Westminster Higher Education Forum policy conference:
Freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education - practice, regulation and next steps
Timing: Morning, Tuesday, 19th January 2027
*****Taking Place Online*****

WESTMINSTER HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM

Draft agenda subject to change

8.30 Registration

9.00 **Chair's opening remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian

9.05 **Sector priorities for protecting freedom of speech and academic freedom**
Megan Haskins, Policy Adviser, Universities UK
Questions and comments from the floor

9.30 **Implementation of freedom of speech duties - considerations for governance, compliance and institutional practice**
early experience of the OfS free speech complaints scheme alongside internal complaints processes | preparing for conditions E11 and E12 and future OfS requirements | implications for providers, staff, visiting speakers and applicants for academic posts | access to and signposting of the complaints scheme | governance arrangements, codes of practice and institutional policies | evidencing compliance, proportionality and reasonably practicable decision-making | implications of the University of Sussex judgment for regulatory and institutional decisions | managing events, visiting speakers, protest and security considerations | freedom of speech duties alongside equality, harassment, safeguarding and Prevent responsibilities
Smita Jamdar, Partner and Head, Education, Shakespeare Martineau
Senior representative, university
Senior representative, students
Senior commentator
Questions and comments from the floor

10.25 **Student complaints and freedom of speech - lessons from OIA cases**
Charlotte Corrish, Head, Public Policy, Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
Questions and comments from the floor

10.50 **Chair's closing remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian

10.55 Break

11.05 **Chair's opening remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian

11.10 **Institutional culture and academic freedom in teaching, research and employment**
recruitment, promotion and career progression | EDI statements, expression and academic freedom | staff conduct, disciplinary and grievance procedures | protected beliefs and lawful but controversial expression | academic freedom in teaching and supervision | research independence, publication and institutional reputation | international collaboration, foreign interference and research security | external pressure, transnational repression and institutional autonomy
Senior representative, legal
Senior representative, university
Senior representative, union
Senior commentator
Questions and comments from the floor

11.55 **Developing the new national community cohesion framework and supporting inclusive campus culture**
Senior commentator

12.05 **Supporting a culture of free speech and open debate on campus**
student perspectives on freedom of expression and academic freedom | students' unions, representative bodies and implications of planned changes to their statutory duties | protest, activism and disruption on campus | supporting open debate and avoiding unnecessary restriction of lawful speech, while acting on unlawful conduct | online expression, social media and university responsibility | confidence in institutional processes and concerns around self-censorship | community cohesion, belonging and respectful disagreement | institutional culture, complaints procedures and public confidence in higher education
Senior representative, students
Senior representative, university
Senior commentator

12.20 Questions and comments from the floor

12.45 **Policy priorities for freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education moving forward**
Johanna Liddle, Senior Policy Lead, Freedom of Speech, Office for Students
Questions and comments from the floor

13.10 **Chair's and Westminster Higher Education Forum closing remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
Sean Cudmore, Westminster Higher Education Forum