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<b>Responsible Person:</b> Principal	<b>New Review Date:</b> August 2028

## PURPOSE & COMMITMENT

ABDO College is committed to fostering an environment where open dialogue and the exchange of ideas are encouraged. As an academic institution, we uphold the principles of free speech and academic freedom, recognising their importance in promoting intellectual growth and critical thinking.

This commitment is grounded in legal obligations under the **Human Rights Act 1998**, the **Education (No.2) Act 1986**, and the **Education Reform Act 1988**, which protect the rights of individuals to express their views, including those that may be contentious or challenge prevailing perspectives.

However, these freedoms are not absolute. They must be exercised within the boundaries of the law, including the **Equality Act 2010**, the **Education Act 2011**, and the **Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015**, particularly the **PREVENT duty**, which requires institutions to take steps to prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism.

## POLICY SCOPE

This policy applies to all individuals and groups associated with ABDO College, including:

- College trustees and staff (including volunteers)
- All enrolled students (full-time, part-time, or at partner institutions)
- Student representatives, ambassadors, and societies
- External speakers and individuals using College facilities or digital platforms

"College premises" refers to any physical or digital space managed or used by the College, including student-run areas and IT systems.

This policy covers all forms of expression, including but not limited to: public speaking, written materials, digital content, meetings, protests, and social media activity.

## PRINCIPLES OF FREE EXPRESSION

ABDO College will take all reasonable steps to safeguard lawful freedom of expression. The College will not deny a platform solely because a viewpoint is controversial or unpopular, provided it does not breach legal or ethical standards.

Events or expressions may be restricted if they:

- Violate the law
- Promote violence, hatred, or harassment
- Encourage terrorism or extremist ideologies
- Incite public disorder
- Contravene equality legislation
- Endorse illegal organisations

## HOSTING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

“Activities” include talks, debates, demonstrations, and digital communications via College platforms.

To ensure safety and compliance, any event that:

- is expected to draw a large audience, or
- may involve sensitive or controversial topics

must receive prior written approval from the Head of Operations. Requests should be submitted in advance and include:

- Event topic and objectives
- Names of speakers or organisers
- Format and structure
- Date, time, and location
- Seating or access arrangements (if applicable)

The Head of Operations will respond within 10 working days. Approval may be granted with conditions (e.g., security, audience limits, or format changes). Events will not be denied solely due to controversial content, but may be refused if they pose risks such as:

- Criminal behaviour
- Hate speech or unlawful expression
- Radicalisation or extremist promotion
- Threats to safety, property, or the College’s reputation

Events that disrupt normal College operations or require significant additional resources may also be declined.

Guest speakers must follow the **College Guest Speaker Policy**, including all necessary checks.

## APPEALS PROCESS

1. If an event request is denied, the organiser may appeal in writing to the Principal. Appeals must clearly state the reasons for contesting the decision.
2. A written response will be provided within 10 working days. The decision of the Principal is final and may include revised conditions.



## EVENT MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY

All organisers must agree in writing to comply with College policies and procedures. This includes:

- Ensuring safety and security
- Maintaining respectful conduct
- Providing appropriate event management (e.g., stewards, chairs)
- Implementing access controls

If there is a risk of disruption, the College may involve law enforcement.

Organisers are responsible for all event-related costs and ensuring legal and policy compliance, whether the event is in-person or online.

A **Health & Safety Risk Assessment** must be completed and approved by the **Health and Safety Lead** before the event.

## BREACHES OF POLICY

Consequences for violating this policy include:

- Removal from governance roles
- Disciplinary action for staff or students
- Notification of partner institutions
- Cooperation with law enforcement in cases of illegal activity

## POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every three years. The Principal will report on its effectiveness and recommend updates as needed. Any revisions will be submitted to the **Teaching and Learning Committee** for approval.