



Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

Staff Support Procedure

Authors:	People & Culture
Publication date:	August 2024
Amended:	-
Review date:	July 2027

Table of Contents

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Staff Support Procedure **3**

1.	Overview	3
2.	Scope and exclusions	3
3.	Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Staff Support Procedure	4
4.	Equality impact assessment	9
5.	Monitoring	9
6.	Related University of Essex policies and procedures	9
7.	University sources of information	9

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Staff Support Procedure

1. Overview

- 1.1 Academic Freedom and freedom of speech are essential parts of academic and University life and flourish where there is tolerance of a wide range of ideas and opinions which are lawfully expressed. Promoting the lawful expression of diverse ideas and opinions or the sharing of information by means of speech, writing, images (including in electronic form) or through events that we hold, including the lawful expression of ideas and opinions that some may find objectionable or offensive, is an important part of our responsibility to be inclusive. It enables all members of the University to feel able to express their ideas and opinions within the law and be encouraged to be active members of our University community. The University commitment and its supporting governance is set out in full in our [University Code of Practice: Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech \(.pdf\)](#), the [Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy \(.pdf\)](#), and [Harassment and Bullying: Our Zero Tolerance Approach](#).
- 1.2 While our expectations and responsibilities are clear, we also recognise that there is still potential for members of staff to experience objectionable or offensive responses during the course of their academic or professional activity. Responses may be received from parties external to the University, as well as from members of our University community. The University's Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Staff Support Procedure is in place to ensure staff are supported to manage both anticipated or actual responses, acknowledging that each situation will be unique and flexibility will be required.

2. Scope and exclusions

- 2.1 The Procedure is used to ensure support is provided to a member of staff who has experienced a response as defined in paragraph 1.2. The Procedure applies to all permanent and fixed-term employees at the University of Essex. For the purposes of this procedure the term staff is used broadly and is taken to encompass Officers of the University, Members of Council, and individuals engaged on visiting academic and honorary contracts whilst they are operating in the capacity of their role at Essex. Current PGR students who are also holding an active contract of employment and work engagement with the University are also covered by these procedures. Employees of the [University of Essex Campus Services \(UECS\)](#) or [Wivenhoe House Hotel](#) have their own specific policies and procedures.

- 2.2. The Procedure is not used to make a complaint in relation to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech where this is perceived to have been compromised. In such situations our Freedom of Speech Complaints Policy will apply.
- 2.3 The Procedure is not used to investigate an alleged incident or perpetrators: the Disciplinary Procedure will apply if the alleged perpetrator is a member of staff at the University of Essex, the Code of Student Conduct will apply if the alleged perpetrator is a registered student at the University of Essex.
- 2.4 The procedure is not part of the approval processes for research, education or professional practice activity.
- 2.5 The Social Media Policy is used for the management of publicly available published material.

3. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Staff Support Procedure

3.1 The procedure has two stages:

Stage 1: Initial assessment of risk

a) Response is anticipated.

or

b) Response occurs.

Stage 2: scoping meeting

a) Meeting is held to understand the issues, agree any actions, and arrange support as required.

Stage 1a: response is anticipated

- 3.2 An individual member of staff may anticipate a response and choose to raise this with their line manager.
- 3.3 Due consideration through University processes and governance arrangements may highlight the likelihood of an objectionable or offensive response during the course of any academic or professional activity. For example, this may be noted at:
 - Ethics Committee(s)
 - Application and Post Award processes
 - Employment Relations processes

- Student Conduct processes
- Speaker or event assessments
- Communication campaigns

- 3.4 The individual member of staff, line manager, committee secretary, or senior manager for a specific process will notify the relevant Head of Department or Section of the potential risk. The Head of Department or Head of Section (or their nominee) will make contact with the member of staff affected to ask their initial thoughts on any support required noting that they may not want additional support, or for Stage 2 of this procedure to be used. Any support agreed will be provided and/or accessed through existing University services.
- 3.5 The Head of Department or Head of Section is responsible for reviewing the available information at this stage and deciding whether a Stage 2 assessment is needed. The People & Culture Business Partner will be notified that a potential risk has been assessed, the outcome, and any supporting actions recommended or taken. The Business Partner will formally record the information in a confidential case management system and notify the Executive Dean and/or the Registrar and Secretary.

Stage 1b: Response occurs

- 3.6 A response may occur and is reported to a manager by an individual or team at the University. The manager will share relevant information with the Head of Department or Head of Section and seek advice from People & Culture.
- 3.7 The Head of Department or Head of Section (or nominee) makes immediate contact with the member of staff affected to check on their wellbeing and ask their initial thoughts for support and action, noting that they may not want additional support, or for Stage 2 of this procedure to be used. Any support agreed will be provided and/or accessed through existing University services.
- 3.8 The Head of Department or Head of Section is responsible for reviewing the available information and deciding whether a Stage 2 assessment is needed. The People & Culture Business Partner will be notified that a response has been assessed, the outcome, and any supporting actions recommended or taken. The Business Partner will formally record the information in a confidential case management system and notify the Executive Dean and/or the Registrar and Secretary.

