

THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

Findings from a University of Edinburgh 2026 All-Staff Survey

David Smith, Sue Fletcher-Watson, Jenny Jones, Mark Somerville, Emma deZarn, April Bailey, Sarah Foley, Elizabeth Kirkham, Bernd Schroers

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression:
2026 All-Staff Survey Findings

1,948 staff responses

March–May 2026

01 Experiences across staff roles

Academic respondents



felt confident they had academic freedom in relation to the research questions they address **often or very often**

508 / 667 (Figure 18)

25% of academic respondents reported **self-censorship** as a perceived limitation to teaching or research on controversial topics

164 / 666 (Figure 21)

Professional Services and 'Other'

41%

felt confident that they had **freedom to protest** when issues arose that they wanted to challenge **often or very often**.

189 / 456 (Figure 20)

02 What staff expect when academics address controversial topics

92% Said the activity should meet a **minimum standard of scholarly rigour**

1,089 / 1,183 across staff roles: Academic, Professional Services and Other (Figure 14). Multiple selections.

03 Views on forms of protest

Judged justified

Public criticism of institutions **71%**

Opting out of workplace activities **58%**

Judged unjustified

Disruption of campus events **56%**

Disruption of academic classes **66%**

830; 685; 659; 773 / 1,175 respondents (Figure 16). Bars use a 0-100% scale.

04 Views on University protection and practice

Combined responses across staff roles: Academic, Professional Services and Other.

Asked whether the University has **effective policies to protect academic freedom**:



17% disagree | **61% neutral** | **22% agree**

Controversial events: asked whether the University does a good job, **35% disagreed**, 52% were neutral and 13% agreed.

What respondents wanted | Open-text themes from 625 respondents (pp. 35-37)

Calls to protect minoritised groups and to protect academics and invited speakers on controversial topics; clearer policies and communication; concerns around job security and managerial influence.

Source: Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Staff Survey (2026). The survey received 1,948 usable responses (13.6% response rate). Percentages are based on responses to the relevant questions. Findings reflect respondents' views and may not represent all University staff. Full methodology and data are available in the published report.

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Executive Summary

We conducted a survey of University of Edinburgh staff to assess knowledge, understanding, and perspectives on academic freedom and freedom of expression. The survey was open to new responses from 18th March 2026 until 7th May 2026, with unfinished responses accepted until 18th May 2026. Usable responses were received from 1,948 of the 14,357 staff invited, a response rate of 13.6%.

A majority of respondents reported understanding that they had academic freedom (66%, n=804) and freedom of expression (73%, n=894), although 17% (n=201) believed they had neither. There was notable diversity in how these concepts were defined. Most academic respondents (54%, n=362) reported no perceived limitation on their teaching or research on controversial topics. Among the potential sources of limitation, self-censorship was the most frequently selected response (25%, n=164), followed by students (17%, n=111), College or University leaders (15%, n=101), and academic colleagues (14%, n=96). Academic respondents nevertheless reported substantial confidence in the exercise of academic freedom in their recent working lives: 76% (n=508) felt confident often or very often in relation to the research questions they address, 68% (n=455) in relation to the topics they teach, 65% (n=431) that their academic freedom was secure in general, and 61% (n=408) in relation to the events they organise.

In relation to the University, 48% (n=556) agreed or strongly agreed that it takes academic freedom seriously, while 38% (n=443) were neutral. Similarly, 45% (n=519) agreed or strongly agreed that it takes freedom of expression seriously, while 35% (n=406) were neutral. When asked whether the University has effective policies to protect academic freedom, 61% (n=699) were neutral, compared with 22% (n=257) who agreed or strongly agreed, and 17% (n=194) who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Respondents expressed clear views about the expectations that should apply when academics address controversial topics. Only 10% (n=116) selected the expectation that academic activity addressing controversial topics should prioritise community harmony, compared with 92% (n=1,089) who selected a minimum standard of scholarly rigour. Scholarly rigour was therefore selected far more frequently than the prioritisation of community harmony when respondents considered the expectations that should apply to controversial academic activity. In relation to possible limits on academic freedom, 67% (n=796) agreed that non-physical harm should be taken into account. By contrast, 70% (n=828) disagreed that causing shock and 60% (n=710) disagreed that causing offence should themselves be factored into such judgements. Respondents also distinguished between different forms of protest: 71% (n=830) regarded public criticism of institutions as justified and 58% (n=685) regarded opting out of workplace activities as justified, while 56% (n=659) regarded disruption of campus events as unjustified and 66% (n=773) regarded disruption of academic classes as unjustified. Confidence was weaker in relation to freedom to protest: 56% (n=371) of the 667 academic respondents felt confident only sometimes, rarely or very rarely. The University's handling of events on controversial topics also attracted concern: 35% (n=401) disagreed or strongly disagreed that it does a good job, while 52% (n=592) were neutral and 13% (n=151) agreed or strongly agreed.

Qualitative analysis of responses about what the University should do next identified recurring calls for policy development and clearer communication. It also identified concern about the relationship between academic freedom, job security, and the University's current strategic context. Respondents expressed contrasting views about where greater protection was most needed: some emphasised the position of minoritised groups, while others emphasised the protection of academics and invited speakers discussing controversial topics.

Taken together, the findings suggest several areas for further attention. The University could strengthen communication about academic freedom and freedom of expression, including the basis on which academic freedom applies to staff. It could provide greater clarity about the forms of protest in which staff may engage and the criteria by which it approves and supports events on contested topics. It could also make existing policies and decision-making processes more visible and accessible, and investigate experiences of self-censorship in greater depth, particularly in teaching and student-facing contexts. Extending the evidence base to include student perspectives would also provide a more complete picture of the University community.

At the same time, the overall findings are encouraging. Most academic respondents reported confidence often or very often across core scholarly activities, including in relation to research questions (76%, n=508), topics taught (68%, n=455), and the security of their academic freedom in general (65%, n=431), while 54% (n=362) reported no perceived limitation to their teaching or research on controversial topics. Respondents also placed strong emphasis on scholarly rigour (92%, n=1,089) and were more supportive of non-disruptive forms of protest, including public criticism of institutions (71%, n=830), than of disruption to academic classes, which 66% (n=773) regarded as unjustified. Although the extent to which respondents' views and experiences represent the wider staff body is unknown, the survey provides an institutional evidence base and a baseline from which the University can continue to monitor and strengthen its approach to academic freedom and freedom of expression.

Background

Academic freedom and freedom of expression are vital components of an open and democratic society and are fundamental to our core purpose as a University. Freedom of expression is protected by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 10(1) provides that this includes the freedom *'to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers'*.[1] Academic freedom is closely related to freedom of expression and receives specific statutory protection in Scotland. The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, as amended by the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016, applies academic freedom to relevant persons engaged in teaching, the provision of learning, or research. It defines academic freedom as including their freedom within the law to *'hold and express opinions, question and test established ideas or received wisdom, develop and advance new ideas or innovative proposals'*, as well as to *'present controversial or unpopular points of view'*[2]. Both rights are essential to University life, where questioning established ideas, advancing new ones, and engaging in lawful challenge and protest, contribute to the development of knowledge and society.

Neither academic freedom nor freedom of expression is unlimited. Article 10(2) provides that the exercise of freedom of expression carries duties and responsibilities and may be subject to restrictions prescribed by law, and necessary in a democratic society for specified purposes, including public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime, and the protection of the reputation or rights of others.[3] In Scotland, for example, the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 creates offences relating to the stirring up of hatred, while also containing specific protections for freedom of expression.[4] Equally, lawful expression is not deprived of protection merely because it may cause offence, shock or disturbance: the European Court of Human Rights has long recognised that freedom of expression extends to ideas capable of *'offend[ing], shock[ing] or disturb[ing]'*.[5] The boundaries of lawful expression, and the ways in which academic freedom and freedom of expression should be protected within universities, remain the subject of considerable debate in the UK.

1 *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (European Convention on Human Rights) (1950) ETS No 5, art 10(1).

2 *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005*, asp 6, s 26, as substituted by Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016, asp 15, s 23. The amended provision contains the four-part statutory formulation of academic freedom used in the text.

3 *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (European Convention on Human Rights) (1950) ETS No 5, art 10(2).

4 *Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021*, asp 14, ss 4 and 9. Section 4 contains the stirring-up offences and expressly requires regard to Article 10, including the principle that protected expression may 'offend, shock or disturb'; s 9 contains additional statutory protection for discussion and criticism in relation to the offence under s 4(2).

5 *Handyside v United Kingdom* (1979–80) 1 EHRR 737, para 49.

Against this background, a recent Scoping Review of the relevant published literature found the evidence base to be *'fragmented and limited in scope'*.[6] The authors called, among other things, for further empirical research and for future research to include different categories of university staff. That recommendation informed the present study, which was designed to examine the perspectives of both academic and Professional Services staff. This report outlines the results of an institutional survey designed to capture staff understanding and views on academic freedom and freedom of expression within the University of Edinburgh.

Specific elements of the survey were designed to investigate:

- **i)** General level of understanding of academic freedom and freedom of expression, and confidence with these concepts
- **ii)** Staff opinions on the factors that should apply when considering a given instance of academic freedom / freedom of expression
- **iii)** Staff experience of the exercise of their academic freedom / freedom of expression
- **iv)** Staff views on University of Edinburgh policy and practice in this area

The primary goal was to generate an evidence base to inform future internal communication, policy, and practice relating to academic freedom and freedom of expression. A secondary purpose was to contribute to the wider understanding of academic freedom and freedom of expression, from the point of view of a diverse staff body at a large, research-intensive, international University.

6 Rhoda Jiang and John Devaney, *Exploring Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Higher Education: A Scoping Review* (School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, 4 April 2025), p. 3, available at: University of Edinburgh Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression website (accessed 18 September 2026).

Methods

Participants and Recruitment Strategy

Participants were recruited via their University email address and invited to take part in the survey. The inclusion criteria were: current staff at the University, working in any College or Professional Services group, at any staff grade, and irrespective of years of service. Members of the Working Group research team, and any staff on leave at the time of the invitation, were excluded.

Following the consent questions, participants completed questions exploring their general understanding of academic freedom and freedom of expression, followed by questions concerning hypothetical limits on these freedoms. Participants were then asked what should determine judgements about a given exercise of academic freedom or freedom of expression, what forms of protest could be justified, and whether the characteristics of those affected by a given exercise of these rights should influence such judgements. The survey then routed respondents according to role, with separate question sets for academic staff and for Professional Services and other staff concerning their recent experiences. Staff who selected the 'Other' category followed the Professional Services branch. All respondents were subsequently asked about University policy and practice in relation to academic freedom and freedom of expression and were given the opportunity, through open-text questions, to suggest ways in which the University could improve its approach. Participants were then asked for information about their College or Professional Services group affiliation, School, staff grade, and years of service. The survey concluded with options to withdraw their responses altogether, to withhold or revise consent for the publication of direct quotations from their qualitative responses, and to vote for one of four local charities to receive a proportionate share of a £300 donation. A link to a University staff wellbeing page was included in the closing message of thanks in case any participant had experienced distress due to the questions asked.

A key focus was to motivate staff to engage with the survey, regardless of the strength of their views on academic freedom or freedom of expression. To this end, the survey sought to avoid presenting an inaccurate picture of the range of views or level of confidence of staff across the institution. To facilitate this, the team implemented two main recruitment techniques. Firstly, random lists of staff were generated and invited to the survey in waves (see Procedure for details). Invitation emails made it clear that not all staff had been invited to participate. This was designed to combat a form of 'bystander apathy', whereby institution-wide surveys can be ignored because staff expect others to respond. Invitations were issued in successive waves and, by the close of the survey, 14,357 staff had been invited in total (Table 1).

Secondly, the research team selected four local charities, nominated by the Edinburgh University Students' Association Sabbatical Officers, and offered staff the opportunity at the end of the survey to vote for their preferred charity. This was designed to provide a positive motivation to engage with and complete the survey. The £300 donation was subsequently

allocated among the four charities in proportion to the votes received. No incentive was offered to individual participants. In addition, careful attention was paid to making the survey as concise and easy to complete as possible, using closed-response formats where appropriate and checking the formatting for mobile-phone compatibility.

