London Academy for Applied Technology

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice

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Regulatory Alignment with Office for Students (OfS) Conditions

This Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice forms part of the London Academy for Applied Technology's (LAAT) academic governance framework and supports the maintenance of an open academic environment in which lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom are protected and promoted. It provides institutional assurance that LAAT meets regulatory expectations for governance, transparency, student protection, and responsible risk management in matters relating to freedom of expression and academic activity.

In relation to Condition E – Management and Governance, this Code ensures that LAAT has effective governance arrangements, internal controls, and accountability structures to safeguard academic freedom, protect lawful freedom of speech, and manage associated institutional risks responsibly. It establishes clear expectations, responsibilities, and procedures to ensure that decisions affecting academic freedom and freedom of speech are taken transparently, consistently, and with appropriate senior oversight (E1 – Public Interest Governance; E2 – Management and Governance; E3 – Accountability).

In relation to Condition C – Consumer Protection, this Code supports compliance with student protection and consumer law requirements by ensuring that students receive clear, accessible, and accurate information about their rights and responsibilities regarding academic freedom and freedom of speech, and how any restrictions, concerns, or complaints will be handled (C1 – Consumer Protection Law; C2 – Student Complaints Scheme; C3 – Student Protection Plan).

In relation to Condition F – Provision of Information, this Code ensures that information provided to students, staff, and external stakeholders regarding freedom of speech, academic freedom, event approval processes, and complaint routes is accurate, transparent, and accessible, with appropriate information controls applied to related records and decisions (F1 – Provision of Information; F2 – Information Controls).
This Code is informed by relevant statutory duties relating to freedom of speech in higher education, Equality Act 2010 requirements, and sector good-practice guidance on academic freedom in UK higher education. It is implemented through LAAT's academic governance and quality assurance arrangements to ensure consistency, fairness, and effective institutional oversight, and is aligned with Plymouth Marjon University partnership expectations where applicable.

Term of Reference

1. Purpose

This Code of Practice sets out how the London Academy for Applied Technology (LAAT) protects and promotes academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law across its higher education provision. LAAT recognises academic freedom and lawful freedom of speech as fundamental to high-quality teaching, learning, scholarship, and intellectual enquiry. As a private provider delivering franchised and validated programmes, LAAT also recognises its legal, regulatory, and validating-partner obligations to manage these freedoms responsibly and transparently. This Code forms part of LAAT's academic governance framework. It aligns with Plymouth Marjon University's academic governance and partner expectations and supports compliance with the Office for Students (OfS) governance and management conditions by establishing clear responsibilities, controls, and oversight arrangements to safeguard academic freedom and lawful freedom of expression.

Purpose Statement

This Code also provides a clear framework for managing situations where the exercise of academic freedom or freedom of speech may conflict with legal duties, equality obligations, safeguarding responsibilities, or the rights and wellbeing of others. It ensures that LAAT balances the protection of lawful free expression with its duty to maintain a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment. In doing so, the Code supports transparent decision-making, consistent practice, and appropriate governance oversight, in line with Office for Students expectations and Plymouth Marjon University partner requirements.

2. Scope

This Code applies to academic freedom and freedom of speech in all LAAT higher education activities, including:

- Academic staff, visiting lecturers, and researchers
- Students enrolled on higher education programmes
- Teaching, assessment, academic events, and scholarly discussion
- On-campus, online, and partner-approved learning environments

Where any conflict arises between this Code and Plymouth Marjon University's regulations or partner policies, the University's requirements will take precedence.

3. Definitions

Academic Freedom: The freedom, within the law, to question, test, and challenge received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without undue risk to employment, academic standing, or progression.

Freedom of Speech: The lawful expression of ideas, opinions, or beliefs, including those that may be controversial or unpopular, in teaching, learning, research, and academic discussion.

4. Legislative Framework

4.1 This Code of Practice is implemented to ensure that LAAT meets its legal and regulatory obligations relating to academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law. It reflects the duties set out in **Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986**, as amended by the **Higher Education and Research Act 2017**, and incorporates the requirements of the **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023**. The Code also takes account of relevant guidance issued by the **Office for Students (OfS)**, including Regulatory Advice on freedom of speech and academic governance.

4.2 In fulfilling its obligations under this Code, LAAT has due regard to its responsibilities under the **Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015**, including the Prevent Duty. LAAT will discharge this duty in a proportionate manner that does not unnecessarily restrict lawful freedom of speech or academic freedom.

