

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM & FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION (SCAFFE)

As approved at the 20th May 2026 SCAFFE Committee Meeting.

1. Section 9 of the University of Kent Code of Practice on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech states that:

“An annual report will be made to Council by the Joint Standing Committee on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech on all decisions made under this Code of Practice, to comment on the implementation of its provisions, and to recommend any amendments or additions for consideration by Council. The annual report will be published. “
2. This is the first such annual report, and the only such report likely to be made, as the merger of the University of Kent with the University of Greenwich will take effect on 1 August 2026, and new governance structures will be established.
3. No formal decisions have been made under the Code since it was adopted.
4. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 requires the University to (1) take the steps that, having particular regard to the importance of freedom of speech, are reasonably practicable to secure freedom of speech, including academic freedom, within the law, for staff, students and visiting speakers (2) publish a Code of Practice setting out the University's approach to freedom of speech and (3) promote the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom.
5. The University has met its statutory obligation to publish a Code.
6. Over the course of the year, the Committee has not been made aware of any significant instances of academic freedom or freedom of speech being compromised. Where potential conflicts with other University policies or procedures have arisen, the Joint Chairs of the Committee and/or Committee members have participated in work to resolve them. That has included: development of the University social media policy; development of the University Academic Career Map; and the work led by the then Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) to review policies and procedures relating to equality and diversity.
7. There has been some progress with relevant policies and procedures. That includes:
 - Academic freedom being embedded and explained in the mandatory staff EDI training
 - Academic freedom has been highlighted in the optional student Expect Respect module

- Academic freedom has been embedded into Promotions Panel training as part of the EDI element
 - Academic freedom considerations are included within the Equality Impact Assessment template to ensure there are no negative implications for academic freedom
 - Academic freedom has been embedded into the 2025-2030 EDI Strategy
 - Development of an academic freedom staff training module is in progress.
8. However, more should be done to meet the statutory obligation to promote the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom, and to meet the commitments which the University has made in section 5 of the [Code](#). Pressures on resources and the movement or departures of key staff have meant that there has not been an effective means to ensure the delivery or monitoring of those commitments.
9. The Committee has secured a modest budget to arrange a university event on freedom of speech, led by a distinguished external speaker, in October 2026. We hope that this event will provide a platform for further activity to raise awareness and to promote academic freedom and freedom of speech; and that it could become the first in a series of lectures or events.
10. The Committee has not been involved in discussions about future governance, and we are not aware of how the responsibilities of the Committee will be carried forward. We hope that the leadership of the new university group will regard freedom of speech and academic freedom as fundamental to the new organisation, with sufficient weight and prominence within the new governance.