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Introduction

- 1.1 Escape Studios is committed to freedom of expression, within the law, as a fundamental individual right within democratic society and a key principle underpinning enquiry and debate within higher education.
- 1.2 Freedom of expression includes the written and spoken word, gestures, actions and the display of images intended to convey meaning.
- 1.3 This policy draws upon:
 - The Education Act 1986 Section 43;
 - The Education Reform Act 1998;
 - Universities UK. Freedom of speech on campus: rights and responsibilities in UK universities;
 - Diana Beech Cracking the code: A practical guide for university free speech policies (HEPI occasional papers 109, 2017);
 - Office for Students. Prevent duty: Framework for monitoring in higher education in England 2018-19 onwards;
 - Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, 2023.

Principles of Freedom of Expression

2.1 Escape Studios supports the following salient principles of freedom of expression:

- (a) Everyone has the right to free expression within the law;
- (b) Higher education providers should always work to foster respectful and balanced debate and challenge, including on sensitive issues;
- (c) The student higher education experience may, by its very nature, include exposure to course material, discussions or speakers views which some students may find offensive or unacceptable. Such exposure is part of the purposeful challenge of the higher education curriculum;
- (d) Freedom of expression must not, however, be abused to promote hatred or bigotry;
- (e) Any decision about whether or not to hold events and host speakers should seek to promote and protect the right to freedom of expression;
- (f) Peaceful protest is a democratic right and a protected form of expression; however, protest should not be allowed to shut down debate or infringe the rights of others.

2.2 The adoption and application of these principles enables Escape Studios to challenge discrimination and intolerance and foster constructive and engaged student, academic and practitioner communities.

Restriction of Freedom of Expression

3.1 Escape Studios appreciates that there are conditions when freedom of expression must be limited by law: these include the prevention of crime, safeguarding national security, protecting public safety and preventing unlawful discrimination and harassment.

3.2 Such limitations must be lawful, reasonable and proportionate. This places a duty on Escape Studios to mitigate the potential for discrimination or disorder through taking reasonable, practical steps for events such as ensuring that:

- alternative points of view are presented at speaking events;
- events are conducted by an experienced chairperson;
- additional security is provided to ensure order is maintained;
- events are ticket only.

- 3.3 Where Escape Studios has reason to believe that the safety or security of its students, staff or visitors is at risk or there are other serious risks to public order it may be necessary to postpone or cancel an event.

Compliance

- 4.1 To ensure compliance with the policy Escape Studios has produced the following:
- the Due Diligence and Approval of External Speakers Procedure and Form;
 - the responsibilities of organisers and College officers in the organisation and holding of events;
 - a code of behaviour for those attending events;
 - a disciplinary process where the code of conduct is breached.

Allied Policies

- 5.1 This policy is aligned to the following Policies:
- Prevent Duty Policy;
 - Academic Freedom Policy;
 - Academic Freedom Infringements Referral Policy and Procedure.

Review

- 6.1 This policy and its associated procedures and guidance shall be reviewed at least annually and amendments approved in time for publication at the start of the academic year. The policy may be amended and approved more frequently where changes are required, for example to ensure that it is up to date with legislation.

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