



Freedom of Speech Policy

Author: Executive Team Member with Responsibility for Student Services

Approved: 19 June 2025 (Standards and Curriculum Committee)

Review: June 2028

1. Introduction

Harlow College recognises and endorses that freedom of speech and expression within a culture of free and open discussion is an essential part of its role as an academic institution.

Institutions are obliged to comply with the Human Rights Act (1998) and the Education (No.2) Act (1986) allowing staff and learners their freedom of speech and expression, particularly in the context of academic freedom to question and put forward new ideas including controversial or unpopular opinions, Education Reform Act (1988).

At the same time, all such freedoms are subject to limitations under the law, to protect the rights and freedoms of others. These are set out in the Education Act 2011, the Equality Act 2010 and the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2019 - Section 26 PREVENT duty. The Duty states that specified authorities including Further Education colleges, in the exercise of their functions, must have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".

2. Scope of Policy

This policy explains the rights and responsibilities around free speech at the College. It applies to:

- The College and its governors
- All College staff and volunteers
- All students (full or part-time), including those at partner institutions
- The students' union (if active), student ambassadors and student groups
- Any guest speakers or others using/hiring College spaces or systems (including social media)

"College premises" means any property the College owns, manages, or uses—including spaces run by for example students (as applicable) and ICT systems.

The Code of Practice covers freedom of speech and expression in whatever form that may take including (but not limited to) speeches, debates, meetings, demonstrations, written publications and the use of social media.

3. Freedom of Speech and Expression

The College will do everything reasonably possible to protect lawful free speech. The expression of controversial views (which do not breach the law or risk a breach of the law) will not of itself constitute reasonable grounds for refusal.

Reasonable grounds for refusal would include (but are not limited to):

- Breaking the law

- Incite violence, hatred, harassment, or terrorism
- Cause serious public disorder
- Break equality laws
- Promote illegal groups

4. Organising Events and Activities

“Activities” include speeches, meetings, protests, or content shared through College ICT systems (such as emails, virtual meetings, or social media platforms).

The College must ensure safety and order on its premises and within its ICT systems, and can set rules for any event or activity.

If you want to host an event that:

- May attract a large audience, or
- Might be controversial

You must get written permission from the Vice-Principal (Student Services).

Requests should be made in advance and must include:

- The subject and what the event is about
- Who the speakers are
- The purpose and format of the event
- Where and when it will take place
- Seating arrangements, if applicable

If you're not sure whether your event could be controversial, submit your request to the Vice-Principal as early as possible.

The Vice-Principal will give a written decision within 10 working days of receiving the request. Approval may include conditions, such as security measures, audience limits, or format restrictions.

The College will not refuse permission just because views are controversial. However, permission may be refused if the event could lead to:

- Criminal activity
- Hate speech or illegal expression
- Promotion of extremist or unlawful groups
- Risk of someone being drawn into terrorism
- Threats to public safety, property, or the College's reputation

The College may also be unable to support events where they impact on opening hours, student timetables and staff duties because of normal business hours and college closures.

On approval, and where a guest speaker is invited to present to students either in person or by virtual means, you must follow the College Guest Speaker Procedures and ensure all appropriate checks are completed prior to the activity taking place (See Appendix 1 and 2).

5. Appeals

If you disagree with the decision, you may appeal in writing to a senior post-holder through the Principal's office. Your appeal must clearly state the grounds (e.g. why the decision was unfair or unreasonable).

You will normally receive a written response within 10 working days. The senior post-holder's decision will be final and may include additional conditions if necessary.

6. Running Events Safely

To use College spaces or systems, organisers must agree in writing to follow all relevant College rules. This includes ensuring:

- Safety and security
- Proper conduct
- Stewarding and chaiting
- Entry controls

If there's a risk of disruption or disruption during an event, the College may involve the police.

Organisers are responsible for the event's costs and making sure it complies with the law and College policies, whether held on-site or via College ICT systems.

The College will not be able to support events that incur significant additional costs in terms of opening times and staff duties.

The member of staff responsible for organising the event must ensure an appropriate health & safety risk assessment has been carried out and approved by the Head of Health, Safety & Estates prior to the event taking place.

7. What Happens if Rules Are Broken

- Governors who breach this policy may be removed from their role
- Staff and students may face disciplinary action
- Partner organisations will be informed if their staff or students are involved
- The College may assist police in identifying anyone involved in illegal activity

8. Reviewing the Policy

This policy must be reviewed at least every three years. The Vice-Principal will report on how the policy is working, including any recommendations for changes.

