

Arden University Academic Freedom Policy

Classification – *Public*

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Introduction

Arden University is committed to maintaining a culture that upholds and promotes academic freedom as an essential pillar of higher education. This policy is designed to safeguard the rights of university staff, students, and researchers to engage in intellectual inquiry, teaching, and research without fear of reprisal, censorship, or undue influence. The University recognises that academic freedom is fundamental to the development of critical thought, innovation, and the advancement of knowledge.

Academic freedom ensures that both staff and students are encouraged to engage with challenging ideas, take intellectual risks, and contribute to the advancement of their respective disciplines. This policy aligns with guidance set out by the Office for Students (OfS), which sets standards for protecting and promoting academic freedom in the UK higher education sector. It also incorporates best practices and examples from across UK universities, ensuring that Arden University remains a leading institution in safeguarding academic independence.

Who is covered by the policy?

This policy applies to all members of Arden University, including academic staff, researchers, students, visiting scholars, and any other individuals who are engaged in academic or scholarly activities. It covers all academic activities, including but not limited to:

- Research and scholarship
- Teaching and learning
- Academic publishing
- Public speaking and debates
- Engagement in public policy and political discourse

The principles outlined in this document are intended to protect and promote academic freedom at all levels of Arden University, ensuring that all members of the university community can pursue their intellectual endeavours freely, responsibly, and without fear of interference or retaliation.

Definition of Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is the right to seek, teach, research, publish, and disseminate ideas without fear of censorship, institutional restrictions, or external interference. It includes:

- **Freedom to teach and discuss:** Staff and students are free to respectfully engage in the teaching and discussion of any subject or idea within their area of expertise, including controversial or challenging topics, without fear of reprisal.

- **Freedom of research and inquiry:** Staff and students are free to pursue research in any area, including those that may challenge accepted norms or prevailing ideas, without restrictions from internal or external stakeholders, political pressures, or commercial interests.
- **Freedom to express opinions:** The right to express personal and professional opinions on academic matters, including through public speeches, media, or publications, without facing retaliation, as long as such expressions are within the parameters of lawful free speech
- **Freedom to challenge academic norms:** The right to question and challenge established paradigms, assumptions, or methodologies within the academic community, contributing to scholarly debates and the evolution of knowledge.

This right to academic freedom is balanced by the duty to respect the rights, dignity, and freedoms of others, ensuring that all academic activities are conducted responsibly. For more details, see the [Arden University Freedom of Speech Code of Practice](#).

Institutional Commitment to Academic Freedom

Arden University is fully committed to ensuring that academic freedom is not only protected but actively supported across all areas of the institution. This includes:

- **Protection from censorship:** Arden University will protect its staff and students from any external or internal attempts to censor their work, including government influence, commercial pressures, or public opinion.
- **Support for controversial research:** Arden University will support research and teaching that challenges dominant ideas or engages with controversial issues, ensuring that academic freedom remains central to the institution's work.
- **Promotion of intellectual diversity:** Arden University will foster an academic environment that encourages diverse viewpoints, rigorous debate, and respectful disagreement. This includes ensuring that the curriculum is dynamic, inclusive, and reflective of a broad range of academic perspectives.
- **Freedom to challenge authority:** Staff and students are encouraged to challenge established ideas, including those held by Arden University itself, as long as the challenge is rooted in scholarly evidence and is conducted in a respectful and professional manner.
- **Protection against retaliation:** Staff and students will not face retaliation for expressing controversial or dissenting views, as long as these expressions are within the parameters of lawful free speech and are in compliance with the [Arden University Freedom of Speech Code of Practice](#).
- **Protection from disciplinary action for academic work:** Staff and students will not be subject to disciplinary action or other penalties based

solely on the content of their academic work, unless it violates Arden University policies related to harassment, discrimination, or safety.

- **Engagement with OfS guidelines:** Arden University will adhere to the [Office for Students' guidelines](#) on freedom of speech, ensuring that its policies are compliant with the regulatory framework that governs higher education in the UK.

Legal Framework and Compliance with OfS Guidelines

Arden University's academic freedom policy aligns with the **Office for Students (OfS)** regulations, which provide a clear legal framework for protecting academic freedom in UK higher education. According to the OfS:

- **Freedom of speech and expression:** The OfS requires all higher education providers to ensure that their policies and practices support freedom of speech and academic freedom. This includes taking steps to prevent censorship, discrimination, or undue influence on research, teaching, and learning activities.
- **Protection from external interference:** The OfS explicitly highlights the importance of protecting staff and students from external pressures, including political, corporate, or religious influences, that could undermine the integrity of academic work.

Arden University adheres to these guidelines by ensuring that academic freedom is protected while also maintaining the institution's commitment to safety, inclusion, and respect for diversity.

Dispute Resolution and Complaints

If any member of Arden University believes that their academic freedom has been compromised, they should follow Arden University's formal grievance procedure.

Staff and students are encouraged to raise any concerns informally with their line manager, lecturer or academic supervisor. Arden University seeks to resolve issues at the earliest stage possible through dialogue and mediation.

If informal resolution is not possible, staff and students can submit a formal complaint through the appropriate channels (i.e. People Services for staff, formal complaints mechanisms for students.)

Office for Students' new complaints scheme specifically considers free speech complaints about universities and colleges. Staff members and visiting speakers who believe their freedom of speech rights have been infringed will be able to submit complaints to Office for students directly under this scheme.

All complaints regarding academic freedom will be investigated in a timely and impartial manner. Arden University will ensure that the investigation is thorough and that any violations of academic freedom are addressed.

Responsibilities of Staff and Students

While academic freedom protects the rights of individuals to engage in free and open inquiry, it also comes with certain responsibilities:

- **Intellectual integrity:** Staff and students must ensure that their work is conducted with integrity, honesty, and respect for the rights of others. Academic freedom does not extend to spreading misinformation, engaging in plagiarism, or undermining the academic standards of the institution [[Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy](#) and [Arden University Statement on the use of artificial Intelligence on assessment](#)].
- **Respect for others:** While academic freedom protects the right to challenge ideas and engage in controversial discussions, staff and students must do so in a way that respects the dignity and rights of others. Offensive or discriminatory language and behaviour will not be protected under the policy.
- **Safety and wellbeing:** Academic staff and students must ensure that their academic activities do not compromise the safety or wellbeing of others. This includes avoiding harm through speech or actions that incite violence, discrimination, or harassment.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or earlier if changes in legislation, regulation, or University practice require. Arden University's Academic Board is responsible for ensuring its continued relevance and compliance.

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