

## Policy statement on Academic Freedom at King's

Policy Category:	Governance
Subject:	Academic Freedom
Approving Authority:	Council and University Executive
Responsible Officer:	Assistant Principal, Academic Freedom and Free Expression
Responsible Office:	Vice-Chancellor's Office
Related Procedures:	Procedures for events, protests and open space gatherings at King's
Related College Policies:	Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom
Effective Date:	1 August 2025
Supersedes:	N/A
Next Review:	July 2026

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### 1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1. In meeting our statutory duties and related regulatory requirements in respect to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, King's College London ("King's") has a statutory Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom setting out our values, policy approach provisions, relevant procedures and institutional expectations.
- 1.2. This 'Policy Statement on Academic Freedom at King's' is a special appendix to our Code of Practice. Its purpose is to provide detail on our guiding approach and institutional expectations in relation to taking reasonably practicable steps to secure academic freedom.
- 1.3. In statutory terms, academic freedom applies in the United Kingdom to staff employed as academics. The approach of King's accepts those statutory duties but extends the conceptual scope of academic freedom further to be inclusive of students once they reach a stage of their academic journey at King's where they are engaging in scholarly activity that may produce new knowledge and challenge existing understanding.

### 2. Definitions

- 2.1. **Academic freedom** – This designates the freedom of the academic community - including academic staff and students - in respect of research, teaching and learning and, more broadly, the dissemination of research and teaching outcomes both within and outside the higher education sector, without unreasonable interference. The concept ensures that the academic community may engage in research, teaching, learning and communication in society in an academic context without fear of reprisal, within the limits of the law. The statutory concept and duty on academic freedom is set out in Part A1 (6) of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 available to read [here](#).
- 2.2. **Academic integrity** – This denotes a set of positive behaviours and attitudes in the academic community internalising and furthering compliance with ethical and professional principles and standards in learning, teaching, research, governance, outreach and any other tasks related to the missions of higher education. The duties and rights associated with the fulfilment and protection of academic integrity apply to all members of the academic community.
- 2.3. **Institutional autonomy** – Denotes the will and ability of higher education institutions to fulfil their missions, without undue interference within the parameters of the law, and to set

and implement their own priorities and policies as concerns organisation, finance, staffing and academic affairs.

### **3. Our guiding approach and institutional expectations in relation to academic freedom**

- 3.1. Sections 3 and 4 of the main section of our Code of Practice framework set out our values and policy approaches to freedom of speech and academic freedom. This Policy Statement flows from those provisions, providing more specificity on our guiding approach and institutional expectations in relation to the upholding of academic freedom at King's.
- 3.2. Within the parameters of the law, our students, staff and academic visitors are entitled to teach, learn, research and engage in other forms of scholarly endeavour at King's in a safe, open and intellectually vibrant environment that values the pursuit of knowledge and greater understanding, scholarly excellence, and vigorous debate of a wide range of topics and viewpoints. They may do so without fear of reprisal or impairment of academic progress, privileges and career opportunities at King's.
- 3.3. All staff, and particularly those directly involved in academic life at King's and in positions of leadership, must have particular regard in their functional duties to the importance of upholding the value of academic freedom and the need to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure it is secured and not infringed either intentionally or unintentionally. Members of the King's community have a shared responsibility to guard against victimisation, intimidation or discrimination as a result of the exercise of academic freedom.
- 3.4. Even if the content of the curriculum, academic teaching materials or academic research may offend or be discomforting to students, staff members or members of the public, this will not make it unacceptable unless it contravenes the law or is found to amount to serious academic misconduct.
- 3.5. King's has the right to utilise our institutional autonomy to make changes from time to time to our educational curriculum and programme offerings and our approach to facilitating research, knowledge exchange, innovation, and public engagement.
- 3.6. Where it is established through our procedures that an academic member of staff or a student has committed a form of academic misconduct, through deliberate dishonesty, plagiarism, or the intentional promotion of fraudulent findings or misinformation with the intention to do harm, these are not behaviours protected under academic freedom.
- 3.7. Academic freedom also specifically applies, under UK law, to both external and internal applicants for academic job positions at King's and to existing academic staff applying or being considered for academic promotion at King's. All King's staff involved in such processes should have full regard to the need to take reasonably practicable steps to avoid infringing the legitimate academic freedom of others. Any concerns in this regard may be directly reported to the Senior Vice President (Academic) and/or the Vice President (People & Talent)/ Chief People Officer of King's or raised through the relevant complaints or grievance procedures that can be found on our [Policy Hub](#).
- 3.8. The University's commitment to Academic Freedom within the parameters of the law applies primarily to the laws and regulations of the United Kingdom as this is where the University is principally based. However, when students and staff are engaging in scholarly

activity in a third country or overseas territory, both they and the University must also take into account the laws and regulations of that country or overseas territory in their approach.