



## **Bishop Burton College Freedom of Speech Policy**

### **1. Introduction**

Bishop Burton College, is fully committed to upholding and promoting the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom, as detailed in the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

This policy applies to all staff, students, governors, visiting speakers, contractors, and external organisations using any part of the College's facilities.

### **2. Policy Statement**

#### **2.1. Definition: Freedom of Speech**

Freedom of speech refers to the right of individuals to express their ideas, beliefs, and opinions without fear of censorship, restriction, or punishment — provided that such expression is within the law.

In the context of higher education, this includes the right to:

- Speak freely in lectures, seminars, and public forums;
- Debate controversial or unpopular views;
- Invite external speakers to share differing perspectives.

This right is protected by UK law (including the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023) and applies to students, staff, governors, and visiting speakers.

#### **2.2. Definition: Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom is the right of academic staff to teach, research, and publish without undue interference, and to express ideas, even those that may be controversial or unpopular, as part of their scholarly work.

It protects the ability to:

- Explore new or challenging areas of knowledge;
- Publish research findings without institutional or political censorship;
- Offer academic critique within one's field of expertise.

2.3. Academic freedom is a cornerstone of intellectual inquiry and applies specifically to those engaged in teaching and research in higher education.

2.4. The College recognises that the free exchange of ideas is central to academic inquiry and personal development. We are committed to creating an environment in which lawful freedom of speech is protected and academic freedom is upheld.

2.5. The College will not deny the use of its premises to any individual or organisation on the basis of their lawful views, beliefs, or opinions, unless the event or activity:

- Contravenes the law;
- Poses a risk to public safety;
- Threatens the rights or freedoms of others;
- Significantly disrupts the operations or activities of the College.

### 3. Freedom of Speech in Academic Life

3.1. The College recognises that the open exchange of ideas is at the heart of teaching, learning, and research. As such, freedom of speech is not limited to organised events or public debates but is a vital part of everyday academic life.

3.2. Staff and students have the right to:

- Explore challenging topics through teaching and classroom discussion;
- Question, debate, and critique different perspectives;
- Engage in robust dialogue on matters of public, political, or academic interest.

3.3. These rights must be exercised within the law and in a manner that respects the rights of others. This includes freedom to:

- Express unpopular or minority views;
- Challenge conventional thinking;
- Assign or study texts and ideas that may be controversial or sensitive.

3.4. Academic freedom and freedom of speech must be protected even when content may cause discomfort — provided it does not amount to unlawful harassment, incitement, or discrimination.

3.5. Staff and students are expected to engage respectfully and to distinguish between intellectual challenge and personal attack. The College supports a culture of civil discourse, critical inquiry, and mutual respect.

### 4. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Board of Governors** – Oversees this policy and ensures compliance with legal duties.
- **Senior Management** – Implements and reviews the policy, provides guidance, and manages risks associated with external events or speakers.
- **Staff** – Responsible for day-to-day implementation and compliance with procedures.
- **Students** – Expected to uphold freedom of speech, engage respectfully in debate, and report any concerns.

### 5. External Speakers and Events

5.1. All events involving external speakers must comply with the College's approval and risk assessment process.

5.2. Event organisers must:

- Provide full and accurate details of proposed events;
- Submit sufficient notice for appropriate review;
- Comply with safeguarding, Prevent Duty, and public safety requirements.

5.3. Refusal of permission will only occur where there is a clear, lawful basis, and the decision will be communicated in writing with the right to appeal.

### 6. Managing Risks

6.1. Where risks are identified, proportionate actions will be taken to mitigate them, including:

- Adjusting logistics (time, venue, or format);
- Enhancing security or safeguarding measures;
- Facilitating balanced representation of views.

6.2. Refusal to host an event will only occur as a last resort, based on evidence-based assessment.

## 7. Complaints and Appeals

Concerns about the implementation of this policy should be submitted in writing using the College's complaints procedure.

All concerns will be addressed transparently and fairly, with the option to escalate to external regulators such as the Office for Students (OfS) if necessary.

## 8. Related Policies and Procedures

8.1. This policy should be read alongside other relevant institutional policies and frameworks, including:

- Code of Conduct for Students and Staff
- Safeguarding Policy
- Prevent Duty Risk Assessment and Action Plan
- Complaints and Appeals Procedures
- Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy (Condition E6) – In line with the Office for Students' Condition of Registration E6, this policy outlines the institution's approach to preventing and responding to harassment and sexual misconduct. The University Centre affirms that all measures taken under Condition E6 will be implemented in a manner fully consistent with our legal duty to uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom.

## 9. Method of Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed annually, or in response to legislative changes, regulatory updates, or institutional needs.

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**Date:** July 2025

*This document is available in a variety of formats. Main Reception will supply guidance on the range*

## Policy Approval

Approval By:  <b>Corporation</b>	<u>Date:</u>  23 <sup>rd</sup> Oct 2025
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