Engineering College of Technology.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH
AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY

Engineering College of Technology.

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1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out ECT's principles, statutory duties and institutional commitments in relation to freedom of speech and academic freedom. ECT recognises its duty to take reasonably practicable steps to secure academic freedom within the law for staff, students, visiting speakers and other members of the ECT community. It should be read in conjunction with ECT's Ethics Statement and Codes of Conduct for staff and students.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all staff (including those teaching from outside the UK), students, visiting speakers and external contributors, contractors, partners and third parties that may use ECT premises or platforms.

3. Objectives

3.1 ECT recognises that freedom of speech and academic freedom is a right and responsibility of all staff and students and that it underpins the creation and dissemination of new knowledge. Academic freedom and free speech are central to the mission of ECT. Freedoms are exercised within the framework of the law, professional standards and mutual respect.

3.2 ECT is bound by a common commitment to promote engineering and related scientific disciplines and to facilitate its practice for the common good based upon shared values of:

- Ethical behaviour
- Competent performance
- Innovative practice
- Engineering excellence
- Application of the scientific method
- Equality of opportunity
- Social justice
- Sustainable development.

3.3 Freedom of speech and academic freedom are not protections from professional misconduct. Academic freedom and freedom of speech must be exercised within the boundaries of applicable laws, institutional policies, and ethical responsibilities. Conduct that constitutes professional misconduct—such as harassment, discrimination, breaches of integrity, or other violations of policy—will not be excused on the grounds of these freedoms.

4. Implementation

4.1 The promotion of freedom of speech and academic freedom will occur via publication of policies on ECT's website; and by forming an integral part of staff induction and staff development.

4.2 ECT will ensure that this policy is implemented through:
- Staff and student induction
- Refresher training as necessary
- Governance oversight and periodic review

Freedom of Speech Code of Practice

4.3 ECT will maintain and publish a Freedom of Speech Code of Practice which sets out the procedures for the practical implementation of this Policy. This will include arrangements for the organisation and approval of events and visiting speakers, risk assessment processes, decision-making and escalation routes, and record-keeping. The Code of Practice will be kept under review to ensure alignment with legal and regulatory requirements.

Academic Freedom

4.4 Academic freedom is exercised within the law and ECT's regulatory framework and shall not be constrained except where lawful, necessary and proportionate.

4.5 A member of ECT's academic staff shall have freedom, within the law, ECT policies and the contractual obligations of the employee, in his or her area of expertise in teaching, research and scholarship and any other academic activities either in or outside ECT, to:
- Question and test received wisdom
- Put forward new ideas and engage in robust, unfettered scholarly debate
- State controversial or unpopular opinions
- Exercise the right of academic freedom without fear of harassment, bullying, intimidation or unfair treatment
- Pursue critical and independent thought and encourage the same in others, in teaching, scholarly activities, publication and research
- Participate in professional or representative academic bodies

4.6 Staff will foster a teaching, learning and research environment that:
- Values diversity of opinion, encouraging vigorous exchange of opinion between teacher and student as part of a robust educational process
- Will seek to develop and search for truth as a part of the experience of teaching and learning
- Recognises that the search for new knowledge, experience, and practice is an essential part of the academic experience
- Adheres to policies and procedures of ECT
- Is in accordance with the principles of professional practice, intellectual rigour, scientific enquiry and research ethics
- Demonstrates scholarly practice, expectations and standards of their discipline
- Fosters honest academic conduct at all times
- Upholds a commitment to academic standards, including academic integrity.

4.7 When entering into collaboration, memorandum of understanding (MoU), affiliation or contractual agreements with third parties, ECT shall take reasonable steps to minimise restrictions or conditions on academic freedom of any academic staff or students carrying out research or study under such arrangements.

4.8 ECT will regulate its affairs in accordance with its independent ethos, traditions and the traditional principles of academic freedom. In doing so, it shall have regard to:
- The promotion and preservation of equality of opportunity and access.
- The effective and efficient use of resources.
- Its obligations to corporate and public accountability.

4.9 Staff and students shall not be disadvantaged or subjected to detriment for the lawful exercise of academic freedom.

Freedom of Speech

4.10 ECT recognises the importance of freedom of speech and will promote an environment where all members of the ECT community are free to express themselves, within the requirements of the law, and in accordance with this Policy.