4.3 LAAT is subject to the **Equality Act 2010**, which requires the elimination of unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; the advancement of equality of opportunity; and the fostering of good relations between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not. LAAT will meet these obligations in a manner consistent with, and not undermining, lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom.

4.4 In determining whether speech is lawful, LAAT also has regard to relevant legislation including (but not limited to) the **Public Order Act 1986**, **Protection from Harassment Act 1997**, **Terrorism Acts**, **Malicious Communications Act 1988**, and **Communications Act 2003**. These legislative requirements inform LAAT's assessment of legality, proportionality, and risk when considering speech-related activities.

4.5 This Code is applied in a manner consistent with LAAT's contractual and academic partnership obligations with **Plymouth Marjon University** and supports compliance with **OfS Conditions D (Governance) and E2 (Management and Governance)** relating to institutional oversight, risk management, and protection of academic freedom.

5. Principles

LAAT is guided by the following principles in protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech:

- Lawful freedom of expression
- Academic integrity and scholarly standards
- Respect for equality, diversity, and institutional values
- Protection from harassment, discrimination, or harm
- Proportionate, transparent, and evidence-based decision-making

6. Governance and Oversight

Oversight of academic freedom and freedom of speech is provided by the **Academic Board**, which monitors implementation of this Code and ensures alignment with validating-partner expectations. Matters presenting significant risk or strategic importance may be escalated to the **Board of Governors** for assurance and oversight.

7. Policy Statement

7.1 Protection of Academic Freedom

LAAT will not disadvantage staff or students for expressing lawful academic views, including views that may be controversial or challenge institutional or societal norms.

7.2 Lawful Restrictions

Freedom of speech does not extend to:

- Hate speech or unlawful discrimination
- Harassment, intimidation, or incitement to violence
- Breaches of safeguarding, professional, or Prevent obligations

7.3 Academic Events and Speakers

Academic events and invited speakers must:

- Be academically relevant and lawful
- Comply with safeguarding, equality, and Prevent requirements
- Follow the Standard Operating Procedure (Appendix A) where prior approval or risk assessment is required

8. Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

8.1 Process Overview

This procedure outlines how academic events, invited speakers, and teaching activities are supported and, where necessary, reviewed to ensure compliance with academic freedom, lawful freedom of speech, safeguarding, and institutional risk-management requirements.

8.2 Step-by-Step Process

1. Academic activity, event, or invited speaker is proposed.
2. Initial review conducted by the Programme Lead or Academic Dean.
3. Risk assessment undertaken where applicable.
4. Approval granted, or conditions applied where required.
5. Event delivery or academic activity proceeds as approved.
6. Post-event review conducted where concerns or risks have been identified.

8.3 Templates and Records

The following records support implementation of this SOP:

- Academic Event / Speaker Approval Form
- Risk Assessment Template
- Event Review Record

9. Monitoring, Compliance and Review

9.1 Monitoring

Implementation of this Code of Practice is monitored through LAAT's academic governance and quality assurance arrangements. The Academic Board receives periodic reports on matters relating to academic freedom and freedom of speech, including any risks, concerns, or cases arising under this Code. Where significant or systemic issues are identified, these are escalated to the Board of Governors for oversight and assurance.

Monitoring activity is used to:

- Ensure consistent and fair application of this Code
- Identify emerging risks or trends
- Inform staff training, guidance, and continuous improvement

9.2 Compliance

Failure to comply with this Code may be addressed through appropriate academic, professional, or disciplinary procedures, in line with LAAT regulations and relevant partner requirements. Any actions taken will be proportionate, evidence-based, and subject to appropriate authorisation and documentation.

9.3 Review

This Code will be reviewed annually, or sooner where required due to:

- Changes in legislation or statutory duties
- Updates to Office for Students regulatory expectations
- Revisions to Plymouth Marjon University partner regulations
- Institutional learning from implementation of the Code

The Academic Dean is responsible for initiating the review and presenting any proposed amendments through the appropriate governance approval routes.

10. Responsible People / Roles include

- **Academic Dean (Policy Owner):** Dr Manoj Ponugubati
  Has operational responsibility for implementing, maintaining, and reviewing this Code, and for ensuring that academic freedom and lawful freedom of speech are upheld across LAAT's provision.
- **Academic Quality Lead:** Dr Vishwanath Kokkonda
  Maintains records, supports reporting to governance committees, and ensures procedural compliance where concerns arise.
- **HR Manager:** Ms Ginny Mishra
  Ensure that teaching, assessment, and academic discussions promote lawful debate and intellectual enquiry, and that academic activities comply with this Code.
- **Programme Lead:** Mr Amarjeet Singh
  Ensure that teaching, assessment, and academic discussions promote lawful debate and intellectual enquiry, and that academic activities comply with this Code.

