

Academic Freedom Code of Practice

Policy no:	2.4
Version no:	23.09
Author:	Head of Compliance
Last review date	September 2023
Next review due:	September 2024
Responsible Committee:	AcB
Approved by & date:	BoG October 2020
Linked policies:	<p>Academic Management Framework</p> <p>Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy</p> <p>Academic Appeals Policy</p> <p>Employee Handbook</p> <p>Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy</p> <p>Disciplinary & Staff Grievance Policy</p> <p>Safeguarding and Prevent Policy</p> <p>Anti-Bullying & Anti-Harassment Policy</p> <p>Equal Opportunities Policy</p> <p>Equality and Diversity Policy</p>
External reference:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, Accessed online: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/16/enacted. 2. Information Commissioner’s Office, Accessed online at: https://ico.org.uk/ 3. UK Public General Acts, Data Protection Act 2018, Accessed online at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents/enacted 4. UK Public General Acts, Human Rights Act 1998, Accessed online at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/schedule/1/part/1/chapter/9 5. UK Public General Acts, Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, Accessed online at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/section/26 6. GOV.UK Statutory Guidance, Prevent duty guidance, Accessed online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance
Audience:	Academic and other staff and stakeholders

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1.0. Introduction

1.1 Oxford Business College (OBC) steadfastly supports and promotes the principle of academic freedom, recognising it as a cornerstone of higher education. This policy asserts OBC's unwavering commitment to upholding freedom of speech within the parameters of the law, as delineated by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. We acknowledge the vital role of academic freedom in fostering an environment of intellectual exploration, where staff, students, and visiting speakers can freely exchange ideas, question established knowledge, and express diverse viewpoints without fear of censorship or retribution. OBC is dedicated to maintaining a balanced approach that respects individual expression while adhering to our legal, ethical, and social responsibilities.

2.0. Purpose

2.1 The primary purpose of this Academic Freedom Policy at Oxford Business College (OBC) is to delineate and reinforce the institution's dedication to academic freedom as an essential element of higher education. This policy serves to clarify the rights and responsibilities associated with the exercise of free speech within the college's community. It aims to foster an environment where academic staff, students, and visitors can engage in open and critical discourse, academic enquiry, and the free exchange of ideas, all within the bounds of legal and ethical standards. This policy also seeks to balance the freedom of academic expression with the need to maintain a respectful, inclusive, and safe educational environment, in compliance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and other relevant legislation. The ultimate goal is to support a vibrant academic culture that is conducive to learning, teaching, and research of the highest quality.

3.0. Scope

3.1 The Academic Freedom Policy applies comprehensively within OBC. It encompasses all members of the OBC community, including academic and administrative staff, students, visiting lecturers, guest speakers, and other stakeholders engaged in the College's activities. The policy is pertinent to all academic and related activities undertaken on OBC premises, as well as those conducted under the aegis of the College in external or virtual environments. This includes, but is not limited to, teaching, research, public engagement, and the organisation and hosting of events and debates. The policy ensures that academic freedom is upheld consistently across all facets of the College's operations and interactions, aligning with the legal framework set by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

4.0. Aims and Objectives

4.1 Aims

- To ensure that academic staff have the freedom to teach, research, and engage in public debate without fear of censorship or retribution.
- To promote an environment that fosters open inquiry, critical thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge without interference from external or internal pressures.
- To uphold the principles of academic freedom as a cornerstone of higher education and a fundamental human right.

4.2 Objectives

- To establish clear guidelines and procedures for protecting academic freedom, including the rights of academic staff to express their views without fear of discrimination or retaliation.
- To create a culture of intellectual diversity and debate that encourages the free exchange of ideas, even those that may be controversial or unpopular.
- To ensure that institutional policies and practices are consistent with the principles of academic freedom and that any infringements on academic freedom are addressed promptly and effectively.
- To provide training and resources to academic staff and students to promote understanding of academic freedom and its importance in higher education.
- To work with external organisations and government bodies to promote the importance of academic freedom and advocate for its protection.
- To regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of the academic freedom policy to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in promoting and protecting academic freedom.

5.0. Legal Frameworks

5.1 Academic Freedom Policy at Oxford Business College (OBC) is underpinned by a robust legal framework, ensuring compliance with national legislation and guidelines. Key legal references include:

- Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023: This Act mandates higher education institutions to uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom, providing the primary legal foundation for this policy.
- Data Protection Act 2018: Ensures the protection of personal data, relevant in the context of academic research and communications.
- Human Rights Act 1998: Article 10, concerning the right to freedom of expression, is directly applicable to the principles of academic freedom and free speech.
- Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015: Introduces duties for higher education institutions to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, which must be balanced with the commitment to free speech.
- Prevent Duty Guidance: Provides statutory guidance for higher education institutions on their duties under the Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015.

6.0. Academic Community and Freedom of Speech

6.1 Oxford Business College (OBC) is an academic community that values and supports the ability of all members to freely challenge established norms, question the viewpoints of others, and present innovative or radical ideas. This ethos is central to our commitment to academic freedom.