Design, Measures & Analysis Plan

The full survey text has been deposited on DataShare, with public access scheduled for 1st November 2026.[7] Participant information appeared at the start, explaining the aim of the study and how data would be managed. Following this, there were two consent sections. One was a checklist of statements to ensure that participants understood the way in which their data would be handled, all of which had to be selected in order to proceed. There was an additional consent item concerning the processing and reporting of qualitative responses. Participants could opt for their open text answers not to be quoted directly in the publicly available research report. This option was also re-stated at the end, in case participants wished to revise their answer after having completed the survey.

Thereafter, all participants initially followed the same survey flow. The survey first asked about **general understanding** of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, followed by questions concerning **hypothetical limits** on these freedoms. Participants were then asked what factors should inform judgements about a given exercise of academic freedom or freedom of expression, what sorts of protest could be justified, and whether the characteristics of the individuals affected by such an exercise should influence staff judgements. These questions took the form of binary checkboxes (agree / disagree), multiple choice options ('select all that apply'), and Likert-scale options (e.g., a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree).

The two branches contained parallel, role-specific questions. Academic staff were asked about their **confidence** in relation to academic freedom across aspects of their own work, and about **perceived limitations** on their teaching or research and on activities or outputs taking place at the University. Professional Services and other staff were not asked about their own exercise of academic freedom, but were asked parallel questions concerning freedom of expression and **perceived limitations** on teaching, research, activities, or outputs taking place at the University. This branching reflected the design of the survey and did not establish whether an individual respondent fell within the legal scope of academic freedom. Again, a range of response formats were used, depending on the specifics of the question.

Following the role-specific questions, all participants were asked for their views on University policy and practice concerning academic freedom and freedom of expression. Participants were also given the opportunity, through open-text questions, to suggest ways in which the University could improve its approach to these issues.

Participants were then asked for information about their College or Professional Services group affiliation, School, staff grade, and years of service. The survey concluded with the

7 Fletcher-Watson, Sue. (2026). Staff Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Survey, 2026, [dataset]. University of Edinburgh. Provost's Office. https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8188

option to withdraw altogether; to withhold or revise consent for the publication of qualitative responses; and to choose from four local charities to which a donation would be made. A link to a staff wellbeing page on the University website was included in the closing message of thanks, in case any staff had experienced distress due to the questions asked in the survey.

Procedure

The email invitations were sent to randomly generated lists of University staff email addresses, balanced across Colleges and Professional Services units. This sampling was undertaken by the Human Resources systems' team. The survey research team did not have access to information about the staff profiles. Databases of selected staff emails provided by Human Resources were uploaded into the Qualtrics platform, which was then used to auto-generate an email with a unique response link for each individual listed. Participants received a unique survey link in their invitation email, while responses were collected anonymously. Once a staff member had begun their response, the link could not be forwarded for use by another person.

Staff who had been invited were reminded twice more by email on a planned schedule and were not contacted again. Those previously contacted were excluded from further rounds of invitations (See Appendix A for email invitation texts). In the reminder emails, the latest response rates were mentioned to encourage staff to participate.

Following the first round of invitations, some staff contacted the survey research team with concerns about the authenticity of the survey. This was motivated in part by the fact that the survey invitation came directly from Qualtrics, and not from a University email address. As a result, all subsequent email communications included Professor David Smith's official signature and contact information to reassure staff that it came from a trustworthy source.

The survey was launched on 18th March 2026 and closed on 7th May 2026, with unfinished responses allowed to complete until 18th May 2026. The recruitment target was 2,000 total responses (1,948 responses achieved), with a minimum of 500 per College (see Table 1); this minimum was not reached in any College. A stopping rule had been specified whereby the survey would close either when the recruitment target was reached or at the beginning of May 2026, whichever was sooner. In practice, the survey remained open until 7th May 2026 and closed 52 responses short of the overall target of 2,000.

Ethical Approval and Consent

This study was reviewed and approved by the Moray House School of Education and Sport Ethics' Committee, University of Edinburgh. The work was funded internally by the University of Edinburgh.

No incentive was offered to individual participants. At the end of the survey, participants could cast a vote to direct a share of £300 to one of four local charities, allocated in proportion to the votes received. Participation was voluntary.

Before proceeding, participants were required to select all consent statements. These confirmed that they had read the participant information; that the information provided was sufficient; that they knew how to contact the research team; that participation was voluntary; that withdrawal required clicking through to the end of the survey and selecting the withdrawal option; that they could skip any question; that anonymised numerical data would be deposited on the University of Edinburgh DataShare platform and retained indefinitely, while open-text responses would be deleted within one year of the close of the survey; and that their responses were anonymous and could not be linked back to them. A separate item sought consent for direct quotation in the report; participants could decline this, and their choice could be revised at the end of the survey.

Quotations reported in this report are drawn only from participants who consented to direct quotation. All quotations were reviewed for identifiability before inclusion and are attributed only as [A], academic, or [PS], professional services.

Invitations were issued through Qualtrics to email addresses supplied by University HR. The Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Working Group team had no access to staff profile information. Responses were anonymised at the point of collection, so that no response could be linked to the contact record that generated it. All demographic information reported here, whether College, School, Group, grade, or length of service, was self-reported by participants at the end of the survey.

The University of Edinburgh processed the data based on its legitimate interest in conducting surveys that inform University life. Anonymised quantitative responses are deposited and retained indefinitely.[8] Open-text responses will be deleted within one year of the close of the survey. Interpretation of open-text responses was carried out by a Research Assistant. The closing page of the survey included a link to University staff wellbeing support in case any participant found the subject matter distressing.

Analysis plan

The quantitative analysis plan was defined and signed off by the survey research team prior to completion of data collection to ensure transparency and openness. This is provided on DataShare.[9] Key elements of the analysis plan are provided here. Where questions included an ‘other, please specify’ response, responses were reviewed and exemplar quotes reported for illustrative purposes only. Where quotes are cited, this was always with explicit consent: participants were asked for consent before completing the survey and were asked to reconfirm that consent at the end. Quotes were carefully reviewed for identifiability before inclusion and are marked only as [A], Academic, or [PS], Professional Services.

8 Fletcher-Watson, Sue. (2026). Staff Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Survey, 2026, [dataset]. University of Edinburgh. Provost’s Office. https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8188

9 Fletcher-Watson, Sue. (2026). Staff Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Survey, 2026, [dataset]. University of Edinburgh. Provost’s Office. https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8188

Primary exclusion criteria were:

a) if consent statements were not fully completed;

b) if the respondent selected that they wished to withdraw their responses at the end of the survey;

c) if the respondent confirmed that some of their responses were jokes or random. Otherwise, all data available for each given question was analysed and no attempt was made to impute missing data.

For Likert-scale questions, the overall summaries presented in this report pool response counts across the statements within each question. These summaries therefore describe the distribution of item responses rather than the number of individual respondents. If relevant, item-level data were also analysed. Descriptives for the multiple-choice questions were reported in terms of percentages of staff who responded to that specific item, as are all job information questions.

Open answers to questions about definitions of 'academic freedom' and 'freedom of expression' have been analysed for content using automated analysis tools. Using BERT sentence transformers, the text responses were converted into data points that could be measured in terms of their similarity to a central definition. These *cosine similarity* scores show strong to weak alignment, in terms of their closeness to a central definition.

In addition, a Research Assistant used framework analysis to examine open-text responses to the final survey questions concerning what the University should do next around academic freedom and freedom of expression. This approach aimed to extract practical recommendations about next steps while also revealing some of the specific issues and feelings that were commonly apparent. The framework was developed in response to the data, but with a top-down approach focused on extracting what the University can do, rather than attempting a deeper qualitative analysis of implicit attitudes, feelings, and experiences.

Results

Summary of the respondent sample

In total, 14,357 staff members were invited to complete the survey. While 2,417 people initially opened the survey from the email invitation, useable responses including completed consent statements were received from 1,948 participants. Therefore, the overall response rate, limited to useable responses, was 13.6%. The range of response rates by College and Professional Services group is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1: Proportion of responses from total invitations

College or Group	Total invitations	Responses	Response rate by area*
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	4,385	456	10.4%
College of Science and Engineering	4,102	286	7.0%
College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine	3,399	285	8.4%
Corporate Services Group	1,463	46	3.1%
Information Services Group	390	46	11.8%
University Secretary's Group	618	30	4.9%
Did not say		765	
Other		34	
Total	**14,357**	**1,948**	**13.6%**

*Area-specific percentages show the number of respondents who identified each College or Group divided by the number invited from that area. They exclude respondents whose affiliation was not stated or was recorded as 'Other', so they do not represent complete response rates for each area. The overall response rate includes all usable responses.

The higher overall response rate relative to those broken down by area is accounted for by the large number of respondents who did not provide a College or Group affiliation.

When required to say whether they were an academic staff member or member of Professional Services staff, many respondents dropped out of the survey, with total responses for this question at n=1221 (Table 2).

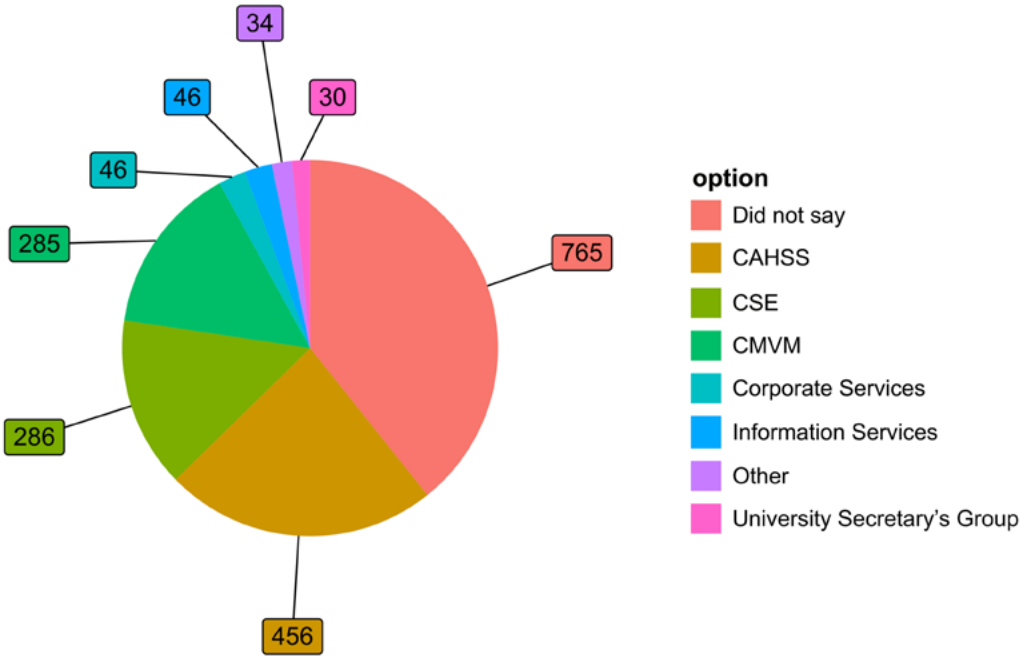
Table 2: Summary of role-types

Role type	Responses	Percentage of respondents who provided a role (n=1,221)
Academic (teaching and / or research)	697	57.1%
Professional Services (University administration, support for teaching and / or research)	486	39.8%
Other (please say which)	38	3.1%
Total	**1,221**	**100%**
No role response recorded	727	

Of those who did report a role type, about 57% were Academics and 43% Professional Services staff or 'other'.

After exclusions, the sample consisted of staff from all three Colleges and Professional Services groups, with 39.3% (or n=765) not declaring which unit they were based within. The College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS) had the highest proportion of responses after that at 23.4%, (n=456) with both College of Science and Engineering (CSE) and College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM) staff at around 15% (14.7% or n=286 and 14.6% or n=285, respectively). Corporate Services Group (CSG) and Information Services Group (ISG) were both equally represented by 2.4% of respondents (n=46 for both groups), with 1.7% (n=34) selecting "Other" and 1.5% (n=30) from the University Secretary's group (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Breakdown of Respondents by University College or Group



For each College, the breakdown of respondents per School is shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4.

