

# Canterbury Christ Church University

## Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

### Guide to Raising Concerns about Free Speech

Raising concerns about freedom of speech and academic freedom, particularly involving an external speaker, is a means of exercising the freedom of speech within the law.

However, raising concerns requires a careful balance between respecting freedom of speech and academic freedom and addressing your concerns.

Here is a guide on how you might proceed. We also provide a self-assessment checklist as a summary of the main points.

#### 1. Acknowledge Free Speech

Start by recognising these principles as vital to the University's mission. Freedom of speech and academic freedom encompass exposure to diverse, even offensive, viewpoints essential for critical thinking and growth.

Our role as a University is not to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive.

Our mission is to facilitate the free exchange of ideas. We aim to balance the right to free expression with the well-being and inclusivity of the community.

#### 2. Research and Reflect

You might review the University [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and External Speakers](#).

#### 3. Construct Your Feedback

It would be best to frame your concerns positively, affirming your support for free speech while highlighting areas for consideration.

You might suggest ways to incorporate diverse viewpoints or formats that foster respectful and productive discourse and help secure and promote freedom of speech and academic freedom.

#### 4. Choose the Right Approach

It would be best to address your concerns directly to the individual(s) concerned or the Principal Organiser of an event.

If that feels daunting, seek advice from a colleague or (if you are a student, trainee or apprentice) the Students' Union to approach the individual(s) or Principal Organiser on your behalf.

Alternatively, you can express your concerns using the Report+Support reporting tool. You can do this anonymously if you wish. We will pass your concerns to the individual(s) or Principal Organiser.

## 5. **Communicate Your Points**

Maintain a respectful tone, be clear and constructive about your support for freedom of speech and academic freedom, and offer suggestions for improvement.

## 6. **Engage in Dialogue**

Emphasise the importance of dialogue, education, and mutual respect.

Be open to discussion and willing to listen to others' perspectives to exercise freedom of speech and academic freedom.

## 7. **Reflect on the Process**

Consider what you have learned about balancing free speech with your concerns.

We encourage you to continue to engage with the University to contribute to a culture that values free speech and a respectful, diverse academic environment.

## 8. **After an Event**

After an event, you can express your concerns by writing to [freespeech@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:freespeech@canterbury.ac.uk).

Alternatively, you can express your concerns using the Report+Support reporting tool. You can do this anonymously if you wish.

We will review concerns made after the event to develop our procedures and provide support for Principal Organisers of events.

## 9. **Free Speech Complaints Scheme**

In the event that a member of staff, student, speaker or external visitor considers there to have been a breach of the [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and External Speakers](#), they may complain in writing to [freespeech@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:freespeech@canterbury.ac.uk).

A complaint under the Code of Practice is restricted to allegations of:

- (a) being prevented from arranging, speaking at or attending an event covered by the Code;
- (b) infringements of freedom of speech; and
- (c) where an external speaker at specified event breaches or is likely to breach the Code.

The decision of the reviewer appointed to review the complaint represents the final decision of the University.

The expectation is that a response will be given within ten working days following the day of receipt.

Where the complaint is complex or concerns particularly sensitive or controversial speakers or subject matter, the complainant will be told of the likely response period within ten days following the day of receipt.

*Principles of impartiality and fairness*

We will address free speech complaints impartially, fairly and without bias. By addressing complaints impartially, we evaluate each complaint based solely on the facts presented, favouring no party or allowing external influences to affect judgment.

We will seek to maintain objectivity and avoid conflicts of interest.

*Restriction on vexatious or frivolous complaints*

The University will not engage in or encourage free speech complaints without substantial merit or would represent investigations into inconsequential matters, particularly if the lawful expression of opinions motivates such complaints.

We will demarcate the bounds of acceptable complaints and investigations, excluding actions based on the lawful articulation of viewpoints.

## Self-Assessment Checklist for Raising Concerns About an Event

This self-assessment checklist can help you raise concerns about events related to freedom of speech and academic freedom at the University.

### Preparation

- **Acknowledge Free Speech:** Confirm understanding the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom as part of the University's mission.
- **Review Code of Practice:** Consult the University [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and External Speakers](#).

### Constructing Feedback

- **Frame Concerns Positively:** Ensure you frame your concerns positively, supporting free speech while identifying areas needing attention.
- **Suggest Improvements:** Suggest ways to include diverse viewpoints and formats that promote respectful discourse.

### Communication

- **Choose the Right Approach:** Decide whether to address concerns directly to the Principal Organiser or use the Report+Support tool.
- **Prepare Your Points:** Draft the main points of your concerns clearly and constructively.
- **Maintain Respect:** Ensure respectful communication throughout.

### Engagement

- **Engage in Dialogue:** Be prepared to engage in open discussions and listen to other perspectives.

### Reflection

- **Reflect on the Process:** Reflect on any thoughts balancing free speech with your concerns.
- **Continuous Engagement:** Plan ongoing interactions with the University to contribute to a culture that values free speech and respectful discourse.

### Post-Event Actions

- **Express Post-Event Concerns:** If concerns persist after an event, prepare to communicate them through the channels provided.
- **Complaints Scheme:** Be aware of how to engage the University Free Speech Complaints Scheme or the Office for Students (OfS) Free Speech Complaints Scheme.