

The Minster Centre Policy on Academic Freedom and Values and Free Speech

As a specialist alternative training provider offering degree courses in psychotherapy and counselling validated by Middlesex University, The Minster Centre is compliant with UK legislation with respect to free speech as outlined in Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986. This requires the Centre to take ‘such steps as are reasonably practical to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured on university premises for members, students and employees of the university and for visiting speakers.’

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 also imposes a duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. To comply with the Prevent Duty for Higher Education Institutions, the Centre needs to balance its legal duties in terms of both ensuring freedom of speech and academic freedom and protecting student and staff welfare.

We are guided by [Middlesex University’s Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#) (May 2016) which sets out its policy on academic freedom.

Context

The Minster Centre is a registered charity and Company Limited by Guarantee that provides psychotherapy and counselling training and services. It operates from a single building in Queens Park, north-west London. Courses offered range from 10 week Counselling Skills courses to MA programmes validated by Middlesex University. All courses are part-time and students live at home. All students are 18+ and the vast majority are 30+. All training is delivered on the premises. The students have not so far chosen to set up a Students Union or student societies and hence there are no events organised separately by these bodies and no associated website or social media presence. The Centre does organise short Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses and events for psychotherapists and counsellors – these are evening talks, usually with an external speaker, or one or two day courses at weekends. The Centre also hires therapy rooms to private therapists when not in use by the Minster Centre and training rooms can be hired for training, talks, and meetings by individuals and organisations.

Academic Freedom and Free Speech

The Centre is committed to supporting its academic staff and students’ in their freedom of inquiry and communication. We recognise that we are working in a field which is developing and highly active and in which new ideas frequently emerge. We therefore encourage individuals to explore and be confident in their own opinions, challenge received wisdom, develop and advance new ideas and be able to express unpopular or controversial opinions.

We expect our staff and students to communicate with each other in constructive and courteous ways, and to be respectful of everyone's views and rights to contribute to discussions and academic debates. While some opinions may cause offence to some people, we do not believe that this is grounds for those views not to be expressed. However, we do expect staff and students to express themselves or challenge others sensitively and without hostility. The Centre accepts the responsibility this freedom implies with regard to competence and concern for the best interests of clients, research participants, students, colleagues and society.

Transparency of the Centre's governance is facilitated through staff and student participation on relevant boards and committees, where they are encouraged to express their views. The QAA's Educational Review, minutes of Board of Studies meetings, results of surveys and External Examiner reports are all accessible on Moodle. We also believe that academic staff have the right to constructively criticise the Centre, or other training organisations, without fear of reprisals or job losses.

While encouraging freedom of speech, we do not practise, condone, facilitate or collude with any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, colour, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition or status.

Furthermore, academic staff should also never make statements that oppose the Minster Centre's *General Code of Ethics* or *Code of Practice for Trainers*, which they have contractually agreed to abide by.

Risk Management

The Centre has carried out a Prevent risk assessment and prepared an action plan. Policies and procedures covering safeguarding, acceptable use of IT and computer facilities, and room hire are used to manage risk and meet our Prevent duties.