Figure 2: Respondents per School: College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

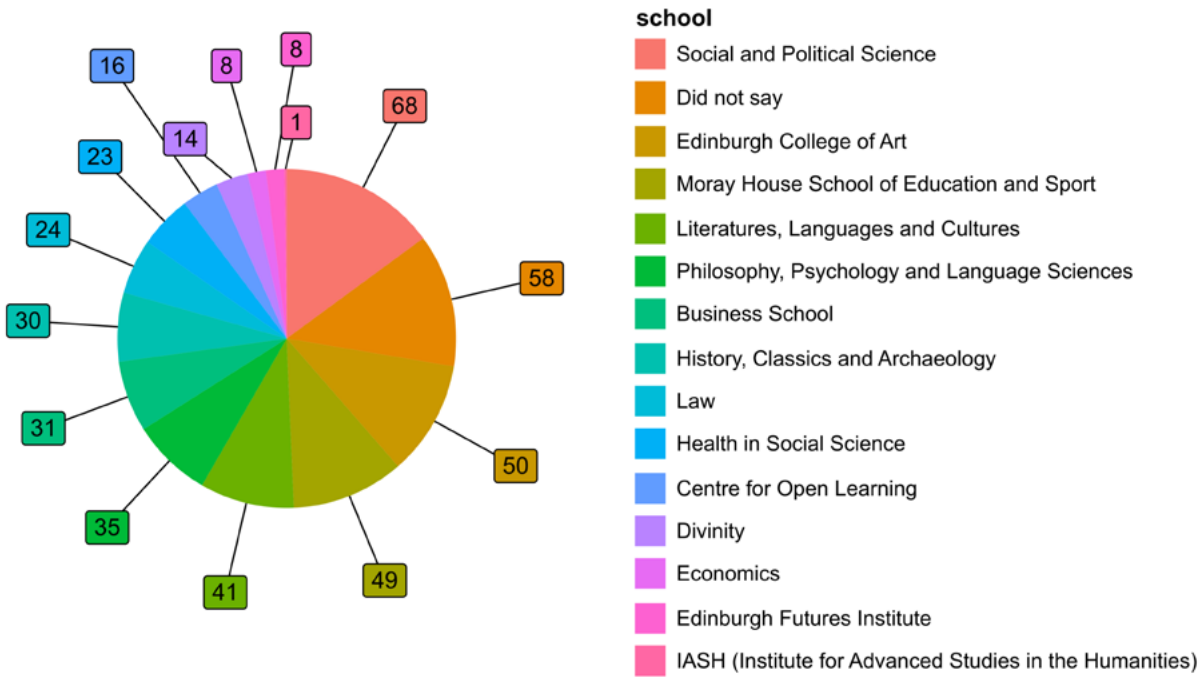


Figure 3: Respondents per School: College of Science and Engineering

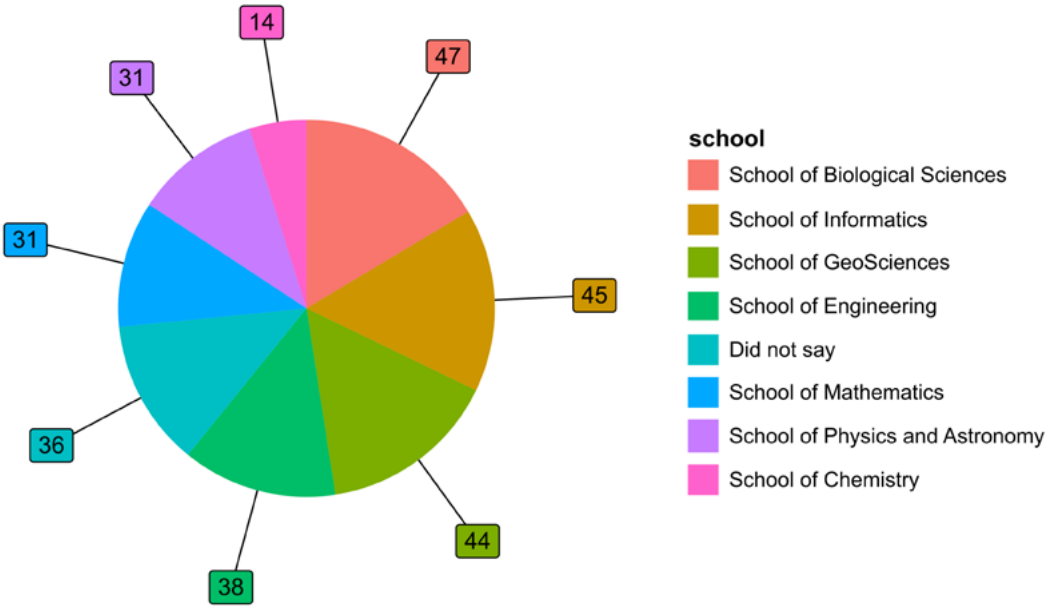


Figure 4: Respondents per School: College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

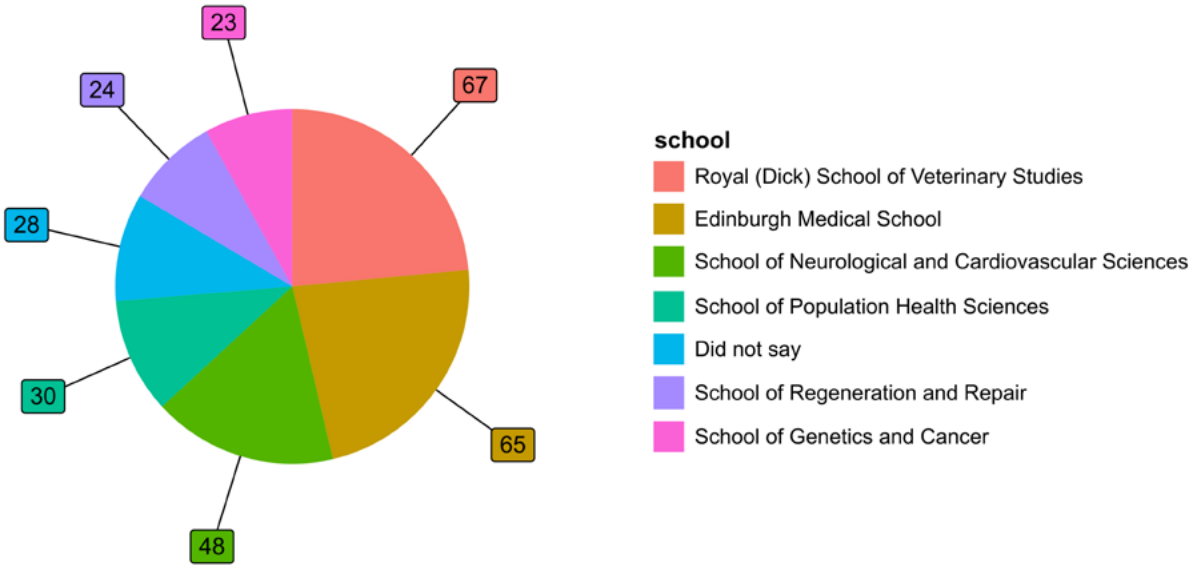
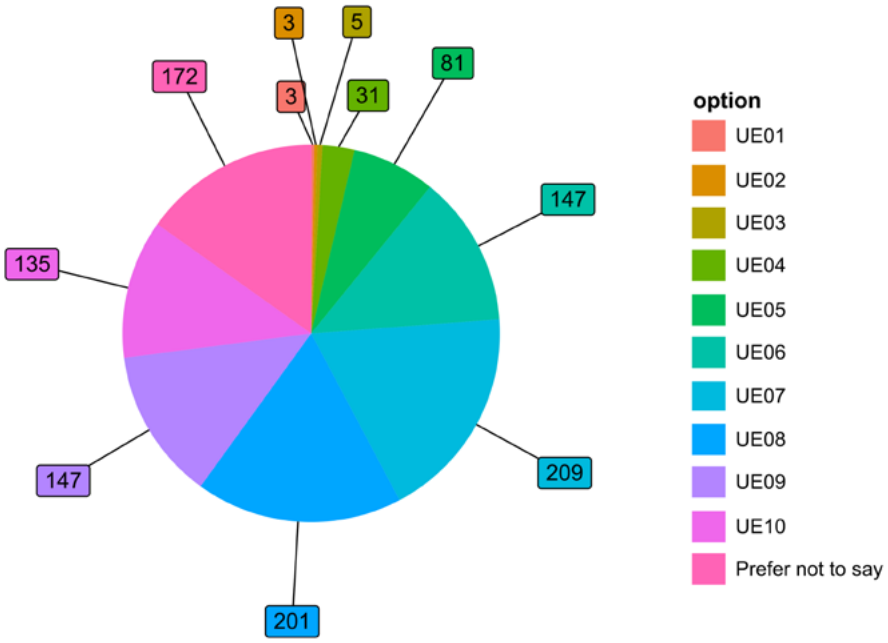
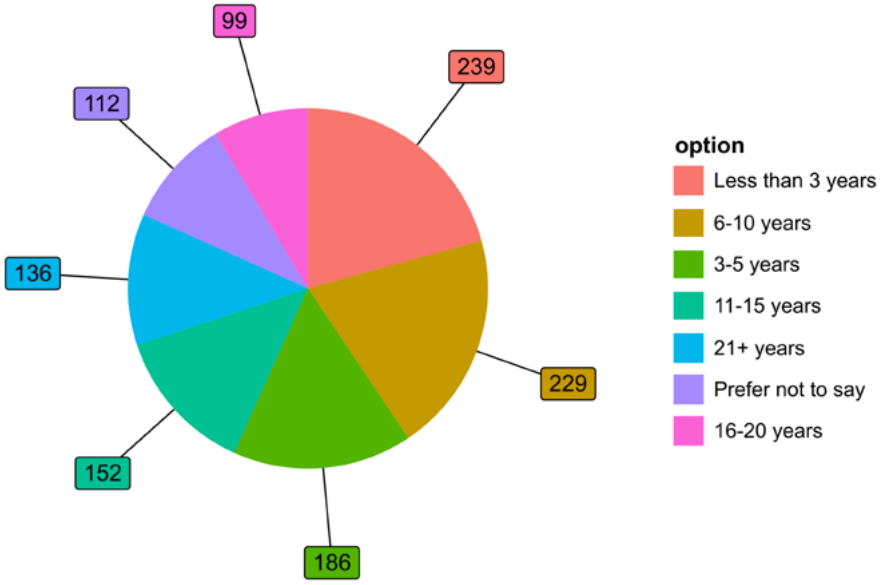


Figure 5: Respondents by Staff Grade



A total of 1,134 survey respondents responded to the question about their grade. Respondents represented all groups, with the highest proportion, 18.4% (or n=209) being in grade UE07, followed by UE08 at 17.7% (or n=201), and then UE06 at 13% (or n=147) and UE09 also at 13% (or n=147). 15.2% (or n=172) respondents selected the option to not disclose this information.

Figure 6: Respondents by Years of Service at the University



A total of 1,153 respondents responded to the question about their years of service as a member of staff at the University. Most respondents, 20.7% (or n=239) had worked at the University for less than 3 years. This was followed by staff who had worked between 6-10 years at 19.9% (or n=229) and between 3-5 years at 16.1% (or n=186). 9.7% (or n=112) chose not to disclose this information.

General understanding

Question 1.6[10]

What is your understanding of 'academic freedom'? Please give us your own definition and/or associations. 1,192 participant responses. Open text answer.

Participants provided their own **definition of Academic Freedom** in text form. The responses were compared against the University's definition of Academic Freedom, using a computational linguistics method described in the Analysis Methods. Most participant responses show moderate alignment, or similarity, with the University's definition,[11] although a notable proportion only had a weak similarity. There was a notable range of definitions suggesting a diversity of responses.

10 This question is number 1.6, and not number 1, because preceding questions related to consent to participate in the survey.

