



CCG Higher Education Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Statement

1. Introduction

Chichester College Group as an academic institution that has regularly exposed students and its members to a wide range of views, including those that challenge commonly accepted ideas and conventional wisdom or that may be viewed as difficult, contentious or discomforting. The core mission of the delivery of higher education is to create, sustain and encourage robust debate and discussion in the pursuit of knowledge. Free speech and academic freedom are fundamental to this purpose.

It is important to note that these freedoms are both enforced - and restricted - by the law of the land. Therefore, whilst both academic freedom and freedom of speech are of vital importance for all higher education institutions, only lawful expression is protected.

2. Academic freedom

2.1 "Academic freedom", means in relation to academic staff at CCG, their freedom within the law to (a) question and test received wisdom; and to (b) put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves at risk of being adversely affected by losing their jobs or privileges; or the likelihood of securing promotion or different jobs at the provider being reduced.

2.2 The right of academic freedom is qualified by the expression 'within the law'. This means that there are boundaries to academic freedom, but those boundaries are as set by criminal and civil law, with the effect that acts which are unlawful are not protected. It is therefore the law that constrains the requirement to protect academic freedom, not CCG's choices.

That objective extends to securing that, where a person applies to become a member of academic staff at CCG, the person is not adversely affected in relation to their application because they have exercised their academic freedom within the law.

3. Freedom of speech

3.1 Freedom of speech is a wider concept than academic freedom that goes beyond the rights of academics and applies to everyone. It is commonly defined by reference to the freedom to speak freely without censorship or limitation. In practice, the right to free speech is not absolute in any country and is commonly subject to limitations which recognise the potential conflict between free speech and other laws.

3.2 Freedom of speech has a special role in colleges, specifically protected as a matter of law. The legislation, in the form of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 which amended the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, emphasises the significance of free speech for colleges by imposing a legal obligation on them to



promote and protect it for students, staff and visiting speakers, which is then regulated by the Office for Students (OfS).

3.3 Section A1 of the 2017 Act states that:

- (1) The governing body of a registered higher education provider must take the steps that, having particular regard to the importance of freedom of speech, are reasonably practicable for it to take in order to achieve the objective in subsection (2).
- (2) That objective is securing freedom of speech within the law for—
 - (a) staff of the provider,
 - (b) members of the provider,
 - (c) students of the provider, and
 - (d) visiting speakers.

3.4 The obligation is not merely to refrain from limiting or infringing freedom of speech, but rather to do all that is reasonably practicable to secure freedom of speech within the law. This includes a duty to ensure that the use of any college premises, including spaces occupied by its Students' Union, is not denied to any individual or body of persons on the grounds of their beliefs, views, policies or objectives. CCG has a 'Freedom of Speech Policy' which sets out the principles which underpin the expectations of staff, students and others wishing to use college premises for meetings and events.

[College Documents and Policies - Freedom of Speech Policy.pdf - All Documents](#)

4. Academic freedom and freedom of speech at CCG

4.1 CCG HE in partnership with its Students' Union, is committed to high quality, student-centered higher education within a supportive community of learning. CCG seeks to create a positive learning environment which inspires and enables individuals to exceed their expectations. In such a community, staff and students must be given opportunity to explore all ideas fully, creatively and critically, free from fear of unlawful harassment or abuse. CCG is a community in which individuals can teach, research, speak and publish freely, confident that their ideas will be respected and debated fairly. It is only with a substantial and practical commitment to these foundational values that staff and students at CCG are able to engage in high quality research, teaching, learning and assessment. Such freedom is essential to the pursuit of knowledge, insight, wisdom and understanding.

4.2 CCG is committed to the growth and development of all its staff and students. Such growth and development is dependent upon CCG being a secure and supportive environment in which ideas, however controversial or unpopular, may be debated seriously and with due consideration to their proponents. CCG will further its goal of being a vehicle for social, cultural and economic renewal and growth by modelling the highest standards of free debate and discussion. Individuals will only exceed their expectations if they are confident, they can experiment with diverse and sometimes unpopular ideas and express themselves freely. First and foremost, CCG is a place where



people are supported and encouraged as they explore diverse ways of thinking creatively and critically about society, culture, religion and politics. There should be no limit in principle to the range of views within the law to which students, staff and members might be exposed. These may include views that some or all students might find shocking, disturbing or offensive.

4.3 To fulfil these goals CCG will encourage all its members to promote a safe and secure environment in which staff and students feel free to express diverse and sometimes unpopular opinions. Departments will explore ways in which they can foster a positive, supportive and generous environment which can promote widespread free discussion. In addition, CCG will seek to protect the rights of its members to express and discuss a variety of views entirely free from control and pressure so long as such discussions do not contravene its legal obligations. One aspect of CCG's commitment to freedom of speech is to protect and support any member of its community who is subject to abuse or persecution from wider society as a result of the expression of controversial or unpopular opinions. CCG upholds the rights of academic staff to exercise freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have within our community.

4.4 CCG will seek to regulate its life so that it is compliant with the law, especially the law relating to freedom of speech. In balancing our responsibilities for securing and promoting freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law, and also meeting its legal obligations, including in respect of student and staff welfare, CCG aims to act reasonably and proportionately and in accordance with its values, policies and the law.

4.5 CCG recognises there will be occasions when the rights of individuals will be in conflict. In particular, the free expression of one individual or group might be properly perceived as detrimental to the well-being of another individual or group. In such instances CCG recognises there are no easy answers, but it will address such occasions on a case by case basis being guided always by its own values, policies and the law. In particular CCG will seek to secure freedom of speech and find means to mitigate any risks rather than close down opportunities for ideas to be argued and challenged.

5. Appended documents

The following three documents work together as a set:

- Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Statement
- Freedom of Speech Code of Conduct
- CCG Freedom of Speech (Group Policy)



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Lead Manager/Owner	Kirste McCool
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