Stage 2: Scoping meeting

- 3.9 If a Stage 2 Assessment is required, the Head of Department or Section will hold a scoping meeting within 3 working days of the Stage 1 decision to understand the circumstances and agree the specific support required. The meeting will include the following roles as standard:
- Head of Department or Section (or nominee) (Lead)
 - member(s) of staff impacted

- line manager (as appropriate)
- People & Culture Business Partner
- Director of Communications (or nominee).

3.10 Additional colleagues may be invited to attend dependent on the individual case details and support required or contacted following the meeting (e.g. Director of Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing, Campus Security)

3.11 At the meeting the Head of Department or Section (or nominee) will agree the actions and responsibilities. All support agreed will be provided and accessed through existing University services. The Head of Department or Section (or nominee) will agree a date to review the actions taken. The People & Culture Business Partner will record the agreed actions in a confidential case management system and notify the Executive Dean and/or the Registrar and Secretary.

3.12 The Head of Department or Section will review the actions taken at the agreed date and notify the People & Culture Business partner if Stage 2 is now closed or if further action is required. The Head of Department or Section will seek advice from the Executive Dean and/or the Registrar and Secretary and Director of People & Culture at this stage when/as appropriate.

Workflow Stage 1

Risk of response	Response Occurs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Potential risk is identified and reported by individual, line manager or through a University process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Response occurs and is reported to a manager by an individual or team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Head of Department or Section is notified immediately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Head of Department or Section is notified immediately

Complete Stage 1 Assessment

Stage 1 Assessment

Step 1

Head of Department or Section (or nominee) contacts member of staff affected immediately to ask for their thoughts and identify support needs



Step 2:

Head of Department or Section (or nominee) notifies P&C Business Partner and completes Stage 1 Assessment.



Step 3:

Head of Department or Head of Section decides if Stage 2 is required.



Step 4:

P&C Business Partner is notified of the assessment, outcome and actions taken. The Business Partner records the information in confidential case management system. The Executive Dean and/or the Registrar and Secretary are notified.



Step 5:

Close or move to Stage 2.

Workflow Stage 2

Stage 2 Assessment

Step 1

Head of Department or Section (or nominee) calls a scoping meeting within 3 working days of a reported incident or risk to understand the circumstances and agree the support required:

- Head of Department (Lead) (or nominee)
- member(s) of staff
- line manager (as appropriate)
- P&C Business Partner
- Director of Communications (or nominee)

Support needs are identified and responsibilities are agreed.



Step 2:

Head of Department or Section (or nominee) notifies P&C Business Partner and completes Stage 1 Assessment.



Step 3:

Role responsibilities are allocated.



Step 4:

Review date is agreed.



Step 5:

P&C Business Partner records the assessment, outcome and actions taken in a confidential case management system. The Executive Dean and/or the Registrar and Secretary are notified.



Step 6:

Case is reviewed at agreed date and either recorded as closed or further action required.

4. Equality impact assessment

- 4.1 The University has conducted an Equality Impact Assessment on this policy and is satisfied that its application should not result in a differential and negative impact on any groups of employees identified under the Equality Act 2010.

5. Monitoring

- 5.1 The procedure will be included in the University Policy Repository and reviewed on a three yearly schedule as standard. A central record of all cases will be maintained by People & Culture and reviewed annually by People Culture and Inclusion Advisory Group on behalf of USG. Early review of the procedure may be taken following feedback.

6. Related University of Essex policies and procedures

- University Code of Practice: Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech
- Equality and Diversity Policy and Strategy
- Harassment and Bullying: Our Zero Tolerance Approach
- Social Media Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Code of Student Conduct

7. University sources of information

- Health and Wellbeing

Document Control Panel

Field	Description
Title	Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Staff Support Procedure
Policy Classification	Procedure
Security Classification	Open
Security Rationale	None
Policy Manager Role	Policy and Projects Officer
Nominated Contact	develop@essex.ac.uk
Responsible UoE Section	People and Culture
Approval Body	Council
Signed Off Date	6 August 2024
Publication Status	Published
Published Date	1 September 2024
Last Review Date	July 2024
Minimum Review Frequency	3-Yearly
Review Date	July 2027
UoE Identifier	0188

If you require this document in an alternative format, such as braille, please contact the nominated contact at develop@essex.ac.uk.