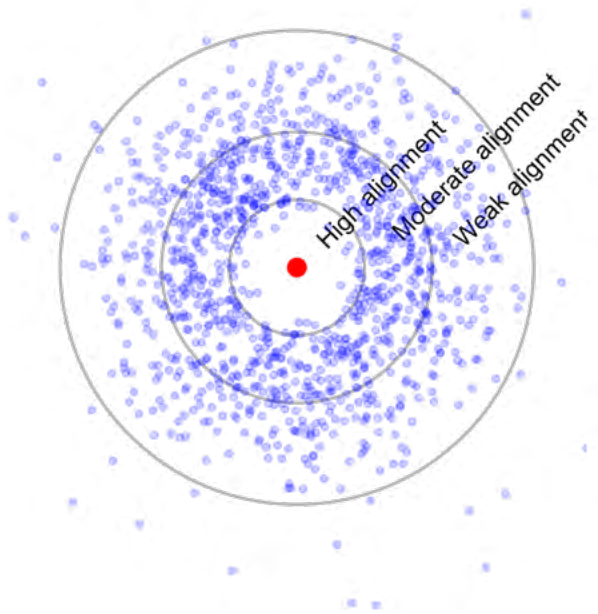
11 'The right to freedom of expression in a University community sits alongside the related principle of academic freedom. Academic freedom means academics can express their opinions, question established ideas and develop new ones, and present controversial or unpopular points of view, without placing their employment at risk. The right to freedom of expression is relevant to the principle of academic freedom, because the exercise of academic freedom must be within the bounds of the law. In other words, if something is an unlawful exercise of the right of freedom of expression, it will not be lawful simply because it takes place in an academic context.'(University of Edinburgh, 'What do we mean by academic freedom and freedom of expression?', https://edwebprofiles.ed.ac.uk/academic-freedom/what-do-we-mean-by-academic-freedom-and-freedom-of (accessed 19th September 2026).

Question 1.7

What is your understanding of 'freedom of expression'? Please give us your own definition and/or associations. 1,188 participant responses. Open text answer.

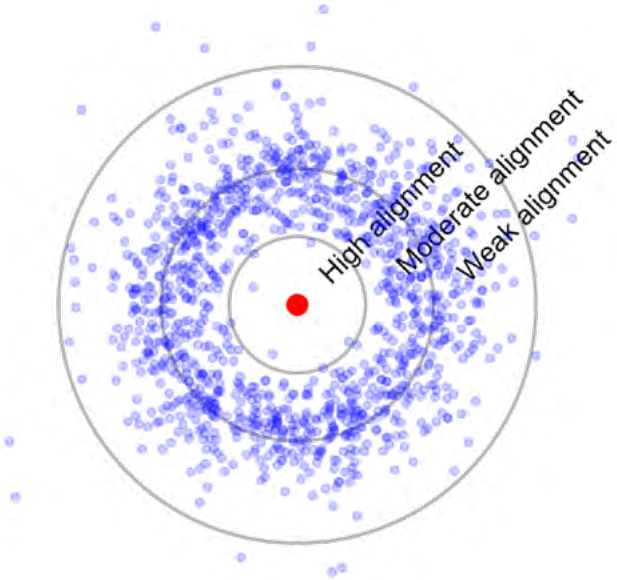
As with the previous question, this question asked participants to give a text **definition of Freedom of Expression**. This was again compared to the University's definition and measured in the same way as the previous answer's responses.[12] Participants' answers showed a little more distance from the University's definition, but were more tightly clustered with fewer responses in the outer regions as well.

Figure 7: Staff Definitions of Academic Freedom compared to the University's definition



Arranged by cosine similarity to University's definition, shown as centre point (in red), similarity = 1

Figure 8: Staff Definitions of Freedom of Expression compared to the University's definition



Arranged by cosine similarity to University's definition, shown as centre point (in red), similarity = 1

12 'An open and democratic society requires an unwavering commitment to freedom of expression in all its forms, including both the spoken and written word, as well as actions and gestures and the display of images intended to show meaning. Freedom of expression applies not only to information or ideas that are favourable, but also to those that people might find offensive or shocking.' ('What do we mean by academic freedom and freedom of expression?', https://edwebprofiles.ed.ac.uk/academic-freedom/what-do-we-mean-by-academic-freedom-and-freedom-of (accessed 19th September 2026).

Question 1.8

1,219 participant responses, select all statements with which you agree Yes / No.

This question asked staff members to say whether they **understood** they had academic freedom and/or freedom of expression, or if they thought they had neither. From this selection of options, 73% of respondents (n=894) said that they understood that they had **freedom of expression**, 66% (n=804) said they understood they had **academic freedom** and 17% (n=201) said that they believed that they had **neither** (Table 3).

Breaking the data down by role type (Table 4) and looking at how responses were distributed across multiple response selections (Figure 9) we can see a number of patterns of note. First, some academic staff selected academic freedom but not freedom of expression. This indicates a possible area for clarification, although their selections do not establish why they chose one option without the other. Second, 226 Professional Services staff believe they have academic freedom (either exclusively, or as well as freedom of expression). This should not automatically be interpreted as a misunderstanding. The University's conditions of employment extend academic freedom protections to employees engaged in teaching, the provision of learning or research, including those whose roles are designated Professional Services. The survey was not designed to establish which individual respondents fall within that scope.

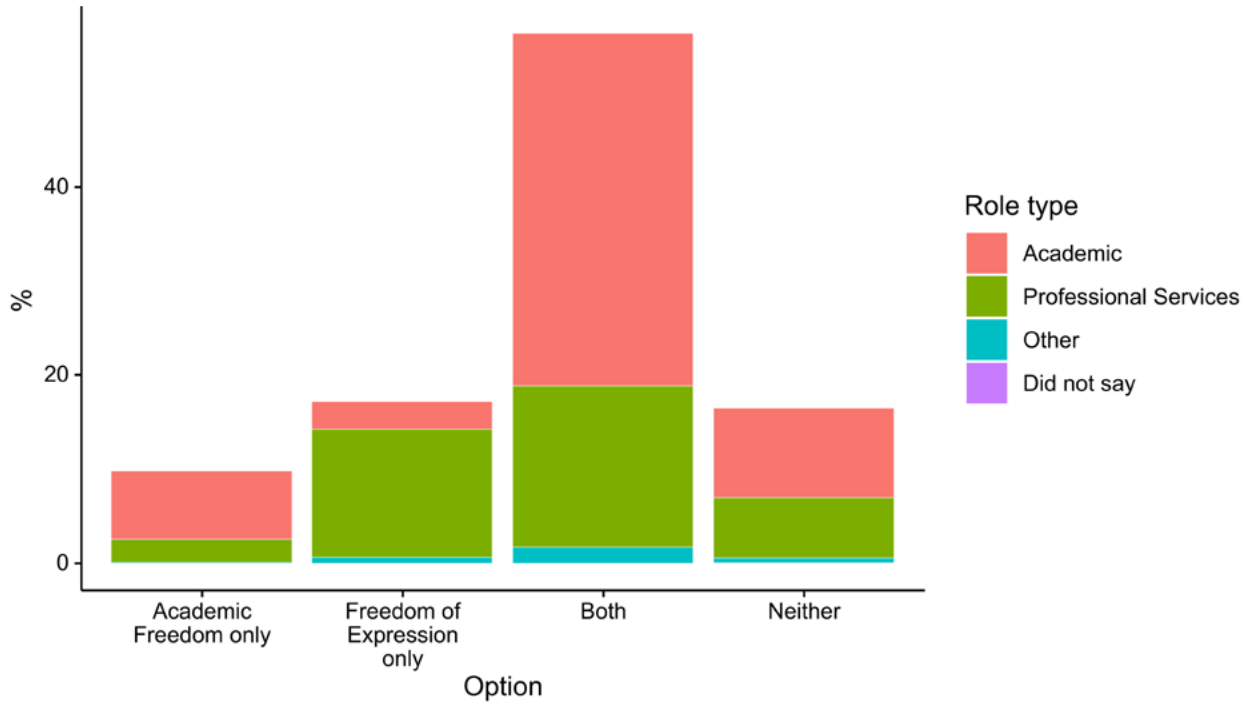
Table 3: Perspectives on the Right to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, by College or Group

College or Group	My understanding is that I have academic freedom	My understanding is that I have freedom of expression	I believe I have neither of the above
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	299	311	80
College of Science and Engineering	202	209	31
College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine	182	197	48
Did not say	54	64	15
Information Services Group	22	34	8
Corporate Services Group	20	33	7
University Secretary's Group	10	24	6
Other	15	22	6
Total	**804**	**894**	**201**

Table 4: Perspectives on the Right to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, by Respondent Role

Role type	My understanding is that I have academic freedom	My understanding is that I have freedom of expression	I believe I have neither of the above
Academic (teaching and / or research)	516	466	110
Professional Services (University administration, support for teaching and / or research)	226	355	74
Did not say	40	45	11
Other (please say which)	22	28	6
Total	**804**	**894**	**201**

Figure 9: Staff Understanding of Having Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, by Role Type

