Westminster Higher Education Forum policy conference:
Next steps for freedom of speech in higher education institutions in England
Timing: Morning, Monday, 23rd March 2026
*****Taking place online*****

Draft agenda, subject to change

WESTMINSTER HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM

8.30 Registration

9.00 **Chair's opening remarks**
Baroness Deech DBE KC

9.05 **Enforcement of the *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023* in England and priorities for regulation moving forward**
Arif Ahmed, Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom, Office for Students
Questions and comments from the floor

9.30 **Implementing new statutory duties and institutional approaches to promoting academic freedom and free speech**
designing and updating institutional codes of practice | developing complaints and investigation procedures | supporting staff and students in understanding rights and responsibilities | practical compliance with the OfS and OIA schemes | impact of new measures on university finances and legal exposure | embedding free speech principles across teaching and training | addressing concerns related to recruitment and promotion practices
Professor Naomi Waltham-Smith, Professor of Music, University of Oxford; and former Chair, Academic Freedom Review Committee, University of Warwick
Sam Rose, Principal Associate, Mills and Reeve
Professor Eric Neumayer, Deputy President and Vice Chancellor, London School of Economics and Political Science
Anam Eijaz Choudhary, President, UCL Students' Union
Questions and comments from the floor

10.25 **Early lessons from student complaints cases - oversight and enforcement**
Senior speaker confirmed from the **Office of the Independent Adjudicator**
Questions and comments from the floor

10.50 **Chair's closing remarks**
Baroness Deech DBE KC

10.55 Break

11.05 **Chair's opening remarks**
Lord Gold

11.15 **Developing internal policies and governance for strengthened compliance**
David Bass, Director, Inclusion and Governance, Advance HE

11.25 **Practical steps for the enforcement of free speech - managing resources, legal risk and options for future legislation**
balancing lawful free speech with safeguarding, harassment and discrimination | resourcing and legal costs | staff training and internal escalation routes | governance of controversial topics, speakers and events | coordinating OfS and OIA remits | transparency, overseas funding and foreign influence
Gary Attle, Solicitor and Consultant, Birketts
Professor Dennis Hayes, Director, Academics For Academic Freedom
Natalie Baker, President, Open University Students' Association
Senior representative, university

11.40 Questions and comments from the floor

12.05 **International perspectives on promoting free speech and academic freedom**
Senior representative, international university

12.15 **Developing a culture of free speech and open debate on campus**
assessing emerging trends in campus culture, drivers of expression and student views on free speech | evaluating effectiveness of policies and complaint handling | addressing concerns surrounding cultural conflict | impact of academic freedom protection on institutional reputation | role of student unions in promoting free speech | strategies for supporting open debate whilst safeguarding students from harassment
Professor Rajani Naidoo, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Culture) and Professor of Higher Education and Social Change, University of Exeter; Visiting Professor and UNESCO Chair, University of Bath; and Chair of the British Council Education Advisory Group
Professor Abhishek Saha, Professor of Mathematics, Queen Mary University of London; Founder Member, London Universities' Council for Academic Freedom; and Advisory Board Member, Committee for Academic Freedom
Ash Scholz, President, Edinburgh University Students' Association

12.30 Questions and comments from the floor

12.55 **Chair's and Westminster Higher Education Forum closing remarks**
Lord Gold
Sean Cudmore, Westminster Higher Education Forum