

BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

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Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) Statement pertaining to Academic Freedom

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Section 202 (2) (a) of the Education Reform Act 1988* makes explicit the obligation on Universities:

“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...”

- 1.2. Academic Freedom can be understood in (at least) three ways[†]:

- 1.2.1. Individual scholars have freedom to determine how they do their work – i.e. free from direction, especially how they teach and conduct their research.
- 1.2.2. Institutional claims to Academic Freedom can be made by universities and higher education institutions.
- 1.2.3. Individual academics have the freedom to participate in organisational governance of the universities and higher education institutions that employ them.

- 1.3. Together, these interpretations provide the basis for a consideration of Academic Freedom insofar as it affects BGU.

2. Substantive Elements of Academic Freedom

- 2.1. For BGU there are some substantive contextual themes that frame the operational interpretation of Academic Freedom:

- 2.1.1. The university is a place where free debate and learning are encouraged and nurtured.
- 2.1.2. Notwithstanding the commitment to Academic Freedom, there are quality management arrangements within which learning and teaching, research and innovation activities are conducted.

* HMSO (1988) *The Education Reform Act*, Chapter 40. London: HMSO, section 202 (2) (a). Available [here](#) and [here](#).

† Barendt, E.& Bentley, D. [summarised by Hlavkova, M.] (2010) Academic Freedom and the Law. International Law Discussion Group. Chatham House. Available [here](#).



2.1.3. For the purposes of accreditation and endorsement from professional bodies and/or subject associations, there are certain requirements that need to be met.

2.1.4. Work conducted on behalf of the university should fit within the parameters of institutional strategic priorities. If required, clarification about appropriateness should include the opportunity for members of staff to justify corporate relevance.

3. Operational Interpretation of Academic Freedom

3.1. The principle of Academic Freedom is enshrined in BGU's Articles of Governance, (section 21.2): operationally, this pertains to two substantive elements of AF – synthesised from Karran & Mallinson (2017: 7)[‡].

3.1.1. Freedom to teach – i.e. the freedom to determine:

- 3.1.1.1. what shall be taught (course content);
- 3.1.1.2. how it shall be taught (pedagogy);
- 3.1.1.3. who shall teach (via transparent selection procedures);
- 3.1.1.4. who shall be taught (the right to determine and enforce entry standards);
- 3.1.1.5. how students' progress shall be evaluated (assessment methods);
- 3.1.1.6. whether students shall progress (via marking criteria and grade determination).

3.1.2. Freedom to undertake research – i.e. the freedom to determine:

- 3.1.2.1. what shall be researched;
- 3.1.2.2. the method(s) of research;
- 3.1.2.3. the purpose(s) of research (and thereby refuse to undertake research considered unethical);
- 3.1.2.4. the avenues and modes (conference presentations, journal articles) of disseminating research findings to one's peers, and the wider world.

3.2. For BGU there is a related imperative linked to the delivery of knowledge exchange / innovation / enterprise – i.e. the freedom to determine:

[‡] Karran, T. & Mallinson, L. (2017) *Academic Freedom in the U.K.: Legal and Normative Protection in a Comparative Context*. London: University and College Union. Available [here](#).



- 3.2.1. with which external agents /agencies work shall be conducted;
- 3.2.2. the nature and method(s) of that engagement;
- 3.2.3. whether to decline and / or withdraw from work that is considered ethically / culturally problematic.