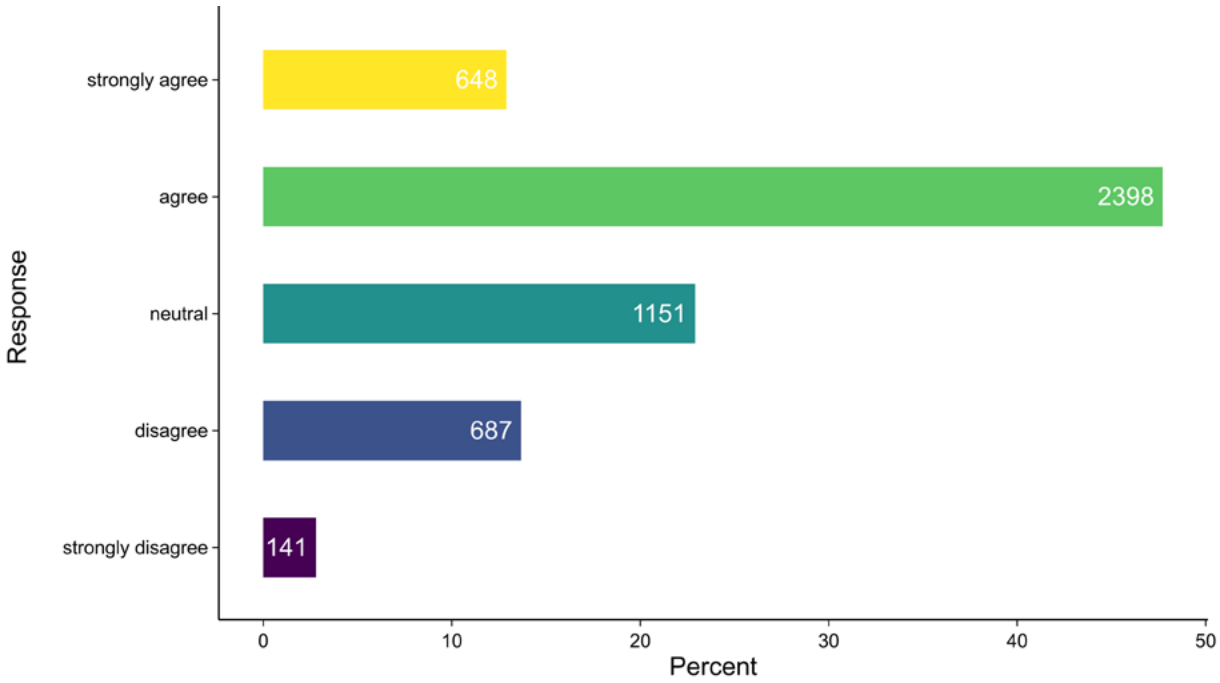


Question 2.1

1257 participant responses, Likert scale agree-disagree

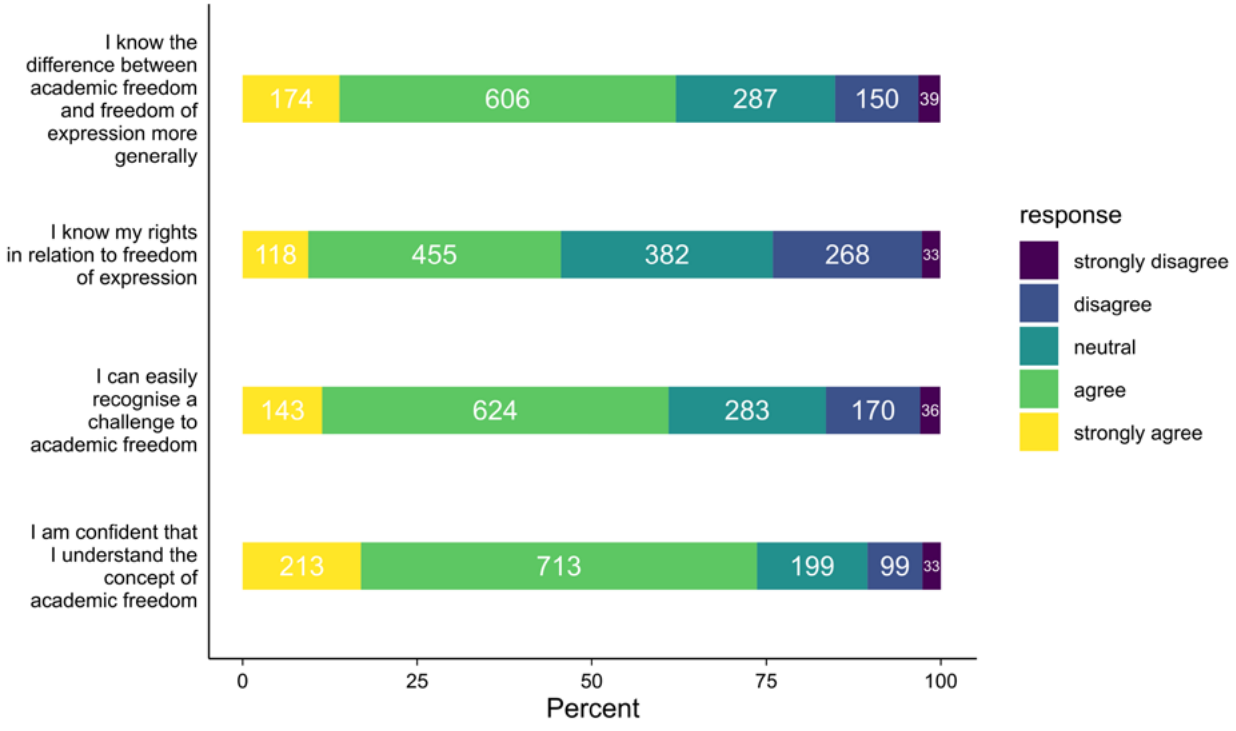
When answers to the four statements were added together, the majority were 'agree' or 'strongly agree' (Figure 10). These totals count answers rather than individual respondents, as each respondent could answer all four statements. There was also a substantial minority of neutral responses across all items (23% of all responses given).

Figure 10: Staff Confidence in their Knowledge of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression



Breaking down responses item by item (Figure 11), most staff reported that they **knew the difference** between academic freedom and freedom of expression more generally, could easily **recognise a challenge** to academic freedom, and **understood the concept** of academic freedom. The statement about **knowing their rights** in relation to freedom of expression attracted the lowest agreement of the four statements: 54% of respondents (n=683) selected strongly disagree, disagree or neutral.

Figure 11: Staff Confidence in their Knowledge of Different Aspects of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression



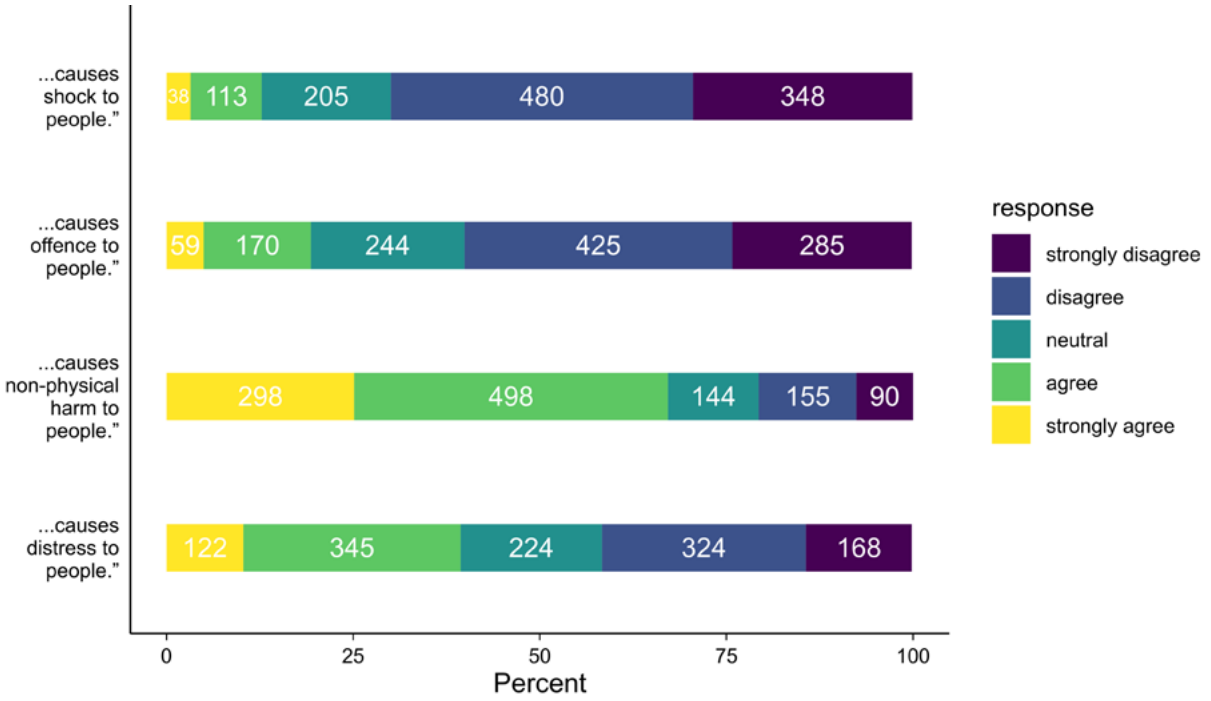
Views on limitations

Question 2.3

1,185 participant responses, Likert scale agree to disagree

When asked to give their opinion on hypothetical "reasonable limits" to academic freedom, a majority of respondents, 67%, agreed that these should take account of whether the academic activity causes **non-physical harm** (n=796 *strongly agree* or *agree*) (Figure 12). Agreement was lower on whether causing **distress** to people should be taken into account (39%, n=467 *strongly agree* or *agree*). Conversely, causing **shock** or **offence** was largely not considered relevant, with 70% (or n=828) and 60% (or n=710) saying they *strongly disagree or disagree*, respectively that these should be factored in when considering reasonable limits on academic freedom.

Figure 12: Staff Views on Hypothetical Limitations to Academic Freedom

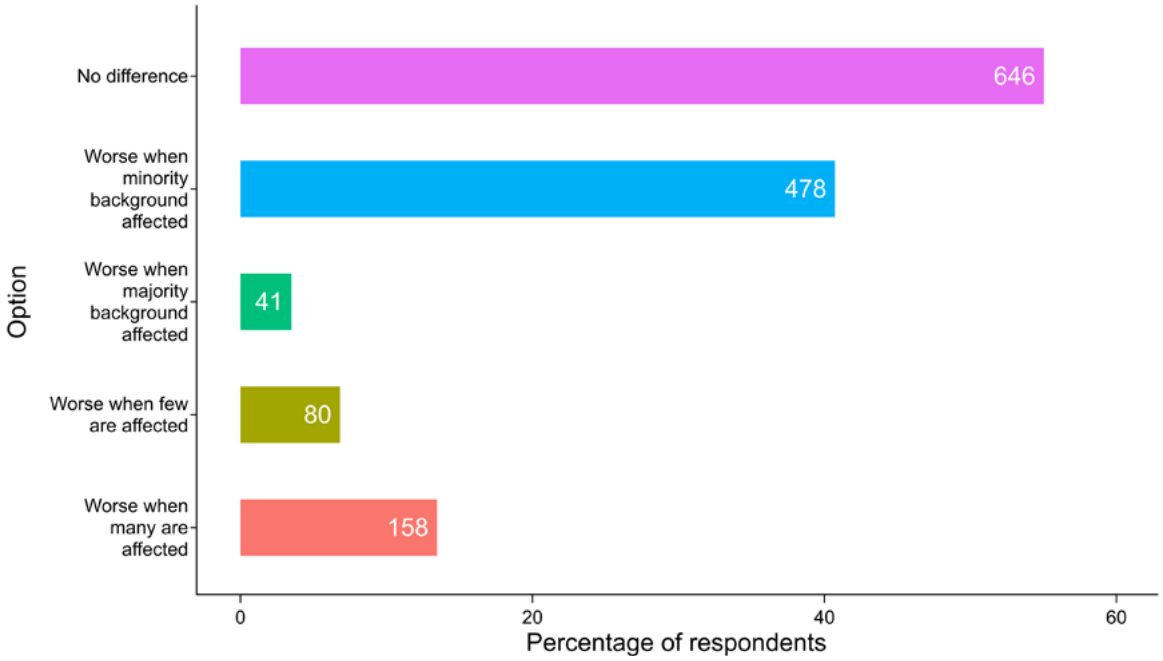


Question 2.4

1,174 participant responses, yes/no checkboxes, select all that apply

We asked about a scenario where 'reasonable limits' to academic freedom are breached, and whether the nature of the group of people impacted made a difference. A majority, 55% (n=646), believed that neither the **number of people** impacted, nor their **majority/minority status** made a difference in relation to their views. However, a large minority, 41% (n=478), also responded that it is **worse when people from a minority or under-represented background are affected**. For each of the other listed options (Figure 13), percentage endorsement was always less than 15%.

Figure 13: Staff Views on the Impact of Expressions of Academic Freedom

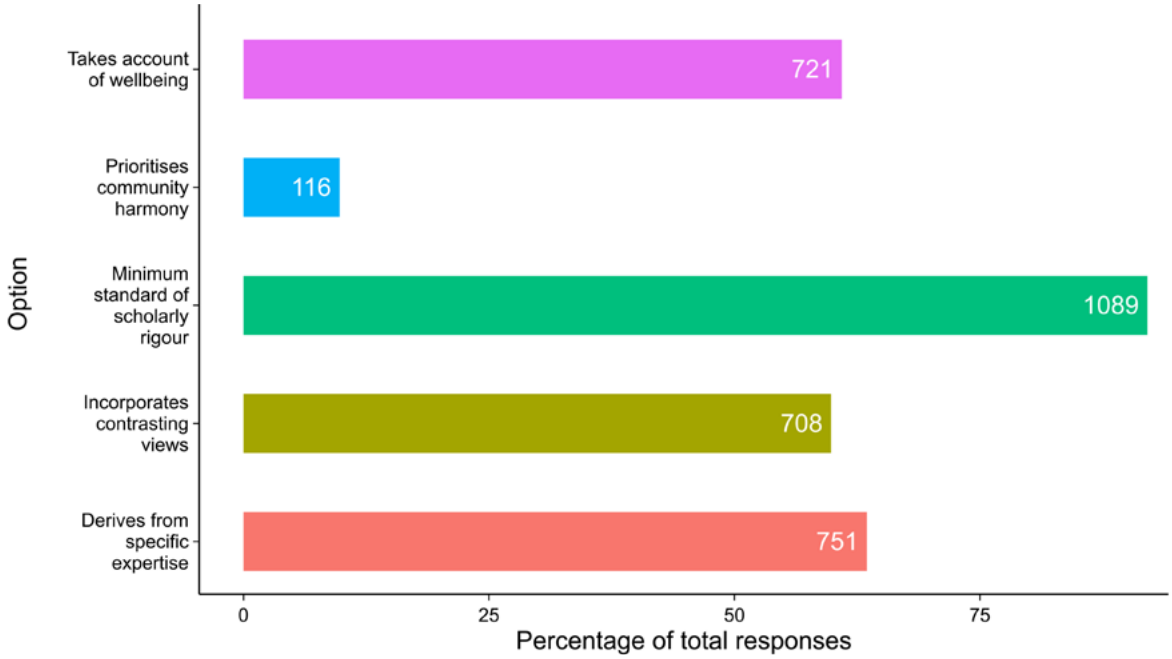


Question 2.5

1,183 participant responses, yes / no checkboxes, select all that apply

This question asked about the expectations that academics should meet when engaged in activities that address controversial topics. The aspect that most respondents, 92% (or n=1,089), felt was important was that the activity should meet a minimum standard of **scholarly rigour** (Figure 14). The considerations of **relevant expertise**, offering a **range of views**, and taking account of the **wellbeing** of those exposed to the topic were also important (agreement all around 60%), whereas only 10% (n=116) selected the expectation that the activity should prioritise **community harmony**.

