

1. University Approach

Academic freedom and freedom of speech, as set out in the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Statute XII, are protected by law and University policy. These rights include the ability, within academic practice, to question received wisdom and to present new, controversial, or unpopular ideas. Such rights must be exercised within the law and in accordance with university policies and codes of practice.

The University's commitment to equality and diversity, affirmed in its Equality Policy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, complements its commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech.

2. Legislation

UK legislation underpins these principles, including:

- the Education (No 2) Act 1986;
- the Education Reform Act 1988;
- the Human Rights Act 1998;
- the Equality Act 2010;
- the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (s.31, Prevent duty); and
- the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

These laws require universities, as public bodies, to uphold and actively promote freedom of expression and academic freedom, subject to legal limits.

3. Department Approach

3.1 Commitment to Academic Freedom and Ethical Awareness

The Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR) is committed to academic freedom, open debate, and critical inquiry as part of a learning community within the wider University. We adhere to the University's approach and the policies outlined in Section 1, and we expect our staff and students to demonstrate the same commitment. Our research and teaching often address politically, ethically, and socially sensitive issues across a wide geographical and political scope. Our choices of research and teaching topics are guided by engagement with the academic community and a careful consideration of their ethical and political implications.

3.2 Political Implications of Academic Work

Because of the nature of our field, academic work is frequently intertwined with political implications. Critiquing government policy, expressing support for groups, analysing the causes of events, and evaluating public arguments are all legitimate aspects of academic work that contribute to public and political debate.

3.3 Principles of Academic Speech

Academic speech at DPIR is conducted to promote truth, reliability, and validity. No single perspective or belief is privileged. Staff and students are expected to think critically about their own positions and to engage in respectful exchanges within the law.

3.4 Support for Discussion and Debate

The Department actively supports discussion and debate, including the organisation of seminars and events and the invitation of external speakers. All such activity operates within the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech to ensure compliance with legislation and the Office for Students' Regulatory Guidance (effective from 1 August 2025).

3.5 Disciplinary Measures and Annual Reminders

Breaches of the Code may result in disciplinary action under the relevant staff or student procedures. The Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech is published on the University website, and the Department reminds staff and students of it annually.

4. Freedom of Speech Complaints Procedure

The University's Freedom of Speech Complaints Procedure states that 'before making a formal Complaint, the Complainant should consider taking steps to resolve the matter informally'. We encourage departmental members to seek informal resolution via the following contacts:

Staff: DPIR HR - personnel@politics.ox.ac.uk

Postgraduate students:

Head of Department headofdepartment@politics.ox.ac.uk

Undergraduate students: Designated Tutor or Freedom of Speech contact within your respective college.

5. Related Policies and Guidance

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- [DPIR Code of Conduct](#)
- [Understanding Harassment and Sexual Misconduct: What you need to know](#)
- [Responding to Student Disclosure of Harassment and Sexual Misconduct for Staff](#)
- [The Office for Students \(OfS\) Guidance about the duty to promote free speech as outlined in the Higher Education \(Freedom of Speech\) Act 2023.](#)

6. Disclaimer

In the event of any inconsistency or contradiction between this document and University policies or regulations, the relevant University policies and regulations shall take precedence.

7. Monitoring and Review

The EDI Committee will review this policy annually and recommend amendments to the General Purposes Committee (GPC).

Governance	Detail
Policy Owner	Matthew Gooch, EDI Officer
Reported to/Noted by	EDI Committee
Approved by	General Purposes Committee (GPC)
Policy Date	November 2025
Review Frequency	Annually
Next Review Date	November 2026