

Policy on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

1 Introduction

In accordance with the duties imposed upon it by the Office for Students, the University of Essex Online (UoEO) has instituted the following Policy to ensure that we can promote academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law for members of UoEO (including the Staff/and Students).

Universities and higher education providers play an important role in society as places of debate and discussion within the law, where ideas can be tested, where students learn to challenge ideas and think for themselves, and where rationality underpins the pursuit of knowledge. UoEO is fully committed to promoting an environment in which intense inquiry and informed argument generates lasting ideas, and where members of its community have a responsibility both to challenge and to listen fully.

This commitment is of long standing. UoEO awards are validated by the University of Essex, and the University's Royal Charter provides that "Academic staff shall have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges". This commitment was reasserted in the University of Essex Strategic Plan 2013-2019 as one of the University's core values.

2 Access to the Virtual Learning Environment

To give expression to this commitment, so far as is reasonably practicable, access to the UoEO Virtual Learning Environment shall not be denied to any registered student or staff member of UoEO or to any individual or body of persons invited to access the VLE to deliver a lecture or module or Director's Workshop, on any grounds relating to:

- the beliefs or views of that registered student, employee or person so invited: or
- the policies or objectives of that body;

except insofar as the expression of such belief, views, policies or objectives shall be unlawful and where it is reasonably anticipated that the unlawful expression of such beliefs, views, policies or objectives might occur on the relevant occasion.

However, this commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law is not absolute. In addition to affirming UoEO's commitment to promoting academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law, this policy also specifies circumstances in which academic freedom and freedom of speech might properly be restricted. UoEO may itself apply restrictions in circumstances where they are necessary for UoEO:

- to discharge its obligations under the Education (No 2) Act 1986, The Education Reform Act 1988, or the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015;
- or to safeguard the safety, health and welfare of its registered students, employees and other persons lawfully accessing the VLE or engaged in activities associated with UoEO, including giving effect to the safeguards set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

Just as UoEO will not restrict debate or deliberation simply because the views being expressed might be considered unwise or even offensive, it also expects members of the UoEO community to show commitment to this same principle by not obstructing or interfering with the rights of others to express views with which they might disagree profoundly.

Responsible Manager	Date of approval	Related Policies
Academic Director	May 2019	<p><u>Use of the Virtual Learning Environment and Social Media Policy</u></p> <p><u>Student Code of Conduct Policy</u></p> <p><u>Prevent Policy</u></p>