Figure 14: Staff Expectations about Academic Activities

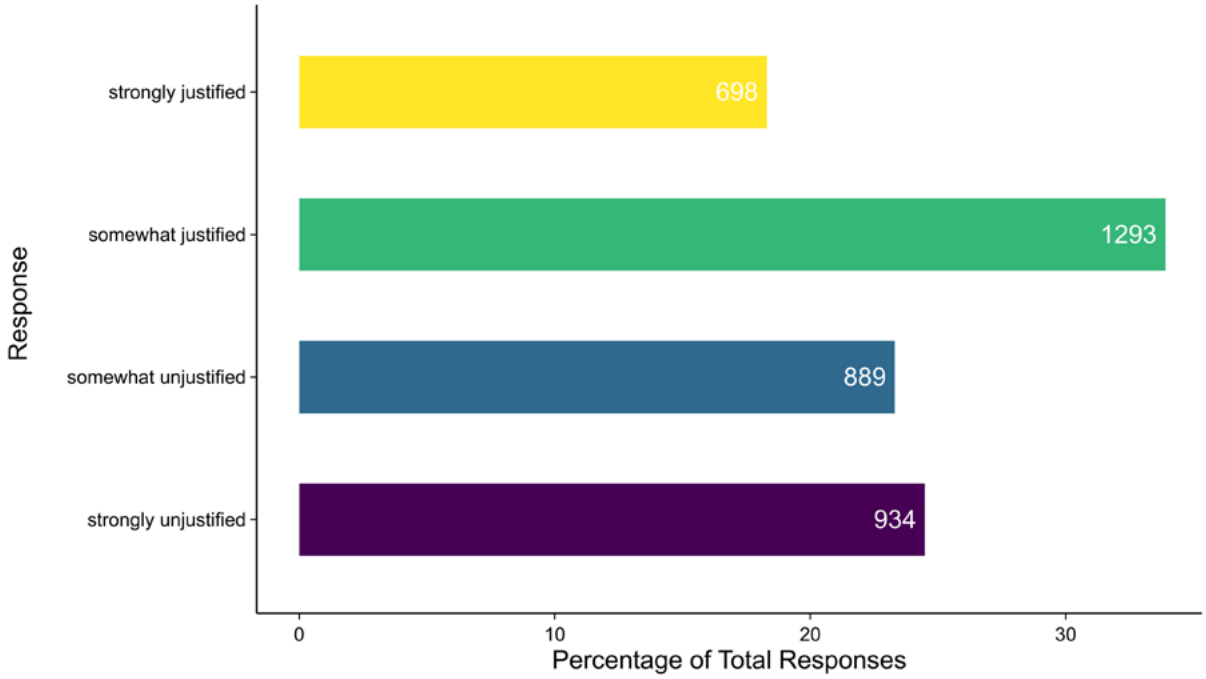


Question 2.7[13]

1,175 participant responses, Likert scale: justified to unjustified

This question asked to what extent participants thought different actions might be justified for people wishing to object to the way academic freedom has been exercised. Participants rated whether four forms of protest were justified: public criticism of institutions, disruption of academic classes, disruption of campus events, and opting out of workplace activities. Excluding answers of 'neutral', 3,814 ratings were recorded across these four forms of protest. Of these, 1,991 (52%) were 'strongly justified' or 'somewhat justified'. These totals count ratings rather than individual respondents, as each respondent could rate all four forms of protest.

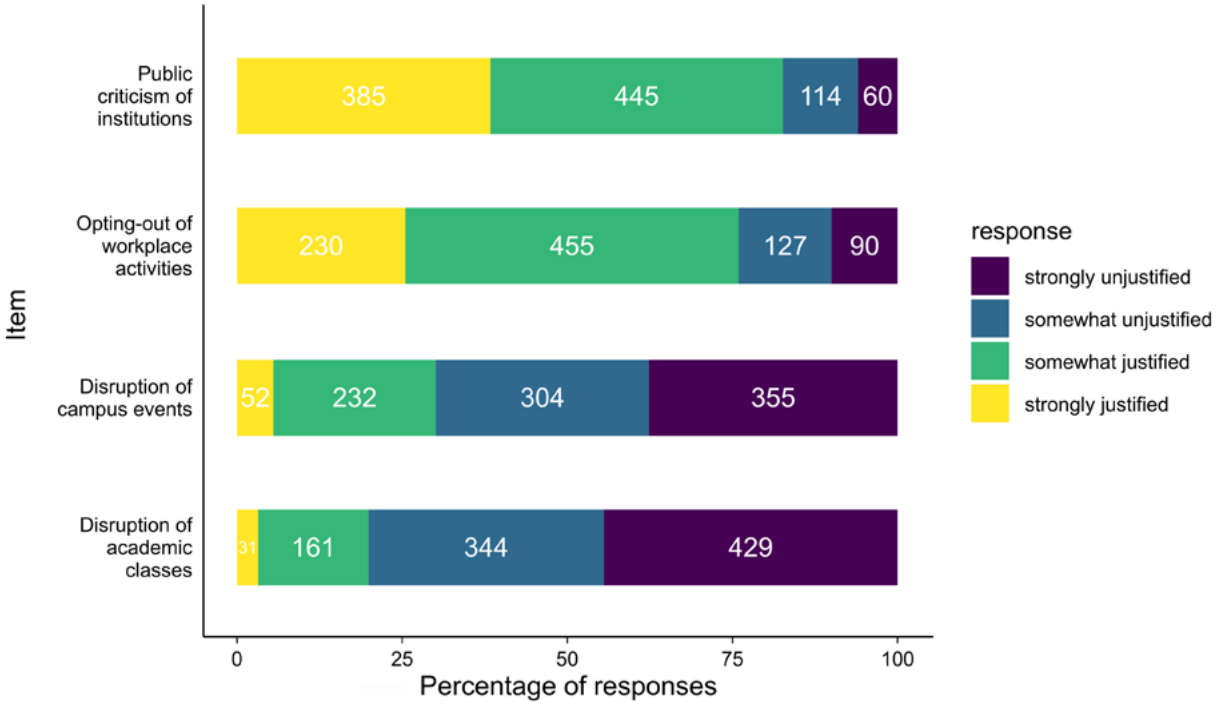
Figure 15: Staff Views about Types of Protest about Academic Activities Overall, Excluding Neutral Responses



Breaking down responses by item, **public criticism** of institutions (71% or n=830) and opting out of workplace events (58% or n=685) were endorsed as justified by the majority of respondents (*somewhat justified* or *strongly justified*). On the other hand, the majority felt that **disruption of campus events** (56% or n=659) and **disruption of academic classes** (66% or n=773) were not legitimate (*strongly unjustified* or *somewhat unjustified*).

13 Question 2.6 invited further open-text comments on the preceding questions about the exercise of academic freedom. Its wording is reproduced in Appendix B.

Figure 16: Staff Views on Types of Protest, by Type of Protest, Excluding Neutral Responses



The chart shows the percentage distribution among the four response categories displayed for each form of protest. Percentages reported in the accompanying text use the overall question sample of 1,175 respondents. Consequently, the chart percentages and those reported in the text use different denominators.

Survey Branch Point

At this point, 57% (n=697) of respondents identified themselves as Academic, 40% (n=486) as Professional Services, and 3% (n=38) were 'other'. Participants selecting other followed the Professional Services branch of the survey.

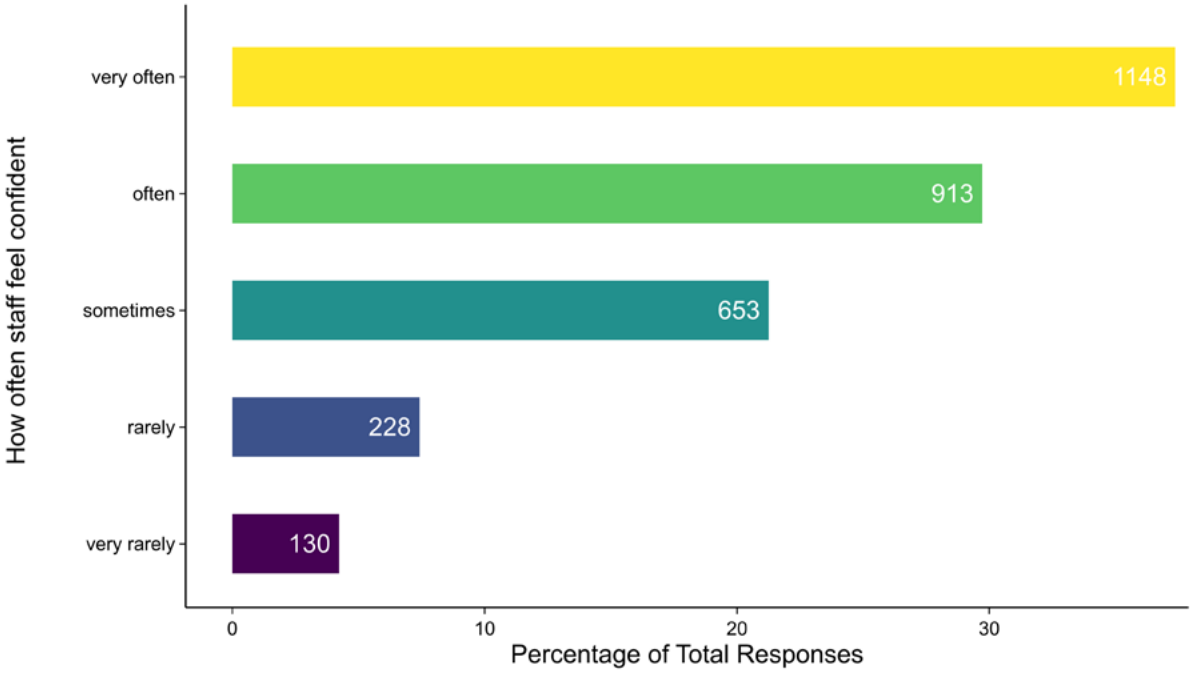
University of Edinburgh Experiences

Academic: Question 3.1

667 participant responses, Likert scale often-rarely.

