WTC CODE OF PRACTICE: ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH

2026-27

WTC Code of Practice: Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech	
Purpose	To give clear details about the principles, responsibilities, and processes established at WTC for the protection of academic freedom and freedom of speech.
Enquiries	Enquiries about the Code of Practice on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech should be directed to the Principal at principal@wtctheology.org.uk.
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Approved by	Executive Team
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Staff member responsible for update	Dean of Studies
Policy / procedure relevant to	External - WTC website; MyWTC

Code of Practice:
Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

1. Introduction

1.1. WTC believes in the vital importance of intellectual and creative freedom as a means for reflecting on issues of faith and faith-led responsibilities, as well as something intended to be experienced as an integral component of humanity's creation in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28). These values underpin the priority WTC gives to affirming and protecting the academic freedom and freedom of expression for all of its members. As an academic Higher Education Institution (HEI), WTC is committed to pursuing this priority in accordance with the legal responsibilities published in Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986,[1] and further outlined in the Public Interest Governing Principles published by the Office for Students.[2]

1.2. As stated in the Education (No. 2) Act, HEIs should "take such steps as are reasonably practicable" to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for all members of the institution, including (but not limited to) Trustees, Faculty, students, employees, and visiting speakers. Incorporated within this protection is the academic freedom for all academic staff of WTC to "question and test received wisdom" and to "put forward new ideas and controversial or popular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at the HEI."

1.3. This Code of Practice details the specific rights and responsibilities that constitute the proper maintenance and protection of academic freedom and freedom of speech and expression, and outlines the processes in place at WTC to ensure these rights and responsibilities in accordance with WTC's values.

1.4. These rights and responsibilities apply to WTC as an institution as well as its individual members, including:

- WTC's Board of Trustees;
- all members of WTC staff, Faculty, and/or those working on behalf of WTC;
- all duly enrolled students of the college;
- any societies, clubs or associations which operate in the name of WTC, whether online or on WTC premises, including the central office, WTC Hubs and at WTC Residentials;
- all persons invited to speak, or otherwise take part in events organised by and/or on behalf of WTC.

[1] This is available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/61/contents.
[2] Office for Students, Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England (24th November 2022) p195.

2. Freedom of Speech and Expression

2.1. WTC will 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 of Practice's rights and responsibilities apply.

2.2. Correspondingly, everyone to whom this Code of Practice applies is responsible for upholding the requirements, standards, and expectations that are contained within it.

2.3. WTC values academic freedom and encourages free debate and enquiry, as well as expression of, and interaction with, a wide range of views (including political, theological, academic), even those which are unpopular, controversial, or provocative. WTC will not suppress freedom of thought and expression. However, the college has a duty to ensure, wherever practical, that such thoughts and expressions do not constitute incitement to riot, insurrection, racial hatred, religious hatred, sexual harassment or other activities (beyond the right of peaceful protest) which are likely to cause a breach of the peace or public disorder, or otherwise to be unlawful. In particular, WTC takes seriously its duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism (as outlined in WTC's Prevent Policy). We also have a duty to prevent the disclosure of information received in confidence.

2.4. WTC therefore requires all of its members (see 1.4 above) to respect WTC's vision and values, to be sensitive to the diversity of WTC's community, and to show respect to all sections of that community.

2.5. WTC will take reasonable practicable steps (including, where appropriate and following proper investigation) to ensure that the obligations of this Code are complied with.

3. Events and Teaching

3.1. WTC has no campus. Teaching is delivered in-person during two intensive teaching weeks per year at Nottingham University and, for a further twenty weeks a year, at thirteen local learning communities (Hubs) across the UK. Hubs are partnerships between WTC and visionary local churches/Christian organisations who share WTC's desire to see the church equipped through the teaching of rigorous, academic theology. Hub partners provide their premises for WTC students to meet together for Hub evenings.

3.2. WTC takes responsibility for maintaining the rights and responsibilities laid out in this Code of Practice in all premises (including online) used for WTC purposes for the duration of WTC work, teaching, and events. These include, but are not limited to, the WTC central office, Residential premises, Hubs, venues used for teaching and/or promotional events, and online seminars and open events.

3.3. WTC will exercise the right to regulate and, if necessary, to impose conditions or restrictions upon activities such as teaching, meetings, and demonstrations held or proposed to be held at WTC-hosted events (as outlined in 3.2 above), while at the same time supporting the right of free speech and diverse opinions. Any such activities must comply with this Code of Practice.

