Support services for [students](#) and [staff](#).

ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves at risk of losing their jobs or any privileges they may have at the University⁷. Academic staff will be no less likely to secure a promotion or other roles at the University because of expressing such ideas or opinions, within the law.

6. Decision-making and policy development

- 6.1. We recognise that there will be difficult and complex challenges for the University when considering matters of free speech, academic freedom and balancing competing rights and obligations. The principles set out in this policy will inform our decisions and policies where such issues are at play. The University also has in place a Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech which sets out how the principles in this policy shall be applied in practice.
- 6.2. We will keep this policy, the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, and all relevant policies and procedures under review, in consultation with our wider University community, to ensure that we continue to secure and promote these fundamental rights.

7. Policy Content

[Insert policy content here]Version amendment history		
Version	Date	Reason for change

Document control box	
Policy / Procedure title:	Policy on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom
Lead contact email	deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk
Date updated:	July 2025
Approving body:	Board of Governors
Version:	V2 July 2025
Supersedes:	V1 July 2024
Previous review dates:	July 2024
Next review date:	July 2026
Equality impact outcome:	Medium
Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations:	Statute X, Statute XVI
Related policies/procedures/guidance etc	Code of Practice Freedom of Speech Dignity at Work and Study Policy
Policy owner:	Deputy Secretary
Lead contact:	Deputy Secretary

⁷ [Statute X](#)