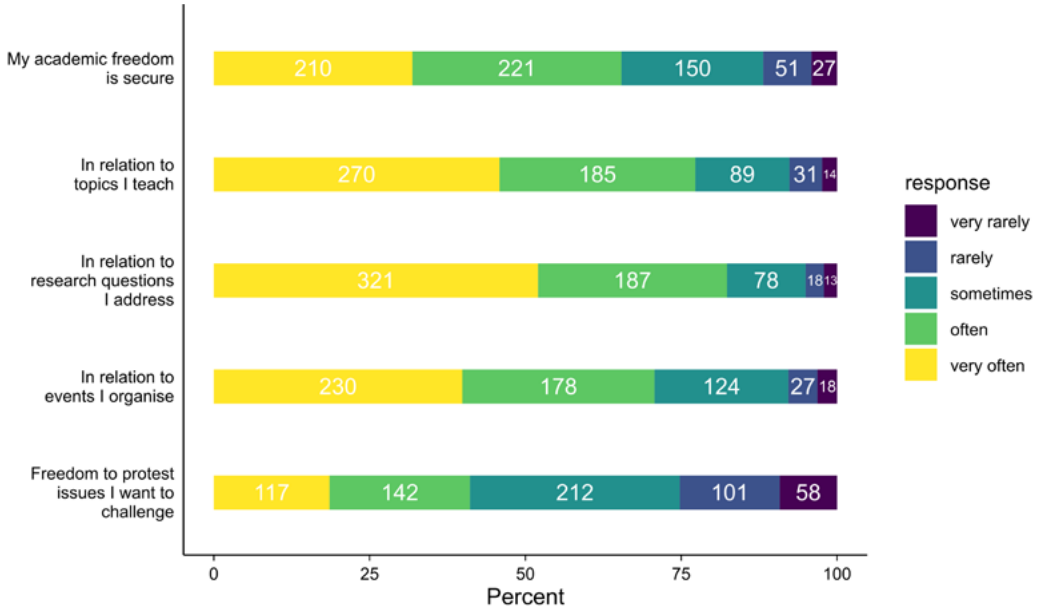
We asked academic participants about their degree of confidence in the security of their academic freedom and freedom of expression in their recent working life. Across the five items, 2,061 of the 3,072 ratings in the five frequency categories shown were 'often' or 'very often' (67%; Figure 17). This pooled percentage counts ratings rather than individual respondents and excludes 'not applicable' and unanswered items. The individual-item percentages reported below use the overall question sample of 667 academic respondents.

Figure 17: Academic Staff's Confidence in their Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Overall



The largest single response category was *very often*. Breaking responses down by item, respondents felt confident (*very often* and *often*) in relation to the **research questions** they address (76% or n=508), the **topics they teach** (68% or n=455), the **events they organise** (61% or n=408) and about whether they perceive their academic freedom is **secure in general** (65% or n=431). The item that showed the least confidence concerned having the **freedom to protest** when issues arise that they want to challenge, with participants saying they only *sometimes* feel confident (32% or n=212), *rarely* feel confident (15% or n=101), or *very rarely* feel confident (9% or n=58) in this regard.

Figure 18: Academic Staff's Confidence in their Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, in relation to Different Aspects of their work[14]

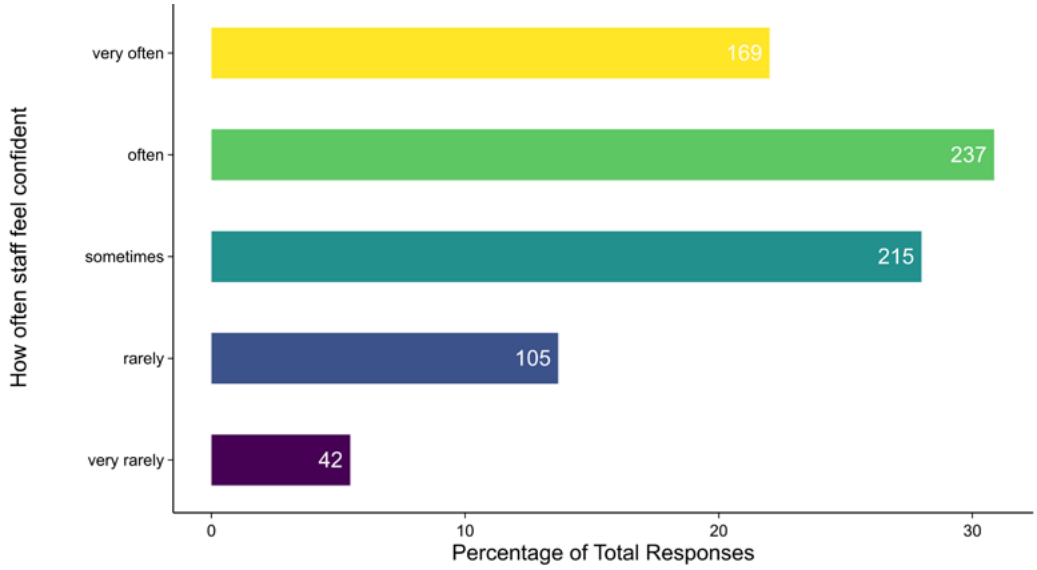


Professional Services: Question 4.1

456 participant responses.

This question asked Professional Services staff, and those who selected 'Other' for their job role, if they felt confident about their right to freedom of expression in their recent working life. Again, this pooled percentage counts ratings rather than individual respondents and excludes 'not applicable' and unanswered items. Across the two items, 19% of the ratings shown in Figure 19 indicated confidence rarely or very rarely (147 of 768 ratings). The two most frequently selected categories were 'often' and 'sometimes'.

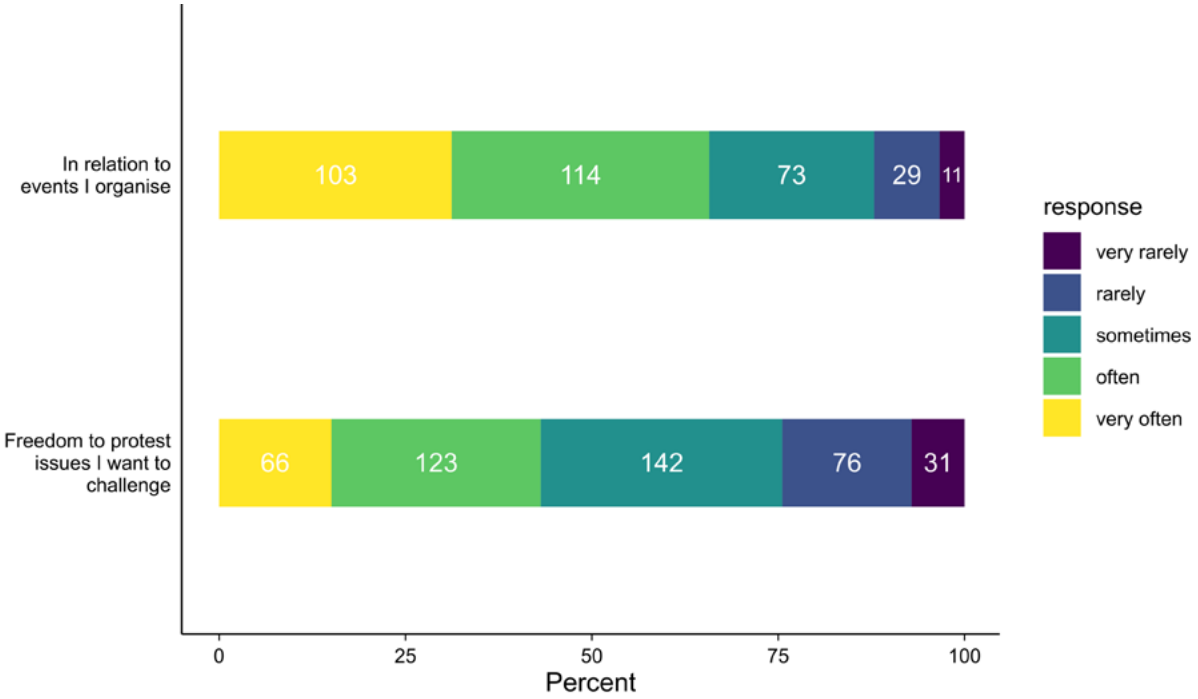
Figure 19: Professional Services Staff's Confidence in their Freedom of Expression Overall



14 Note: The chart shows the percentage distribution among the five frequency categories displayed. 'Not applicable' and missing answers are not represented in the bars. Percentages reported in the text for Question 3.1 use the overall question sample of 667 academic respondents. Consequently, the chart percentages and those reported in the text use different denominators.

Breaking responses down by item, 48% of respondents reported confidence around the **events that they organise** (*very often* or *often*, n=217), and 41% reported confidence in having **freedom to protest** when issues arose that they wanted to challenge (*very often* or *often*, n=189).

Figure 20: Professional Services Staff's Confidence in their Freedom of Expression in Relation to Different Aspects of their Work



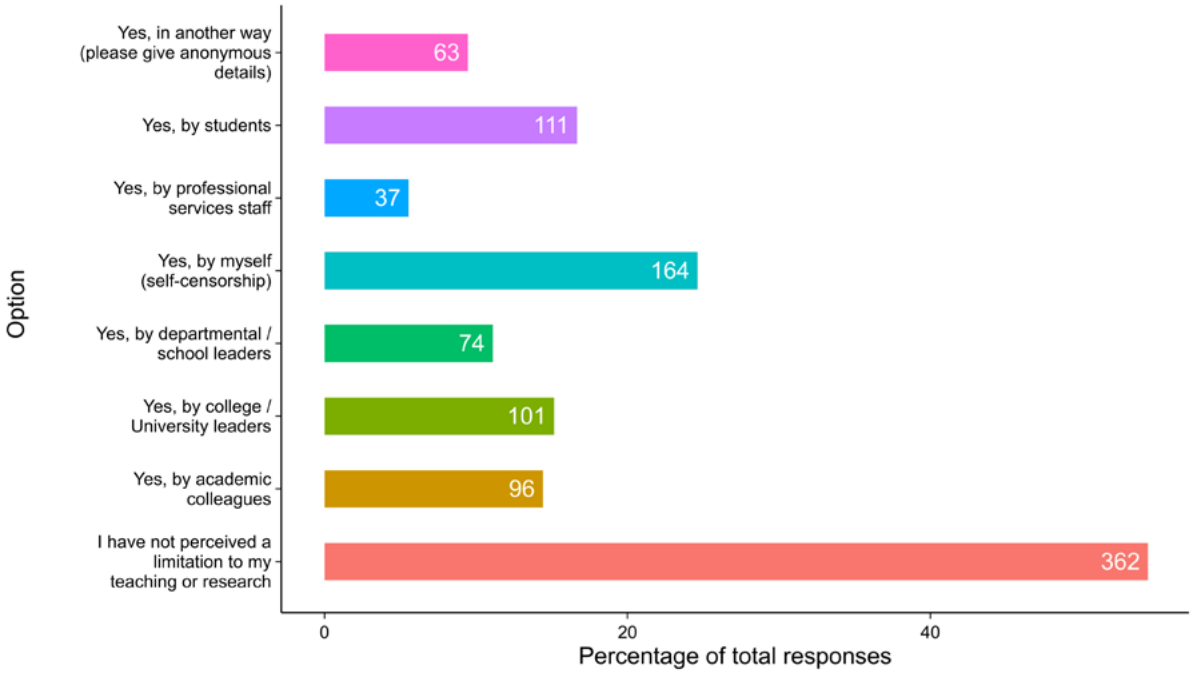
Note: Percentages in this chart are calculated separately for each activity, using the total responses in the five frequency categories shown. The results paragraph for Question 4.1 uses all 456 Professional Services and 'Other' respondents as its denominator. For example, the 217 respondents reporting confidence 'often' or 'very often' in holding events represent 66% of the 330 responses shown for that activity, but 48% of the overall sample of 456.

Academic: Question 3.2

666 participant responses, yes / no checkboxes

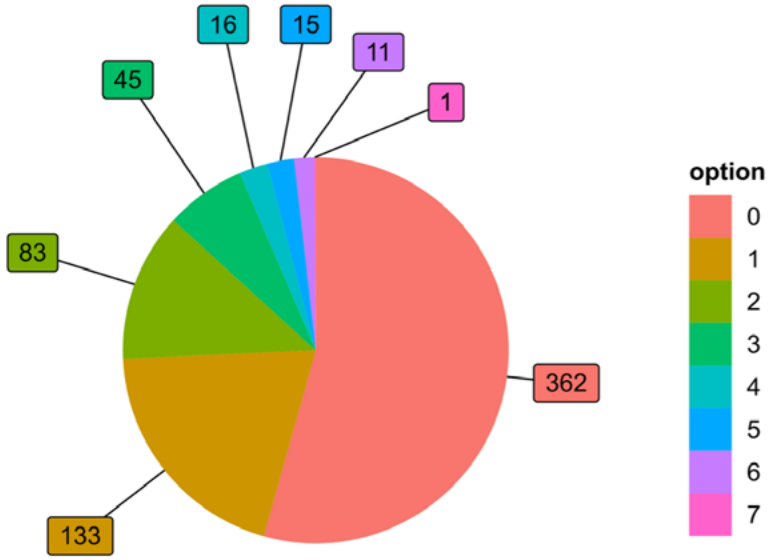
This question asked academic staff whether, in their recent working life, they had perceived a limitation to their teaching or research on controversial topics from any of the listed sources. The majority, 54%, said they had perceived **no such limitation** (n=362). Self-censorship was the most frequently selected source of perceived limitation, reported by 164 respondents (25% of all 666 respondents answering this question). The other actors that might impose limits all scored fairly low: students (17% or n=111), followed by College or **University leaders** (15% or n=101), academic **colleagues** (14% or n=96), and department or **school leaders** (11% or n=74). The other available response items both received less than 10% endorsement.