List of People & Contacts

Role	Name	Email ID
Academic Dean (Policy Owner)	Dr Manoj Ponugubati	manoj@laat.ac.uk

Academic Quality Lead	Dr Vishwanath Kokkonda	vishwanath.kokkonda@laat.ac.uk
Programme Lead	Mr Amarjeet Singh	Amarjeet.singh@laat.ac.uk
HR manager	Ginny Mishra	Ginny.m@laat.ac.uk

11. List of Documents (LoD)

- **Teaching and Learning Policy** – supports academic enquiry and scholarly activity
- **Assessment Practices Policy** – ensures academic integrity and fair academic standards
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy** – ensures lawful expression is balanced with equality duties
- **Safeguarding and Prevent Policy** – ensures risk management and statutory safeguarding compliance
- **Student Code of Conduct** – defines expected behaviour in academic and learning environment.
- **External Speakers and Events Procedure** – governs approval and risk assessment of academic events and speakers

12. Evidence

The following evidence items demonstrate implementation, oversight, and effectiveness of this Code of Practice.

- Teaching and Learning Policy
- Assessment Practices Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Safeguarding and Prevent Policy
- Student Code of Conduct
- External Speakers and Events Procedure

Evidence Item	Purpose / What it Demonstrates	Relevant OfS Condition(s)
Teaching and Learning Policy	Demonstrates institutional commitment to academic enquiry, scholarly activity, and structured learning environments supporting academic freedom	***B1*** *(Academic Experience),* ***E2*** *(Management & Governance)*
Assessment Practices Policy	Demonstrates controls ensuring academic integrity, fair assessment, and maintenance of reliable academic standards	***B4*** *(Assessment & Awards),* ***B5*** *(Sector-Recognised Standards)*

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy	Demonstrates that freedom of expression is balanced with equality duties and protection from discrimination or harassment	***C1*** *(Consumer Protection),* ***E1*** *(Public Interest Governance)*
Safeguarding and Prevent Policy	Demonstrates statutory safeguarding arrangements, protection from abuse of power, and risk escalation mechanisms	***C3*** *(Student Protection Plan),* ***E2*** *(Risk Management)*
Student Code of Conduct	Defines expected behavioural standards and mechanisms for addressing misconduct or abuse of power	***C1*** *(Consumer Protection),* ***E2*** *(Institutional Controls)*
External Speakers and Events Procedure	Demonstrates structured approval and risk assessment of academic events and visiting speakers to protect lawful freedom of speech while managing institutional risk	***E2*** *(Management & Governance),* ***F2*** *(Information Controls)*

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech – Event Approval Form

Please complete all relevant sections. Fields marked * are mandatory.

Event / Activity title*

_____

Proposed date and location*

_____

Organiser name and role*

_____

Programme / Department*

_____

External speaker(s) details (if applicable)

_____

Academic purpose and relevance*

_____

Summary of topics to be discussed*

_____

Risk assessment required? (Yes/No)*

_____

Safeguarding / Prevent considerations

_____

Recommended approval outcome

_____

Approving officer

_____

Conditions attached (if any)

_____

Final decision and date

_____

Academic Event Risk Assessment Template

This template supports proportionate assessment of risks associated with academic events and speakers.

Event title*

_____

Assessor name and role*

_____

Date of assessment*

_____

Description of activity*

_____

Identified risks (e.g. safety, safeguarding, reputational, legal)*

_____

Risk level before mitigation (Low / Medium / High)*

_____

Control measures / mitigations*

_____

Residual risk level after mitigation*

_____

Safeguarding implications (Yes / No)*

_____

Prevent considerations (Yes / No)*

_____

Further action required

_____

Escalation required (Yes / No)*

_____

Approving officer

_____

Review date (if applicable)

_____

Academic Event Review Record

This record should be completed following academic events to support assurance and continuous improvement.

Event title*

_____

Date and location*

_____

Reviewer name and role*

_____

Was the event delivered as approved? (Yes / No)*

_____

Attendance numbers

_____

Summary of key issues raised

_____

Any incidents or concerns identified (Yes / No)*

_____

Description of incidents or concerns (if applicable)

_____

Feedback from participants

_____

Follow-up actions required

_____

Escalation to committee required? (Yes / No)*

_____

Date review completed*

_____