

John Wheatley College

Academic Freedom

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document seeks to provide a statement of John Wheatley College's approach to Academic Freedom.
- 1.2 It seeks to respond to the provisions of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 which requires 'fundable bodies' to have 'regard to the desirability of ensuring academic freedom' (Section 26 of the Act).

2. Academic Freedom at John Wheatley College

- 2.1 John Wheatley College upholds the notion of 'academic freedom' for its teaching staff and for those who manage its teaching services.
- 2.2 It accepts that staff have the right to hold unconventional and controversial views about the academic field within which they teach.
- 2.3 The College's formal curriculum provision is primarily determined by external bodies (such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority). As a consequence it is necessary that its staff teach students within these recognised curriculum structures to ensure that they meet the standards required for externally validated certification.
- 2.4 The College acknowledges that staff may disagree with aspects of the externally prescribed curriculum, however, their professional conduct requires them to provide students with learning experiences which comply in all respects with standards established by external bodies.
- 2.5 Within this requirement it is, of course, acceptable that staff reflect healthy debate around aspects of the curriculum. This may involve staff challenging accepted norms and knowledge bases within a classroom situation or other learning environment. However, at all times, it is expected that a 'balanced' argument will be presented and that students are left with a clear understanding of what is a lecturer's personal opinion and what is required by external bodies who may certificate training or learning. It shall also be the responsibility of staff to ensure that their exposition of any views and opinions of their own should also indicate, for the unambiguous information of learners, where the weight of the argument or generally accepted consensus lies in any presentation of such a 'balanced' case.
- 2.6 John Wheatley College does not expect to be engaged in research activities. In these circumstances, the concept of academic freedom is unlikely to apply in these circumstances to its staff.
- 2.7 The concept of Academic Freedom shall not entitle College staff to breach the law. If staff abuse their rights in this manner they shall be dealt with by the Courts. If appropriate they shall also face College disciplinary proceedings. Reliance on a defence which is founded on Academic Freedom shall, in such circumstances, be unacceptable.

- 2.8 In addition, staff shall not use the concept of 'academic freedom' to bring the name of the College into disrepute. Similarly they shall not use this right to make unfounded allegations about the College's strategic and operational management. The College already has in place Public Interest Disclosure Policies which enable staff (and others) to raise matters of impropriety, misconduct and concern. Any malicious, unfounded and vexatious allegations will be dealt with within the Board of Management's existing policy framework. Potentially defamatory statements about members of the College's Board of Management and about its senior staff may also be challenged in the Civil Courts by aggrieved individuals.

IG/SV
John Wheatley College
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