



# WEST THAMES COLLEGE

## Freedom of Speech Policy

<b>Lead</b>	<b>Approved By:</b>	<b>Date Approved:</b>	<b>Next Review Date:</b>	<b>Where Published:</b>
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# West Thames College Freedom of Speech Policy for Higher Education

## Purpose

This policy outlines West Thames College's commitment to upholding freedom of speech within the framework of the law and the expectations set by the Office for Students (OfS). We aim to create an environment where students, staff, and visitors can express their views freely while respecting the rights and dignity of others.

## Policy Statement

Freedom of speech is a fundamental principle of a democratic society. We recognize the importance of diverse viewpoints and the role of open dialogue in academic and personal development. However, this freedom is not absolute and must be balanced with responsibilities to ensure a safe and inclusive environment.

## Legal Framework

This policy is informed by relevant legislation, including:

- The Education Act 1986
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015

## Key Principles

1. **Respect and Tolerance:** All members of the college community are expected to engage in discussions respectfully and constructively, recognizing the diversity of opinions.
2. **Protection Against Hate Speech:** Hate speech, including any expression that incites violence or hatred against individuals or groups based on race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or any other protected characteristic, will not be tolerated.
3. **Health and Safety:** Speech that poses a risk to the health and safety of individuals or the college community may be restricted in accordance with relevant laws and college procedures.
4. **Academic Freedom:** Academic staff are encouraged to explore and present controversial topics in a manner that is informative and respectful, in alignment with academic standards.
5. **Rights and Responsibilities:** All members of the college community have the right to express their views but also have the responsibility to ensure that their speech does not infringe on the rights of others.

## Procedures

### 1. Events and Speakers:

- All events featuring external speakers must be approved by the appropriate College staff member and the Assistant Principal for Creative Industries, Inclusion and HE to ensure alignment with this policy.
- Organizers must provide a clear agenda and purpose for the event.

### 2. Reporting Concerns:

- Any individual who feels that their freedom of speech has been infringed upon or that they have experienced hate speech should report the incident to the designated officer in the Student Services department.
- Complaints will be investigated in accordance with the college's procedures, ensuring confidentiality and fairness.

### 3. Disciplinary Actions:

- Breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action, in accordance with the college's student and staff conduct policies.

## Review and Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed annually by the college's governing body, with input from students and staff. The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through regular surveys and feedback mechanisms.

## Conclusion

West Thames College is committed to fostering an environment where freedom of speech is protected and respected. We strive to balance this freedom with the need for safety, respect, and inclusivity, ensuring that our community remains a place of learning and growth for everyone.