

Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

UCEN Manchester

1. Purpose

This Code of Practice sets out UCEN Manchester's commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law. It provides guidance for students, staff, external speakers, and other visitors engaging in UCEN Manchester activities or using its premises.

2. Scope

This Code applies to:

- All UCEN Manchester students and staff;
- External speakers, visitors, contractors, and partner organisations using UCEN Manchester premises;
- All events, talks, discussions, and activities to include online, or in partnership with an external venue, where UCEN Manchester is the host or sponsor.

3. Legal and Regulatory Framework

UCEN Manchester recognises its legal duties under the following:

- The Education (No. 2) Act 1986 to secure freedom of speech within the law;
- The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, including its duties to promote the importance of free expression;
- Equality Act 2010, ensuring freedom of speech is balanced with duties to prevent unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation;
- Health and safety legislation, safeguarding, and the Prevent Duty.

4. Commitment to Values

As a teaching-focused provider, UCEN Manchester is committed to:

- Creating an inclusive, respectful environment for discussion and debate;
- Supporting students and staff to engage critically with diverse and challenging ideas;
- Balancing freedom of speech with the need to protect individuals from harm or unlawful behaviour.

5. Applicability of this Code

This Code forms part of UCEN Manchester's wider governance and is referenced in:

- Student and staff induction materials;
- Policies on events, external speakers, and disciplinary procedures;
- Any agreement to use UCEN Manchester premises for external events.

6. Statement of Principles

UCEN Manchester is committed to upholding and promoting freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law. These principles are vital to the educational experience, enabling students and staff to explore ideas, challenge assumptions, and prepare for life in a diverse and democratic society.

6.1 Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech means that all members of the UCEN Manchester community have the right to express opinions, receive and impart information, and engage in open discussion within the bounds of the law.

Our commitment to freedom of speech includes:

- Supporting respectful, lawful debate, even on controversial topics;
- Encouraging participation from diverse and under-represented voices;
- Not tolerating disruption, intimidation, or silencing of lawful expression.

6.2 Academic Freedom

UCEN Manchester also supports academic freedom and the right of academic staff to explore and share new or contested ideas as part of their teaching and scholarly practice. Academic freedom also applies to students undertaking independent research or inquiry.

These freedoms are supported by UCEN Manchester's commitment to academic quality and rigour. Our curriculum and teaching staff help students evaluate evidence, form arguments, and assess ideas using critical academic skills.

7. Operational Arrangements

UCEN Manchester ensures that freedom of speech and academic freedom are embedded in its day-to-day operations and procedures.

7.1 Curriculum and Teaching

Our curriculum design, teaching practices, and assessment methods support the expression of a broad range of ideas and critical thinking.

- Programme development and approval processes consider academic freedom and the need to present a range of viewpoints;
- Teaching and assessment practices encourage debate and critical reflection;
- Students are supported to challenge ideas and express opinions respectfully.

7.2 Staff and Student Guidance

New staff and students are introduced to this Code of Practice through induction, with ongoing training available.

7.3 Policies and Procedures

Institutional policies are reviewed to support, not restrict, lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom.

7.4 Monitoring and Feedback

UCEN Manchester uses feedback to evaluate perceptions of freedom of speech and updates procedures as needed.

7.5 Raising Concerns

Concerns can be raised through the appropriate procedures and will be handled fairly and transparently.

8. Meetings and External Speakers

UCEN Manchester encourages events that promote the free exchange of ideas. All such events must comply with this Code and [External Speaker, Organisation, Event and Literature Procedure.docx](#)

General Principles:

- Events must support lawful freedom of speech and be respectful and inclusive;
- Protest must not infringe on legal rights to speak or be heard.

8.1 External Speakers

Events involving external speakers require risk assessment and compliance with our External Speaker, Organisation, Event and Literature Procedure if potential risks are identified.

8.2 Reasons for Restricting an Event

Events may be refused or conditioned if they pose risks such as inciting violence or breaching safeguarding duties.

8.3 Conditions on Events

UCEN Manchester may apply conditions to ensure safety and legal compliance, such as:

- Ticketing;
- Appointing chairs;
- Requiring staff presence;
- Limiting attendance.

8.4 Cancellations

Events may be cancelled only after reasonable mitigation efforts if they cannot proceed safely or lawfully.

8.5 Conduct at Events

Participants must act respectfully and follow lawful instructions. Disruption may lead to removal and disciplinary action.

9. Governance, Monitoring and Complaints

UCEN Manchester has established governance arrangements to support the implementation, review, and enforcement of this Code of Practice.

9.1 Oversight and Responsibility

Overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with this Code rests with UCEN Manchester's Senior Leadership Team. The designated senior leader will:

- Oversee promotion of the Code to staff and students;
- Monitor incidents and concerns raised under this Code;
- Ensure the Code is periodically reviewed and updated in line with sector guidance and legislative requirements.

9.2 Promotion and Training

This Code of Practice will be made available to all students and staff and promoted via:

- Induction programmes;
- Student handbooks and staff training materials;
- UCEN Manchester's website and intranet.

9.3 Monitoring and Reporting

UCEN Manchester will:

- Keep a record of any complaints, concerns, or incidents relating to freedom of speech or academic freedom;
- Utilise the National Student Survey (NSS) to secure student views on whether freedom of speech and academic freedom at the institution are being adequately protected and act upon the findings;
- Identify trends or recurring issues and update procedures accordingly;
- Provide periodic reports to senior leaders and relevant committees.

9.4 Complaints and Appeals

Concerns about a possible breach of this Code can be raised through UCEN Manchester's existing complaints, grievance, or disciplinary procedures. All concerns will be reviewed fairly and in line with relevant policies. Where necessary, the matter may be referred to senior leaders or external authorities.

9.5 Review of this Code

This Code of Practice will be reviewed annually or sooner if required due to legal or regulatory changes. The review will take into account feedback from students, staff, and any incidents or issues that have arisen in the application of the Code.