

## Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Expression

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This policy and procedure is subject to The Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following categories of individual as Protected Characteristics: Age, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex (gender), Sexual orientation, Disability.

## 1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 MK College Group recognises and endorses that freedom of speech [and expression] within the law has fundamental importance for institutions as places of education, learning and the disinterested pursuit of truth. In particular, institutions are obliged under section 43 of the Education (No.2) Act 1986 to take reasonable measures to protect freedom of lawful speech.
- 1.2 In addition, a principle of freedom of lawful expression is enshrined in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- 1.3 MK College Group is also required under Article 15 of the Instrument and Articles of Government to have regard to the need to ensure that academic staff 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 at risk of losing their jobs or any privileges they may have at MK College Group. Institutions have a responsibility, so far as is reasonably practicable, to protect and advance the principle of academic freedom.
- 1.4 This Code of Practice sets out the rights and obligations inherent within the principles of freedom of speech and expression and academic freedom and the Code shall be construed and applied in the spirit of upholding those principles wherever reasonably practicable within the law.
- 1.5 The Code of Practice covers freedom of speech and expression in whatever form that may take including (but not limited to) speeches, debates, meetings, demonstrations, written publications and through the use of social media.
- 1.6 The Code's rights and obligations shall apply to:
  - 1.6.1 MK College Group, including members of the Governing Body;
  - 1.6.2 all persons (whether academic staff or otherwise) working for MK College Group (whether for payment or otherwise);
  - 1.6.3 all duly enrolled students of MK College Group (whether full or part-time);
  - 1.6.4 all students studying with MK College Group (whether full or part-time) under an agreement with a partner organisation of MK College Group (e.g. a college or school)
  - 1.6.5 the students' union and any societies, clubs or associations which

normally operate on MK College Group premises<sup>1</sup>; and

- 1.6.6 all persons invited to speak and/or express views (whether in person or otherwise including through the use of social media) and/or otherwise take part in activities which take place on or are planned or proposed or due to take place on MK College Group premises or through its ICT systems in accordance with the provisions of section 3 of this Code.
- 1.6.7 All persons hiring of using MK College Group premises and/or facilities.
- 1.7 References in the Code to "MK College Group premises" and/or "MK College Group facilities" include premises and/or facilities which are owned by MK College Group, premises and/or facilities which MK College Group does not own but over which it exercises some degree of control, and premises and/or facilities occupied or controlled by MK College Group students' union whether or not MK College Group owns or has control of such premises and/or facilities.
- 1.8 References in the Code to the CEO / Executive or Senior Leader includes reference to their nominee.

## 2. **Freedom of Speech and Expression**

- 2.1 MK College Group shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech and expression within the law is secured for every person to whom this Code's rights apply.
- 2.2 Every person to whom this Code's obligations apply shall assist MK College Group in upholding this Code of Practice.
- 2.3 MK College Group will not suppress freedom of speech and expression, however abhorrent certain expressions may be to the majority of the members of MK College Group, provided that:
  - 2.3.1 such speech and expressions do not go beyond the articulation of points of view, are within the law and do not constitute incitement to riot, insurrection, racial hatred, religious hatred, sexual harassment or other activities which are likely to cause a breach of the peace or public disorder, significantly increase the risk of an individual being drawn into terrorism or otherwise be unlawful; and
  - 2.3.2 by allowing such views to be expressed, and by allowing the activity to take place in the format proposed (for example, a non-religious event being held with men and women in segregated seating) MK College

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<sup>1</sup> The students' union should formally adopt this Code e.g. by reference to it in its constitution or in the Code of Practice agreed between the institution and the union under the Education Act 1994.

Group would not be failing in its wider legal duties, in particular to have due regard in carrying out its functions to the need to:

2.3.2.1 eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;

2.3.2.2 advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and

2.3.2.3 foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and

2.3.2.4 prevent people being drawn into terrorism.

2.4 MK College Group shall ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the use of its premises and facilities is not denied to any individual or body of persons on any ground connected with:

2.4.1 the beliefs or views of such individual or any member of such body; or

2.4.2 the policy or objectives of such body.

2.5 Every person to whom this Code's obligations apply shall refrain from organising or engaging in or otherwise being associated with any conduct (other than by lawful, reasonable and peaceful persuasion) intended to prevent the enjoyment of rights under this Code of Practice.

2.6 MK College Group shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable (including where appropriate the initiation of disciplinary measures) to secure that the obligations under this Code of Practice are complied with.

### 3. **The Holding of Activities**

3.1 References in the Code to "activities" include (but are not limited to) meetings, demonstrations, events and publications through whatever media (including social media) which take place or are proposed or planned or due to take place on MK College Group premises or through its ICT systems.

3.1 MK College Group has the responsibility to take reasonable steps to maintain good order on its premises. It has the right and the power to regulate and, if necessary, to impose conditions or restrictions upon activities which take place or are planned or proposed or due to take place on its premises or through its ICT systems<sup>2</sup>. The

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<sup>2</sup> Such activities are likely to raise tensions between the need to protect people and property on the one hand and to ensure that members of the institution, visiting speakers etc can express themselves freely. The institution will need

organisation and holding of any such activities, and the arrangements, therefore, must comply with this Code of Practice.

