

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

“Blind belief in authority is the greatest enemy of truth.”

— Albert Einstein

### Preamble

1. As a College, we believe that:
  - freedom and the recognition of the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members is the foundation of a successful academic community; and
  - freedom and liberty of people and their communities is vital to social change and a thriving democracy.
2. Therefore, as a common standard for all our work we must ensure that staff, students and the rest of society are not hindered in using their rights to contribute to social change through academic freedom of opinion on matters of public interest.
3. We recognise this may touch on sensitive and controversial issues, and as an academic community we will strive by teaching, education, scholarship and research to promote respect for all opinions and debate that positively contribute to building a civilised democracy.

### Principles

4. ‘Academic freedom’ means the freedom of staff and students to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from the law, College policies or regulations, or public pressure.
5. The College will apply this definition when making decisions about academic freedom under all its policies, regulations, and rules. This includes our employment policies and procedures, particularly those on discipline, grievance, probation, performance management, redundancy and dismissal.
6. The College will maintain the right of staff and students to use their academic freedom by not forcing them to instruct or learn against their own best knowledge and conscience or to use curriculums and methods contrary to national or international standards.
7. With the privilege of academic freedom comes the duty to use it in a way that is consistent with the scholarly obligation to base all endeavour on an honest and ethical search for

truth. Teaching, learning, research and scholarship should occur in full accordance with ethical and professional standards.

8. The College may treat any material breach of these responsibilities as misconduct or gross misconduct. It will consider taking formal action under the relevant procedures should such a breach occur.

#### Privileges of staff and students

9. As members of the academic community, staff and students can use the following opportunities:
  - (a) Freedom – within the law – to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without jeopardising their membership of the College or privileges.
  - (b) Teach and promote learning without interference, subject both to the College's right to manage its activity and to accepted professional principles including intellectual rigour on standards and teaching methods.
  - (c) Research efficiently and effectively without undue interference or suppression in line with their professional responsibility, subject both to the College's rights to manage its activity efficiently and effectively and to nationally and internationally recognised professional principles of intellectual rigour, scientific inquiry and research ethics.
  - (d) Play a significant role in setting the curriculum through consultation by management with the Academic Board from time to time.
  - (e) Publish and communicate.
  - (f) Apply the principles of justice and fairness – and expect them to be applied to them – in fulfilling their functions without suffering discrimination.

#### Responsibilities of staff and students

10. To ensure academic freedom is exercised responsibly, staff and students have a duty to ensure that all their academic endeavours – teaching, learning, research and scholarship – are:
  - (a) based on an honest search for knowledge with due respect for evidence, impartial reasoning and honesty in reporting;

- (b) ethical in their treatment and involvement of people, animals, heritage and their impact on the environment;
- (c) respectful and acknowledge the scholarly work of academic colleagues and students – in particular, that authorship of published work includes all who have materially contributed to and share responsibility for its contents;
- (d) published, where appropriate, and that the results and the data on which they are based are effectively made available to scholars and researchers, except where this may place research respondents in peril or where confidentiality was guaranteed.

### Breach of the code

11. The College takes seriously any instances of students, staff, contractors or visitors not keeping to the code. We will investigate such instances and, if appropriate, consider them under the relevant disciplinary policy and procedures.
12. We strongly encourage informal and local resolution of issues or complaints. This is why we provide a mediation service to support staff and students.
13. If appropriate, all student and staff complaints about policy breaches should first be raised at a local level with a view to informal and timely resolution. If these attempts fail or are inappropriate because of the nature of the policy breach, then:
  - (a) students who believe there has been a breach regarding our provision of a service or facility may raise it through the Student Concerns and Complaints policy;
  - (b) students who believe there has been a breach in our academic processes may use the Academic and Regulatory Appeals policy;
  - (c) instances of breaches by students may be investigated under the Student Behaviour and Discipline policy;
  - (d) employees who believe there has been a breach may raise it through the Grievance policy and procedure; or
  - (e) contractors or other visitors who believe there has been a breach may raise it in writing to a Senior Officer.
14. Support is available for students and staff who invoke these procedures. For students, support is available from the Students' Union. For staff, advice and guidance is available from their Head of Department or the HR Team.

15. If a breach of the criminal law occurs, the College must, where appropriate, help the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service. Regarding any criminal charges, the College may not, unless a Senior Officer decides otherwise, proceed with any disciplinary proceedings on the same matters until any criminal proceedings finish.

### Legal and regulatory context

#### *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (UNESCO)*

16. The College has agreed the above definition of academic freedom, which has been informed by Sections VI and VII of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris on 11 November 1997.

#### *Education Reform Act 1988*

17. UK governments have believed that universities and Higher Education providers play an important role in society as places of debate and discussion where ideas can be tested without fear of control, where students learn to challenge ideas and think for themselves, and where rationality underpins the pursuit of knowledge.
18. This role is reinforced by legislation. The Education Reform Act 1988 (s202) requires universities (created before 1992) 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 in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their institutions'.

### **Schedule (not part of the policies and regulations):**

*Responsible Officer: CEO and President*

*Approved by: Board of Directors and Academic Board and GSM London Students' Union*

*Version: 1.0*

*Date: 24 February 2016*

*Monitoring and Review Body: Academic Board and GSM London Students' Union*

*Effective From: 1 April 2016*

*Next Scheduled Review: April 2019*