

Commonwealth College of Excellence

Freedom of Speech and Guest Speakers policy

Version	Date	Changes	Reason for Changes	Author/ Reviewer	Next Review
v3.1	January 2025	-	A new policy has been adopted.	Mohammad T Islam (Head of Academics & Quality Control)	January 2026/ As required
v3.2	November 2025	The policy name has been changed to Freedom of Speech and Guest Speakers Policy. Previously, it was called Guest Speakers Policy.	To better reflect the full scope and purpose of the document.	Mohammad T Islam (Head of Academics & Quality Control)	January 2026/ As required

1.0 Introduction

Commonwealth College of Excellence (CCE) is committed to upholding and actively promoting the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law. This policy sets out the College's approach to **external speakers** and ensures compliance with its statutory obligations, including:

- The **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023**,
- **Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986**,
- The **Human Rights Act 1998 (Article 10 – Freedom of Expression)**,
- The **Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 – Prevent Duty**, and
- **Equality Act 2010**.

The College recognises that while freedom of expression is a foundational principle in higher education, it must be exercised responsibly and in line with other legal duties, particularly around safeguarding, equality, and the prevention of harm.

2.0 Policy Objectives

CCE aims to:

- **Uphold freedom of speech** within the boundaries of UK law for all students, staff, and external contributors.
- Provide a **safe, respectful, and inclusive environment** that supports the exchange of ideas without fear of harassment or intimidation.
- Ensure **transparent, proportionate, and lawful procedures** are followed for all events involving external speakers.
- Comply fully with the **Prevent Duty**, ensuring that all activities remain within the law and do not contribute to the risk of radicalisation or terrorism.
- Promote an academic culture of **open debate, critical inquiry, and balanced perspectives**.
- Clarify responsibilities of those arranging or participating in events involving external speakers.

3.0 Commitment to Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

3.1 **Freedom of expression** is a legally protected right under Article 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and is reinforced by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. CCE acknowledges that:

- Staff, students, and visiting speakers have the right to express lawful views, even if controversial or unpopular.
- Academic freedom includes the right to discuss and publish ideas, theories, and opinions relevant to academic disciplines without institutional censorship.

3.2 These freedoms are not absolute. The College has a duty to restrict speech that:

- Incites hatred, violence, or terrorism;
- Is unlawful under criminal or civil law;
- Breaches equality or harassment legislation;
- Presents a clear risk to public order or the safety of students, staff, or guests.

4.0 External Speakers and Definitions

4.1 **External Speaker:** Any individual or organisation not currently enrolled or employed by CCE who is invited to speak at an event associated with the College.

4.2 **Event:** Any organised gathering—physical, virtual, or hybrid—arranged by a student, staff member, or affiliated group that involves an external speaker and is either hosted by CCE or represents CCE at external venues (e.g., fairs, public debates, webinars).

4.3 Speaker Responsibilities

All external speakers must comply with the following conditions:

- Must not incite hatred, violence, or break the law.
- Must not promote or glorify terrorism, including support for banned organisations (per the UK Government's list of proscribed groups).
- Must not disseminate material that encourages discrimination, intolerance, or hostility towards protected groups under the Equality Act 2010.
- Should aim to engage respectfully with differing viewpoints and avoid needlessly offensive or inflammatory rhetoric.
- Must not use the platform to fundraise for third-party organisations without written approval.

5.0 Responsibilities of Organisers and Event Planning

5.1 All proposed events involving external speakers must be reviewed by the **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** or **Deputy DSL** at least **14 days in advance**.

5.2 Organisers must complete the **Request for External Speaker Form (Appendix 1)** and submit it to the DSL for approval. Publicity must not begin until formal approval has been granted.

5.3 Approval will be based on a risk assessment considering:

- Compliance with this policy and legal requirements;
- Reputational risk to the College;
- The nature and content of the speaker's past engagements;
- Association with controversial, extremist, or proscribed content;
- Safety, security, and crowd control logistics.

5.4 CCE reserves the right to:

- Cancel or postpone any event that does not meet policy or legal standards;
- Impose conditions (e.g., balanced panel, moderation, recording);
- Refuse or withdraw approval if new information comes to light.

5.5 Organisers should ensure external speakers are sent a link to this policy and must confirm in writing that the speaker agrees to abide by its terms.

6.0 Decision-Making Outcomes

The College may determine that:

- The event proceeds without condition;
- The event proceeds with mitigating steps (e.g., oversight, panel debate, Q&A moderation);
- The speaker is disinvited;
- The event is cancelled.

This decision will be communicated in writing within 5 working days of submission.

7.0 Monitoring and Reporting

- Records of all events involving external speakers will be maintained for a period of **12 months**.
- The DSL will provide an annual report to the **Senior Leadership Team** summarising compliance and any actions taken under this policy.
- Concerns regarding breaches of this policy should be reported to the DSL and may trigger safeguarding or disciplinary procedures.

8.0 Training and Awareness

- Staff and students responsible for organising events will receive **training on the policy and relevant legislation**, including Prevent, freedom of speech, and safeguarding responsibilities.
- Managers must ensure dissemination and understanding of the policy within their teams.

9.0 Review and Oversight

This policy is reviewed **annually**, or sooner if required by changes to legislation or regulatory guidance.

Appendix 1 – Request for External Speaker Approval Form

This form must be submitted at least 14 calendar days before the proposed event. No publicity or booking should take place until formal approval is received.

Section A: Event Details

Event Title:

Date of Event:

Start Time:

End Time:

Venue / Platform (incl. room number or online link):

Event Organiser Name:

Role (e.g. student, staff, society):

Department / Group (if applicable):

Contact Email and Phone:

Target Audience (tick all that apply):

☐ CCE Students

☐ CCE Staff

☐ General Public

☐ External Guests

☐ Online Participants

Section B: Speaker Information

Speaker Full Name:

Organisation / Affiliation:

Job Title / Role:

Speaker Biography (50–100 words):

Has the speaker previously spoken at a CCE event? If Yes, provide details:

Speaker Contact Email / Website / Social Media (if available):

Section C: Topic and Risk Assessment

Brief Description of the Topic / Content of the Talk:

Will the speaker present controversial or sensitive material? If yes, please explain:

Could the event or speaker pose any of the following risks? (Tick if applicable):

☐ Link to a proscribed organisation (per UK Home Office list)

☐ Views previously labelled extremist or discriminatory

☐ Has caused fear or disruption at other institutions

☐ May attract protests or high-profile attention

☐ Health and safety or crowd control concerns

☐ Taking place during election purdah and includes party-political content

If any boxes are ticked, explain steps to mitigate risk:

Section D: Declaration by Event Organiser

I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the CCE Freedom of Speech and External Speakers Policy.
- I have informed the speaker that they must comply with the law and CCE's policies.
- I understand the event may be cancelled or conditions imposed if policy requirements are not met.

Signature:

Name (Print):

Date:

Section E: For DSL / Deputy DSL Use Only

Date Received:

Risk Assessment Outcome:

☐ Approved – No Conditions

☐ Approved – Subject to Conditions (below)

☐ Rejected – Reason below

Conditions or Reasons for Rejection (if any):

Assessed by (Name and Role):

Signature:

Date of Decision:

The End