- 3.2 Any person to whom this Code's rights apply must submit a request, in writing, to the appropriate member of the ELT/SLT or other designate of MK College Group for permission for an activity to take place where it is reasonably foreseeable (in the reasonable opinion of the Commercial Manager or appropriate Executive or Senior Leader) that the activity may be attended by 25 or more people and/or will raise issues which may be controversial in some way. Any such request should be submitted to Commercial Manager or appropriate Executive or Senior Leader not less than 14 days before the proposed date of the activity and must contain details of the proposed subject matter and the purpose and format of the activity, including seating arrangements, the name and identity of any speakers or authors and the proposed timing and location of the activity.
- 3.3 Any organisers of any activity shall, if there is any doubt as to whether the activity may, in the reasonable opinion of an appropriate member of ELT/SLT or other designate, be controversial, consult an appropriate member of SLT/ELT or other designate at the very earliest opportunity so that the correct procedures may be followed.
- 3.4 Except in exceptional circumstances where more time is required before a decision can be made, within 5 of working days of receiving a written request providing all of the information required pursuant to paragraph 3.3 above an appropriate member of ELT/SLT or designate shall issue a written decision in reply which shall either grant or withhold permission for the activity to take place on MK College Group premises or through its ICT systems. Permission granted under this Code may be subject to such conditions or restrictions (for example, as to security precautions, payment of charges, limits on numbers of people to be admitted, seating arrangements or form of publication) or an appropriate member of ELT/SLT or designate reasonably sees fit.
- 3.5 MK College Group will not unreasonably refuse to allow activities to take place on its premises or through its ICT systems. The expression of controversial views which do not breach the law or risk a breach of the law will not of itself constitute reasonable grounds for withholding permission for an activity. Reasonable grounds for refusal would include (but are not limited to) the fact that, if the activity were to take place, a risk would arise that, within the premises of MK College Group and/or the scope of its ICT systems there would be:
- 3.5.1 incitement to commit a criminal act;
  - 3.5.2 the unlawful expression of views;

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to ensure a co-ordinated approach involving all stakeholders in what may need to be a rapid decision -making process.

- 3.5.3 support of an organisation whose aims and objectives are illegal;
  - 3.5.4 the foreseeability that an individual might be drawn into terrorism; and/or
  - 3.5.5 a breach of the peace.
- 3.6 In determining whether permission for an activity to take place on MK College Group premises and/or through its ICT system might reasonably be refused, consideration may be given by an appropriate member of ELT/SLT or designate (as is appropriate in the circumstances) to:
- 3.6.1 the safety of persons attending the activity or otherwise foreseeably affected by the activity and/or on MK College Group premises who might foreseeably be put at risk;
  - 3.6.2 the security of MK College Group premises; and
  - 3.6.3 the good name and reputation of MK College Group.
- 3.7 A request for an appeal against a decision of an appropriate member of ELT/SLT or designate may be made, in writing, to the CEO within 7 days of the issue of an appropriate member of ELT/SLT or designate decision. The decision of CEO shall be final and binding. The CEO may also impose such conditions or restrictions on the activity taking place as it reasonably sees fit.

#### 4. **Practical Measures**

- 4.1 MK College Group shall permit the use of its premises and ICT systems only by organisers or other individuals otherwise involved in an activity or proposed activity who undertake in writing to comply with all lawful instructions and conditions issued by MK College Group in relation to (but not limited to) the location, arrangements, form and conduct of such activities, including adequate stewarding, charring and provision of adequate control over entry.
- 4.2 In cases in which it is reasonable to assume that there is a possibility of disruption arising from the taking place of an activity, MK College Group may consult with the police. If the activity is a public one the police may be prepared to be present throughout the event to minimise any disruption.
- 4.3 Any organisers or other individuals otherwise involved with an activity to take place on MK College Group premises or through its ICT systems shall be responsible for any costs involved in organising and holding such activities and for ensuring, as far as reasonably possible, that nothing in the organisation and holding or arrangements of such activities infringes the law or any MK College Group rule, regulation or procedure in any way.

## 5. **Sanctions and Penalties**

- 5.1 Any member of the Governing Body who breaches this Code may be removed from office under clause 10 of MK College Group Instrument of Articles of Government.
- 5.2 Where those responsible for the breach are students or staff of MK College Group action may be taken against them under the relevant disciplinary procedure.
- 5.3 Where those responsible for the breach are students or staff of a partner organisation of MK College Group the CEO shall consider whether to inform the partner organisation with a view to that partner organisation taking action (whether as well as or instead of) under its relevant disciplinary procedure.
- 5.4 Where a breach of this Code of Practice takes place at an activity or as a result of an activity taking place, MK College Group may take steps to assist the police to secure identification of the persons suspected of committing offences with a view to appropriate action being taken against them.

## 6. **Review and Amendment of Code**

MK College Group acknowledges its duty under subsection 3 of section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 to issue and keep up to date a Code of Practice on freedom of speech. With this end in view the Governing Body will receive a report on the operation of the Code by an appropriate member of ELT/SLT or designate, together with any recommendations for revision of it, at intervals not exceeding 3 years.