6.1.4 Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

1.0 Rationale

Acknowledge Education (AE) is committed to upholding the fundamental tenets of academic freedom and intellectual exploration. As an educational institution, we believe that fostering a culture of free thought, inquiry, and expression is essential for the holistic development of our academic community.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all employees, independent contractors, and students of AE.

3.0 Regulatory Context

3.1 Higher Education Standards Framework (2021)

Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom are protected by legislation, including the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) 2021 and the Higher Education Support Act 2003.

According to the HESF, the governing body is required to take steps to ensure that academic freedom is upheld and protected (6.1.4). Likewise, the governing body must ensure that freedom of speech is upheld and protected (6.1.4).

4.0 Policy

At Acknowledge Education (AE), we recognise that the strength of our academic community lies in its diversity. The multiplicity of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within our institution enriches our collective knowledge and fosters a dynamic learning environment. We firmly believe that every individual has the right to express their opinions and views, even when they diverge from the majority or challenge prevailing thoughts. Freedom of speech is broadly defined as the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Academic Freedom is defined as the right to undertake certain academic, intellectual and expressive activities without fear of undue hindrance or reprisal.

4.1 Staff and Student Entitlements

Both staff and students are entitled to:

4.1.1 Express opinions about Acknowledge Education's operations and policies.

4.1.2 Pursue free intellectual inquiry in general.

4.1.3 Engage in, scrutinize, and disseminate research in the spirit of genuine academic endeavor.

4.1.4 Collaborate to cultivate an academic culture, both within and beyond the classroom, that encourages rigorous discussion of ideas, theories, and experiences.

4.1.5 Freely share and transmit knowledge within Acknowledge Education and to the wider academic and non-academic communities, in alignment with legal standards and the policies and procedures of Acknowledge Education.

4.2 AE pledges to:

4.2.1 Respect and protect the rights of all members of its community to explore and express their ideas, beliefs, and information.

4.2.2 Encourage an environment where diverse perspectives are welcomed and debated respectfully.

4.2.3 Refrain from imposing or endorsing any form of censorship that restricts the intellectual rights of individuals unless it violates established laws or poses direct harm to individuals or the institution.

4.3 Limitations to Intellectual Freedom

While AE champions the principles of intellectual freedom, there are specific limits, including but not limited to:

4.3.1 Speech or actions that incite violence or harm towards individuals or groups.

4.3.2 Activities that violate privacy rights, copyright laws, or other legal constraints.

4.3.3 Actions that compromise the security or reputation of the institution.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 All Staff

- Upholding and exemplifying the principles of intellectual freedom in their academic and professional pursuits.
- Ensuring students understand and appreciate the value of intellectual freedom.
- Reporting any concerns or violations of this policy to the administration.

5.2 Students

- Engage in free thought and expression while respecting the rights and opinions of others.
- Seek guidance when unsure about the boundaries of intellectual freedom.
- Report any infringements on their intellectual rights to appropriate authorities within AE.

6.0 Definitions

Term	Definition
Academic Freedom	The Higher Education Support Act 2003 defines academic freedom to mean the following: (a) the freedom of academic staff to teach, discuss, and research and to disseminate and publish the results of their research; (b) the freedom of academic staff and students to engage in intellectual inquiry, to express their opinions and beliefs, and to contribute to public debate, in relation to their subjects of study and research; (c) the freedom of academic staff and students to express their opinions in relation to the higher education provider in which they work or are enrolled; (d) the freedom of academic staff to participate in professional or representative academic bodies; (e) the freedom of students to participate in student societies and associations; (f) the autonomy of the higher education provider in relation to the choice of academic courses and offerings, the ways in which they are taught and the choices of research activities and the ways in which they are conducted.
Censorship	The suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc. deemed obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security.
Intellectual Rights	The entitlement to claim ownership of an original idea, innovation, or creation and to control its use.
Retaliation	The act of returning harm or like for like, especially in revenge.

7.0 Related Documents

Document Name
Code of Conduct Intellectual Property

8.0 Document Information

Document Name	Freedom of Intellectual Inquiry
Document Number	6.1.4
Purpose	The purpose of this policy is to articulate and affirm Acknowledge Education's commitment to academic freedom and intellectual exploration. It aims to ensure that all members of the AE community — employees, independent contractors,

	and students — understand their rights and responsibilities concerning free thought, inquiry, and expression.
Audience	☒Staff | ☒Students| ☒Public
Category	Institutional Quality Assurance
Subcategory	Academic and Research Integrity
Approval Date	22/06/2022
Effective Date	22/06/2022
Last date of endorsement	22/06/2022
Next Review Date	Under review as at April 2026
Policy Advisor	Narelle Whatley
Approving Authority	Board of Directors
Contact	Regulatory Compliance Officer Regulatorcompliancy@ae.edu.au

9.0 Document change and review log

Date	Version	By	Notes
20/10/2020	1	Dean (TW)	Policy Created (updated to new template on 10 Jan 2022)
13/09/2023	1.1	Narelle Whatley (Dean)	Updated branding. Integrated staff and students' entitlements from the old version regarding AE's operations, free inquiry, research, and knowledge sharing. Clarified "Freedom of speech" and "Academic Freedom" definitions. Added "AE's Commitment" title. Improved language clarity, e.g., changed "Respect and protect" to "Uphold and shield".Used clearer wording for constraints, such as substituting "incite violence" with "foment violence".Added Roles and Responsibilities (5.0). Divided responsibilities for staff and students. Added policy number.