

Academic Freedom Policy

1. Introduction

The SPTI mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. As a deliverer of higher education with awards validated by Staffordshire University, we refer to the university and wider education communities to apply context and parity of opportunity.

“By being places of debate universities are one of our most important pillars of civil society, and represent a safeguard against forces that divide and undermine society. If universities are to be the innovative and dynamic organisations that push back the boundaries of knowledge in areas of science, social sciences and the humanities, they must also be places where differing and difficult views can be brought forward, listened to and challenged.” Universities UK 2011

2. What is Academic Freedom?

Academic freedom’ is a term used to describe the law that allows for open and honest debate in an academic context. SPTI has a legal duty to secure the development of students’ ideas and understanding in the form of academic freedom whilst operating within our academic community.

Academic freedom, according to the Office for Students, is: Academic staff at an English higher education provider 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 the provider.

3. Scope

This Policy applies to all academic staff who as part of their designated duties, are engaged in teaching. SPTI will maintain the academic freedom of staff, that is to say, freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.

4. Principles

In the exercise of this freedom we acknowledge, that as members of a welcoming and inclusive community we have responsibilities to each other and to the wider society to:

- value diversity and recognise that different people bring different perspectives, ideas, knowledge and culture and that this difference brings great strength;
- treat others with courtesy and respect, challenge inequalities, and anticipate and respond positively to different needs and circumstances;

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- respect the rights of individuals to hold different beliefs and views and to express them through appropriate contribution to discussion and academic debate;
- communicate in ways that are clear, relevant, respectful, accurate and timely, and exemplified by transparency and constructive dialogue.

5. This means that

- We will be academically rigorous, justify our views with evidence and academic argument and be willing to recognise the gaps and weaknesses in our own arguments.
- In promoting our ideas, we will make every reasonable effort to minimise the risks of any harm, either physical or psychological, arising for any person, institution or community.
- We will be aware that some academic opinions and arguments may cause offence to some people but that this is not, of itself, a sufficient reason not to express those opinions and arguments. We will, nevertheless, be sensitive to the views of others and we will not present or challenge views in a way that is hostile or degrading.
- We respect the right of others to challenge our views, provided that it is based on accurate evidence, facts or reasonable argument and that it is thoughtful and made in appropriate fora.
- We will always be careful to distinguish between our personal views and those of SPTI or any other person, group of people or organisation with which we may be associated.
- We will consider the legal implications of our actions. We recognise that there may be consequences if we act in breach of the law and will only involve others with their express consent.
- We will reflect upon and apply these principles in our teaching, research, study, and debate. We will be proactive in protecting academic freedom for ourselves and for others and use it responsibly for the promotion of knowledge and understanding.

Any staff member who believes that they do not enjoy the academic freedom that SPTI endorses through this policy should raise their concerns with the Head of Training, either in person or by email.

6. Academic Freedom and Prevent

The Prevent Policy is not intended to infringe on the academic freedom given to staff and students under this policy. The Prevent duty should not prevent the academic and balanced discussion of controversial issues such as religion, politics, or current affairs. However, staff are expected to ensure their academic content, course delivery, and behaviour:

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- a) exemplify and promote the ‘fundamental British values’ of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs; and
- b) respect the rights of others in respect of protected characteristics (race/nationality, gender, sexuality, age, religion/belief, disability, pregnancy, and gender-reassignment), and comply with the responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010; and
- c) avoid promoting or giving a platform for furthering extremist ideologies or terrorism – i.e. calling the deaths of members of the British armed forces or vocal opposition to the above fundamental British values (including promotion of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or homophobia).