3.4. This Code of Practice applies to visiting teachers and speakers just as it does to all members of WTC. WTC's Faculty is substantially comprised of visiting teaching staff, and external speakers are a regular feature of local Hub delivery. While the latter are not formally part of WTC's validated teaching delivery, they contribute to a key extra-curricular element of WTC Hub communities. In addition, there may be other events and occasions when external teachers/speakers are invited to visit, teach, or otherwise represent WTC. In all such cases, WTC will ensure there is no risk to upholding our Prevent Policy. If there is any doubt as to the proposed content, WTC will discuss the proposed teaching/content with the Principal who will, in consultation with senior colleagues, review the proposed activity, highlight any issues which have the potential to undermine this Code of Practice, and decide whether risks are acceptable, can be mitigated in support of freedom of speech, or cannot go ahead. Where permission is not granted, the rationale for the decision will be noted and recorded centrally by the Principal. Where a discussion is required concerning the content of proposed teaching/content, no advertising will be undertaken until permission for the teaching has been granted.

3.5. WTC will not unreasonably refuse to allow activities to be held on premises it is using, including at Hub and Residential venues during WTC events, subject to the activity aligning with and/or serving WTC's vision and values. The expression of controversial views which do not breach the law does not constitute reasonable grounds for withholding permission for an activity. Reasonable grounds for refusal would include, but are not limited to, the fact that the event is likely to:

- incite those attending to commit a criminal act;
- lead to the unlawful expression of views;
- be in direct support of an organisation whose aims and objectives are illegal;
- give rise to a breach of the peace; or
- run counter to WTC's duty to have regard to its Prevent Duty.

3.6. In determining whether the holding of an activity on WTC premises might reasonably be refused, consideration will be given to:

- the agreement of the activity with WTC's vision and values;
- the extent to which consideration has been given to the mitigation of risks;

- the safety of persons attending the event and persons on college premises who might foreseeably be put at risk;
- the possibility that persons might be drawn into terrorism;
- the security of the premises; and
- the good name and reputation of WTC.

4. Research

4.1. Research undertaken by the WTC Academic Team, Faculty, and student body generally relates to the fields of Biblical Studies, Christian Theology, Church History, Mission and Ethics. If teaching staff or students propose to undertake research in other areas, especially where these might be regarded as sensitive or related to extremism they should discuss this in advance with the Principal. The Principal will review the proposed research with at least one other member of the Senior Academic Team, highlight any issues which have the potential to incur risks requiring due diligence and decide whether risks are acceptable or can be mitigated (for example data storage will need to meet the standards for data security and access to such data restricted). Where permission is not granted, the rationale for the decision will be noted and recorded centrally by the Principal.

5. Mitigating Risks

5.1. WTC will not automatically ask for events to be cancelled where seriously contentious or controversial speakers or subjects are involved. However, all ways to mitigate against associated risks will be considered, including:

- appropriate discussion with colleagues, including the Principal and members of the Senior Academic Team, and the Trustees if appropriate;
- due reference to WTC's vision and values in relation to the spirit of the debate;
- careful planning of the event;
- the presence of speakers representing differing positions;
- obtaining certain assurances from external speakers;
- consideration given to health and safety and security concerns;
- the active and well-briefed engagement of a chair of proceedings;
- involving members of WTC's Faculty in the event.

5.2. WTC will only permit the use of its premises (as outlined in 3.2 above) by organisers of activities, whether internal or external (for example, an external bookseller), who undertake to comply with all lawful instructions issued by WTC in relation to the location, arrangements and conduct of such events, including adequate stewarding and moderating, chairing, monitoring, and the provision of adequate control over entry.

5.3. In cases in which it is reasonable to assume that there is a possibility of disruption at an event, WTC will conduct a risk assessment and consult with

appropriate external agencies about security arrangements. In such circumstances, a named Principal Organiser will be identified (this will often, but not necessarily always, be WTC's Director of Events and Partnerships), who is responsible for the booking and control arrangements of the event, and who will be held responsible for taking all reasonable measures to maintain public order and, as far as possible, securing compliance with this Code of Practice.

6. Authority

6.1. The ultimate authority for the interpretation and implementation of this Code of Practice is the Chair of the Board of Trustees, in discussion with the WTC Principal. The day-to-day implementation of the Policy shall be the responsibility of the Senior Executive Team (SET), assisted by the Senior Academic Team and Directors Group.

6.2. The SET may grant or withhold permission for the use of WTC premises (as outlined in 3.2 above) for proposed activities. Permission may be withheld only on the grounds indicated in sections 3-5 above, or if the organiser cannot or will not ensure compliance with any conditions set by the SET.

6.3. It shall be open to the SET to withdraw permission for an activity if, having originally granted permission, they judge that the activity will not in fact conform to this Code of Practice.

7. Prevent Policy

7.1. If anyone has concerns about the possibility of those connected with WTC being drawn into terrorist activity or about people getting close to the WTC community who could influence any within or associated with WTC to take an unhealthy interest in terrorist activity, they should contact the Principal, who will decide whether to seek specialist advice on the matter.

7.2. For more information, see the WTC Prevent Policy.