SPARSHOLT COLLEGE GROUP

SPARSHOLT CAMPUS

ANDOVER CAMPUS

UNIVERSITY CENTRE SPARSHOLT

Freedom of Speech Code of Practice for Further Education

Our Mission

Raising Aspirations, Unlocking Potential, Advancing Futures

Our Values

Excellence, Passion, Teamwork, Integrity, Innovation,

Sustainability, Valuing Others and Supportiveness

Sparsholt College Group

The Sparsholt College Group (the College Group) includes Sparsholt College, Andover College, University Centre Sparsholt, Sparsholt College Services, Westley Enterprises and Andover Town Football Club. College Group policies apply to each part of the group unless specified otherwise.

The Freedom of Speech Code of Practice for Further Education was approved by the Board of Governors in March 2026. A separate Freedom of Speech Code of Practice is in place for Higher Education.

Originator:	Chief Operating Officer
Located:	College website
	College Group intranet
Due for review:	March 2029

FREEDOM OF SPEECH CODE OF PRACTICE FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

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FREEDOM OF SPEECH CODE OF PRACTICE
FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

1. Introduction

1.1. Freedom of speech and lawful expression are fundamental to the mission of Further Education. They enable learners to develop critical thinking, encourage open debate, and support the exchange of ideas in a respectful and inclusive learning environment.

1.2. Sparsholt College Group (the College) is committed to securing **freedom of speech and expression within the law** for students, staff, governors, visiting speakers and all others engaging in College activities. This commitment underpins the College's educational purpose and supports democratic values, intellectual challenge and personal development.

1.3. This FE Code of Practice sets out how the College fulfils its legal duties to protect freedom of speech while also meeting its wider responsibilities relating to equality, safeguarding, health and safety, and the prevention of unlawful activity.

1.4. The Code should be read alongside other College policies, including (but not limited to) the HE Freedom of Speech Code of Practice, the FE Student Code of Conduct, Staff Disciplinary Policy, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy, Safeguarding Policy (incorporating Prevent), and Health and Safety Policy.

2. Legal Framework

2.1. This Code is informed by, and complies with, the following legislation and statutory duties:

- Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986
- The Human Rights Act 1998 and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Prevent Duty)
- Relevant common law and statutory duties applicable to Further Education corporations.

2.2. In complying with these duties, the college recognises that freedom of speech may include the expression of views that some may find controversial, challenging or offensive. Such views will not be restricted solely on that basis, provided they remain within the law.

3. Scope of the Code

3.1. This Code applies in relation to the College's Further Education activities to:

- All students enrolled on Further Education programmes

- All employees, including agency staff and volunteers
- Members of the Corporation and College committees
- Visiting speakers and external organisations
- Contractors, partners and hirers using College premises
- Student societies, clubs and associations

3.2. For students, this Code has the status of a behavioural regulation and forms part of the FE Student Code of Conduct.

3.3. A separate HE Freedom of Speech Code of Practice is in place for University Centre Sparsholt.

4. Definitions

4.1. **Freedom of Speech and Expression**
The right to express ideas, opinions and beliefs within the law, without undue interference.

4.2. **Academic Freedom in an FE Context**
The freedom of teaching staff, within the law, to explore, discuss and present subject-related ideas and viewpoints relevant to the curriculum, without fear of disciplinary action or disadvantage.

4.3. **Activity**
Any meeting, event, demonstration, debate, lecture or publication (including digital or online activity) that takes place on college premises or through college systems.

5. Principles

5.1. The College will take all **reasonably practicable steps** to secure freedom of speech and expression within the law.

5.2. The College will not deny the use of its premises or facilities on grounds connected with the lawful beliefs, views, policies or objectives of individuals or groups.

5.3. Freedom of speech carries responsibilities. All those exercising these rights must do so lawfully, respectfully and without inciting harm or disorder.

5.4. The College will balance its commitment to freedom of speech with its duties to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Maintain good order and safety on college premises
- Prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.

6. Lawful Limits on Freedom of Speech

6.1. Freedom of speech does not extend to:

- Incitement to violence or criminal acts

- Hate crime or unlawful harassment
- Terrorist propaganda or support for proscribed organisations
- Defamation
- Speech that would breach safeguarding or public order laws

6.2. Where speech is unlawful, the College will take appropriate action, which may include refusal or termination of an activity and referral to external authorities where required. The College will also address the matter under the FE Managing Learner Performance Policy.

7. Use of College Premises and Facilities

7.1. The College's premises and facilities are available for activities that align with this Code, subject to reasonable conditions necessary to ensure safety, legality and operational continuity.

7.2. Permission may be required in advance for activities where it is reasonably foreseeable that:

- Large numbers of people will attend
- The activity may generate significant controversy
- External speakers are involved

7.3. Requests must include sufficient information to allow the College to assess legal, safeguarding and operational risks.

8. Visiting and External Speakers

8.1. The College recognises the educational value of external speakers and will not refuse speakers solely because their views may be unpopular or controversial.

8.2. The College may impose reasonable conditions on events, including:

- Chairing arrangements
- Security measures
- Format or location of the activity

8.3. Events will only be refused where there is a demonstrable and lawful reason to do so or where the event interferes with the institution's ability to deliver its core purpose.

9. Conduct and Responsibilities

9.1. All participants in college activities must:

- Comply with lawful instructions issued by the College
- Act in a manner that does not prevent others from exercising their rights
- Refrain from intimidation, disruption or unlawful protest

9.2. Peaceful protest is lawful, but actions intended to prevent college business from

taking place are not.

10. Breaches and Sanctions

10.1. Breaches of this Code may result in action under:

- Student disciplinary procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Contractor or visitor exclusion arrangements

10.2. Where appropriate, the College will cooperate with the police or other statutory bodies.

10.3. Where an FE student considers that the college has breached its Freedom of Speech obligations, they may pursue the matter for consideration under the College's Complaints Policy.

10.4. Where an FE or Business Support member of staff consider that the College has breached its freedom of Speech obligations, they may pursue the matter for consideration under the College Grievance Policy & Procedures.

11. Governance, Monitoring and Review

11.1. The Board of Governors has oversight of this Code and will receive periodic reports on its operation.

11.2. The College will promote awareness of this Code among students and staff and ensure it is accessible.

11.3. This Code will be reviewed at intervals not exceeding three years, or earlier if legislative or regulatory changes are required.