4.11 ECT will take reasonable practicable steps to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members of its community and for visiting speakers.

4.12 Freedom of speech includes the right to express lawful views, even where those views may be controversial, unpopular or offensive to others.

Rights

4.13 Staff and students will have the right to:
- Pursue knowledge and participate in scholarly debate wherever it may lead
- Teach, research, publish and express their opinion without institutional censorship
- A learning environment that fosters free intellectual inquiry through free speech and the acceptance of diverse opinions and experiences
- An environment where differing opinions and beliefs are treated in accordance with the law, ECT policies, and expectations of respectful conduct

Limitations on Freedoms

4.14 Although ECT stands for, promotes, and defends the rights of its staff and students to free intellectual inquiry and open debate it does not endorse the views expressed by academic or affiliated staff. ECT staff and students should indicate they do not represent or speak for ECT's views when they speak or write publicly.

4.15 Limitations on freedoms imposed are subject only to prohibitions, restrictions or conditions imposed by:
- law

- reasonable and proportionate regulation of conduct necessary for conducting ECT's teaching and research activities and to foster the wellbeing of students and staff
- reasonable and proportionate regulation of conduct necessary for ECT to undertake its legal duties including its duties to its visitors
- the rights of others to express themselves
- ECT to reasonably deliver its courses.

4.16 Any restriction on freedom of speech or academic freedom must be lawful, necessary, proportionate and demonstrably justified. This includes consideration of duties under the Equality Act 2010, the Prevent Duty, health and safety law and anti-harassment legislation. The restrictions imposed should be necessary and without being wide-reaching.

4.17 ECT is committed to facilitating lawful events and speakers. Events may only be restricted or refused where the speech would be unlawful, there is a demonstrable and an unmanageable risk and reasonable mitigation measures cannot reduce the risk. A proportionate risk assessment will be undertaken where necessary. Decisions may be appealed through the complaints process.

4.18 ECT will maintain supporting procedures and guidance, including those relating to visiting speakers, events, risk assessment, decision-making and record-keeping, to support the effective delivery of this policy. These will be reviewed periodically to ensure alignment with legal and regulatory requirements.

5. Complaints and Escalation

5.1 Any staff member, student or visiting speaker who believes their freedom of speech or academic freedom has been unlawfully restricted may raise a concern or complaint.

5.2 Complaints will be handled in accordance with:

- The Staff Grievance procedure (for staff)
- The Student Complaints Procedure (for students)

5.3 Where a student is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may escalate the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

6. Definitions

Academic Freedom:

a) the freedom of academic staff and students to teach, present, discuss, and research and to disseminate and publish the results of their research;
b) the freedom of academic staff and students to engage in intellectual inquiry, to express their opinions and beliefs, and to contribute to public debate, in relation to their subjects of study and research;

c) the freedom of academic staff and students to express their opinions in relation to the higher education provider in which they work or are enrolled;
d) the freedom of academic staff to participate in professional or representative academic bodies:
e) the freedom of students to participate in student societies and associations;
f) the autonomy of the higher education provider in relation to the choice of academic courses and offerings, the ways in which they are taught and the choices of research activities and the ways in which they are conducted

Intellectual Inquiry: The open pursuit of knowledge, which may or may not lead to the production and dissemination of new knowledge, ideas or scholarship.

Speech: Speech extends to all forms of expressive conduct including oral speech and written, artistic, musical and performing works and activity and communication using social media; the word 'speak' has a corresponding meaning.

7. Related Legislation

7.1 The following legislation is relevant to this policy; however not all are mandatory education providers:

- Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act (2023)
- Human Rights Act (1998)
- Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986
- Section 22 of the Education Act 1994
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Equality Act 2010
- Higher Education and Research Act 2017
- UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 (QAA)
- Prevent Duty

7.2 This policy supports ECTs compliance with OfS regulatory requirements by protecting academic freedom, operating a transparent complaints process and having due regard to its statutory duties while avoiding unnecessary restrictions.

8. Accountabilities

8.1 The Board of Governors is responsible for review and approval of this policy with input from the Academic Board. The Board will receive periodic assurance reports on complaints relating to freedom of speech, visiting speaker decisions and compliance with statutory duties.

8.2 The policy is to be implemented via induction and training of staff and distribution to students and ECT's community via the website and other publications.

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