This policy will be presented to the Standards and Curriculum Committee of the Governing Body for approval.

Tracking and Reference Information
Date Approved: 19 June 2025 (Standards and Curriculum Committee)
Review Date: Every 3 Years
Author/Responsibility: Executive Team member responsible for Student Services
Equality Impact Assessment: This policy has been assessed to ensure that it does not adversely affect learners on the grounds of any protected characteristic.
Related Documents: Complaints Policy Equality & Diversity Policy Student Code of Conduct
Complaints: If you wish to submit a complaint about the application of this policy or the procedure of it, please send your request in accordance with the provisions of the Complaints Procedure.
Monitoring: The application of this policy and associated procedure will be monitored by the Executive member responsible for Admissions
Easy Reading: To receive this policy/procedure in a different format, please contact HR Services

Appendix 1

Harlow College Guest Speaker Procedures

We frequently invite guest speakers both to our college campus as well as through virtually means such as webinars. The knowledge and understanding of our guest speakers help to enrich our student's college experience and provides them with valuable information to support their learning.

As well as helping develop their understanding of the working world they can also contribute to a greater understanding of wider social issues that can inspire and motivate our students as well as encourage positive wellbeing.

We have a responsibility to our students to ensure that the information they receive is aligned to the values of the College and British Values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Harlow College greatly appreciates the contribution that guest speakers make and therefore also has a responsibility to ensure their experience is a positive one by providing an environment that is respectful, well prepared and conducive to a constructive learning experience.

The purpose of these procedures is to set out the College's responsibilities when using guest speakers and to outline the standards of behaviour expected from them. These procedures therefore draw reference from the Government's Prevent Duty guidance as well as our own safeguarding policy.

The Prevent Duty Guidance: for further education institutions (DfE, July 2015) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/prevent-duty-guidance-for-further-education-institutions-in-england-and-wales>) requires Colleges to have policies and procedures in place for the management of hosting guest speakers. These should apply to all staff, students and visitors and clearly set out what is required for any event to proceed.

The procedures for hosting a guest speaker are:

- All guest speakers must have a nominated point of contact at the College (usually the event organiser)
- The nominated organiser must complete the Guest Speaker Approval Form. This should be signed and retained by the AAM
- The Organiser must conduct research on the person/organisation to establish whether they have demonstrated extreme views/actions – a biographical internet search will usually be suitable. This should be recorded on the Guest Speaker Approval Form

- The organiser must send a copy of the Guidelines for Guest Speakers to the speaker in advance of the event
- The organiser must request presentation/material etc. be sent to the organiser in advance
- Staff must refuse to allow people/organisations access to the College campus, students or staff (including virtually) if they have links to extreme groups or movements
- Justification of the College's decision will be provided to the person/organisation in writing
- Visitors must sign in upon arrival at College and complete all visitor H&S protocols
- Visitors must be accompanied by a College staff member and must never be left unsupervised with students at any time
- In the unlikely event the content does not meet the requirements of the Guidelines for guest speakers, College staff have the right and responsibility to stop a presentation
- Any concerns must be raised with the relevant AAM for escalation if necessary

Appendix 2

Guest Speaker Approval Form

To be completed by the College staff member responsible for the event

**HARLOW
COLLEGE**



Staff Name:				Team:			
Number of Students Attending:		Age of Attendees: (select all that apply)			16-17 <input type="checkbox"/>	18+ <input type="checkbox"/>	
Name of Guest Speaker(s):				Organisation:			
Contact telephone Number:				Email:			
Is there any known or likely media interest in the proposed event?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, please provide details:				
Are there any concerns as a result of background checks that require further investigation or action? Please provide any information.				Sources checked		Agreed	
				Website Checked			
				Printed Literature Checked			
				Resources to be Presented			
				Google Search Completed			
				Other Checks, Please State:			
How will speaker deliver the event?	Face to face on campus <input type="checkbox"/>		Face to face off campus <input type="checkbox"/>		Virtually (e.g. Zoom) <input type="checkbox"/>		
What subject will the Speaker be presenting?							
How will learners benefit?							
Is the presentation suitable and accessible, does it include subtitles?							
Date of Event:				Location of Event:			
Start Time:				End Time:			

Consent Approval

Name of Applicant:			Date of Submission:		
Name of Manager Approval:			Consent Approval Signature:		

1. Complete all boxes and ensure that you have signed the form
2. Forward to your AAM for consent (if you are not in a curriculum team, forward to Director of Student Services to obtain consent)
3. When complete, this form must be retained by the AAM for record keeping