6.2 Within the framework of the law, every individual or group is entitled to conduct meetings or activities on OBC premises, irrespective of their beliefs or viewpoints. Detailed guidance on the types of permissible activities is outlined in our appendices.

6.3 OBC ensures that access to its facilities is not restricted based on individual or collective beliefs, as long as such activities comply with legal standards. In cases of concern regarding any event, OBC engages in open dialogue with organisers to ascertain the event's viability while ensuring legal obligations are met.

6.4 Events associated with OBC, even when held off-campus, must reflect our institutional values as articulated in our strategic and educational enhancement plans, adhering to the principles of this policy.

6.5 OBC adopts a zero-tolerance stance towards discrimination, bullying, harassment, extremism, or actions that could incite terrorism. We are committed to maintaining a safe and orderly environment on campus, aligning with our obligations under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act.

6.6 All members of the OBC community are expected to respect the principle of free speech and demonstrate tolerance towards diverse opinions and beliefs, even if they differ from their own.

7.0. Responsibilities of Academic Staff

7.1 Academic staff at Oxford Business College (OBC) carry the responsibility to uphold academic freedom, which includes respecting this freedom within the academic community and facilitating a fair discourse of diverse views. They are expected to:

- Adhere to high ethical and professional standards in all academic pursuits.
- Deliver effective teaching and cover the full scope of approved curricular content.
- Foster an inclusive learning environment, irrespective of students' backgrounds or needs.
- Encourage a broad spectrum of viewpoints in academic discussions and guide students in their learning journey.
- Conduct and disseminate research impartially, based on an honest quest for knowledge and evidence-based reasoning.
- Address conflicts of interest transparently in consultation with OBC management.
- Evaluate colleagues' and students' work fairly and impartially.

7.2 These responsibilities are vital in maintaining the integrity of academic practices and the ethos of academic freedom at OBC

8.0. Practicing Academic Freedom

8.1 The College upholds the principles of academic freedom through the following practices, which are not exhaustive but are provided as clear examples:

- Supporting opportunities for academic discussion and debate in various bodies and platforms, which include, but are not restricted to, the Partnership, Programme Review and Development Committee (PPRDC), Strategic Planning and Advisory Committee (SPAC) Quality and Enhancement Committee (QEC), Personal Tutor Committee (PTC), and the Academic Board (AcB). These Committees and Boards provide opportunities for interaction between management, staff, and other stakeholders.
- Encouraging regular engagement from academic staff in initiating, adapting, and developing course content and methods of assessment wherever possible.

- Canvassing members of the College to contribute to decision making either directly, through participation in meetings or indirectly with management, student representatives or with external advisors and bodies.
- Making all papers and supporting documentation available for meetings (including minutes) to those they are intended for, limited only by confidentiality requirements.
- Ensuring full approval and consent by the College's Research Ethics Committee (REC) has been provided for academic research being conducted by staff or students at the College, particularly where primary research involving human participants is required.

8.2 The senior management team (SMT) is committed to consulting widely and taking account of a range of views when developing and implementing policies and strategic plans in an honest and transparent debate. It is understood, however, that it may not always be practicable for the College to defer decisions until all interested parties have been able to express their views on the matter.

9.0. External Speakers and Events

9.1 Oxford Business College (OBC) has established a specific policy for external speakers and event management, which is integral to this Academic Freedom Policy. The external speaker policy outlines the procedures and guidelines to ensure that events and speeches conducted under the auspices of OBC uphold the principles of academic freedom while remaining within the bounds of the law. This includes guidelines for the selection and invitation of speakers, the management of events, and the handling of any issues related to content that may be sensitive or controversial. The policy ensures a balance between the free exchange of ideas and the need to maintain a respectful, safe, and inclusive environment. All staff, students, and external individuals or organisations involved in events at OBC are expected to adhere to these guidelines, ensuring that academic discourse remains open, diverse, and compliant with legal and ethical standards. This policy can be found on the OBC Website for reference.

10.0. Breaches of the Code of Practice

10.1 Any violations of Oxford Business College's (OBC) Academic Freedom Code of Practice will be subject to the appropriate disciplinary procedures as outlined by the OBC Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy and Disciplinary & Staff Grievance Policy respectively. All members of the OBC community are responsible for supporting the College in maintaining the standards of freedom of speech as set out in this Code.

10.2 In the event of a breach, it is the duty of all covered by this Code to assist in identifying those responsible. In cases involving criminal law, OBC will cooperate with legal authorities as necessary. Disciplinary actions by OBC will be deferred in instances of ongoing criminal proceedings, unless decided otherwise by the Executive Principal.

11.0. Review and Update

11.1 The effectiveness and adherence to the Code of Practice will be monitored by OBC's Board of Governors and reviewed by the Academic Board to ensure its continual relevance and efficacy.