Figure 21: Academic Staff Perceptions of Limitations to their Teaching or Research on Controversial Topics, by Source



In this question, respondents could select all items that applied. To examine whether a larger number of people had perceived one type of restriction each, or a smaller number of people had perceived multiple restrictions, we calculated the proportion of respondents selecting one, two, three items and so on, up to the maximum of seven available items. This breakdown is shown in Figure 22 and shows a steadily decreasing number of people reporting a perceived restriction from multiple groups:

Figure 22: Academic Staff Perception of Limits on Teaching and Research on Controversial Topics, Number of Options Selected



Based on the 666 academic respondents who answered Question 3.2. Numbers in the legend indicate how many sources of limitation were selected; slice labels show respondent counts. Zero denotes an explicit response of no perceived limitation.

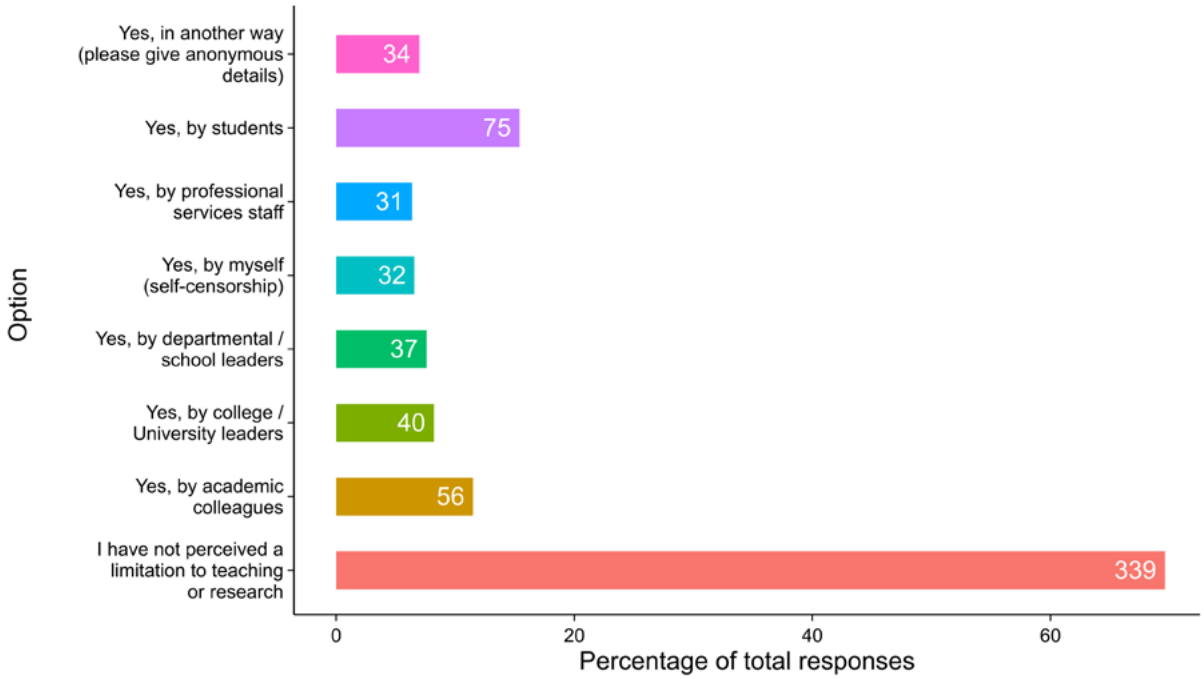
Only 63 participants selected the 'Other' category for this question, and many of those people chose not to provide further details. Exemplar responses when additional detail was given include references to influence from external bodies: *'By funders due to the nature of the funding landscape'* [A] and *'I teach with the university in another country where there is a level of state-censorship'* [A]. There was also reference to: *'a general chilling atmosphere around some controversial issues'* [A] – specific examples cited more than once included Israel-Palestine and sex and gender. There was also some concern that the current *'agenda of cuts'* [A] would infringe on academic freedom.

Professional Services: Question 4.2

487 participant responses

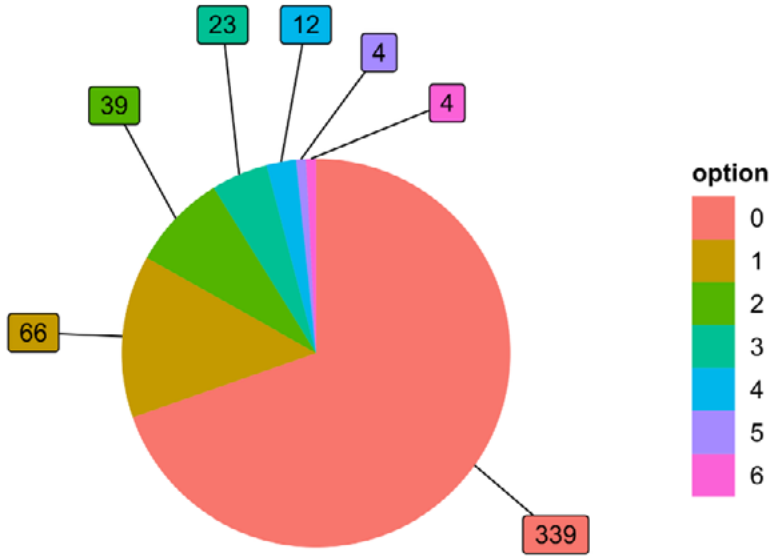
This question asked Professional Services and 'Other' staff if they had perceived a limitation to someone's teaching or research on controversial topics. Again, a large majority, 70%, said that they had perceived **no such limitation** (n=339). Of the actors who might limit someone's teaching or research, the highest-endorsed group was **students** (15% or n=75), followed by academic **colleagues** (12% or n=56). The other five available items all received less than 10% endorsement.

Figure 23: Professional Services Staff Perceptions of Limitations to Someone's Teaching or Research on Controversial Topics



Again, Figure 24 shows a steadily decreasing number of people reporting a perceived restriction from multiple groups. As before, very few participants cited 'other' influences, though one exemplar is a reference to external bodies: *'outside campaign groups or activists'* [PS].

Figure 24: Professional Services Staff Perception of Limits on Someone's Teaching and Research on Controversial Topics, Number of Options Selected



Based on the 487 Professional Services and 'Other' respondents who answered Question 4.2. Numbers in the legend indicate how many sources of limitation were selected; slice labels show respondent counts. Zero denotes an explicit response of no perceived limitation.

Academic: Question 3.3

650 participant responses.

This question asked Academic staff what types of activity or output might have been subject to limitations. Again, most said they had **not perceived any limitations** (63% or n=408). Within the perceived limitations, the ones that showed slightly greater incidence, were in a lecture or **teaching materials** (18% or n=119) and in **internal University communications** (13% or n=82). Other available items all received less than 10% endorsement.

Figure 25: Academic Staff Perceptions of Limitations to their Teaching or Research on Controversial Topics, by Activity or Output

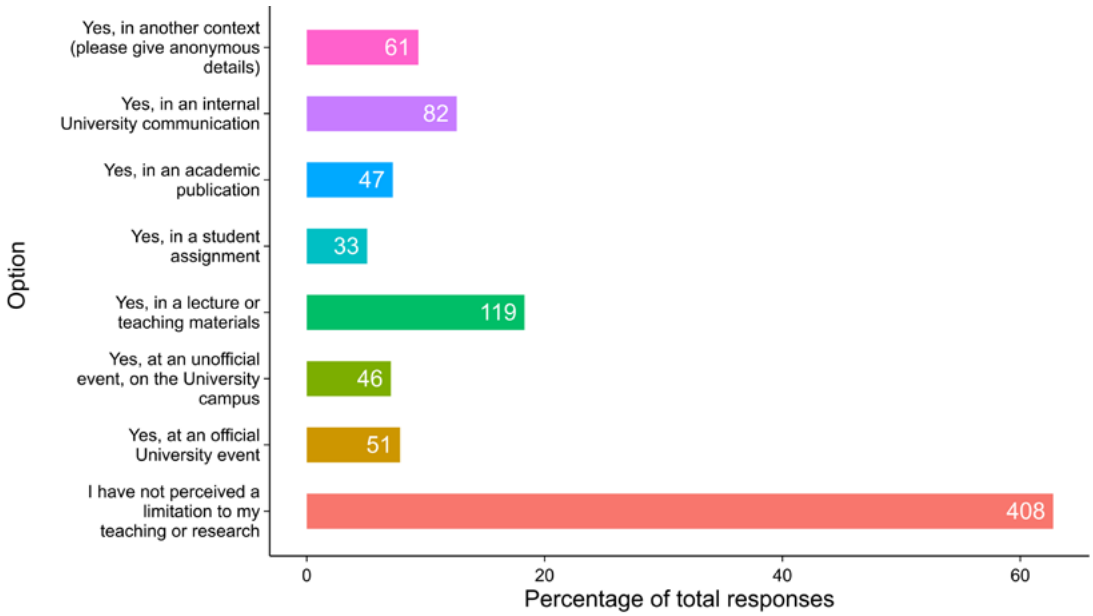
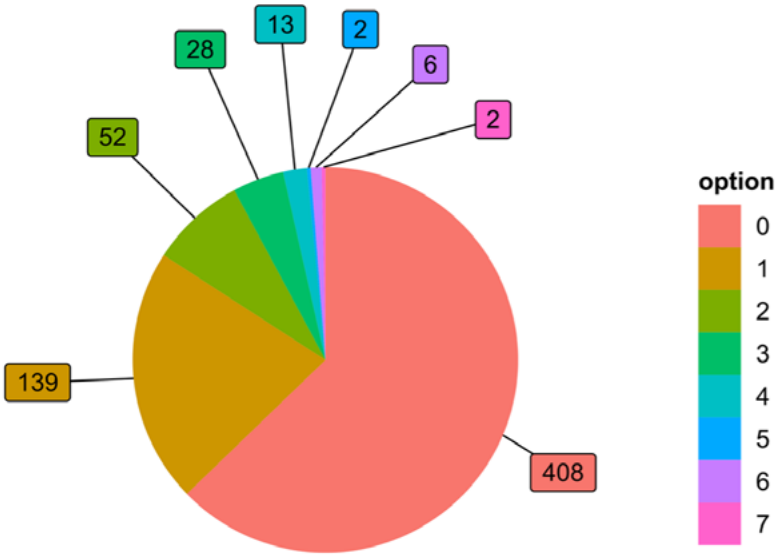


Figure 26 shows the distribution of respondents according to the number of types of activity or output in which they perceived a limitation.

Figure 26: Academic Staff Perception of Limits on their Teaching or Research on Controversial Topics, by Activity or Output, Number of Options Selected



Based on the 650 academic respondents who answered Question 3.3. Numbers in the legend indicate how many types of activity or output were selected as contexts of perceived limitation; slice labels show respondent counts. Zero denotes an explicit response of no perceived limitation.

Once more, a small minority selected 'other' contexts of limitation and even fewer chose to provide further details. Exemplars which were provided included reference to external forces once more, e.g., *'social media'* [A]. Respondents also noted the impact of oversight structures; for example: *'In organising and planning courses. Some of our regulatory structures remove my freedom to teach and assess work...'* [A] and *'Opposition to my proposed research by research ethics committees on grounds of "risk" that are ...more institutional and reputational than actual risks to participants'* [A]. Finally, once again there was concern about the impact of budget cuts on perceived academic freedom: *'Currently courses are being cut back across the university in an effort to cut costs. This is a limitation to my teaching and research'* [A].

Professional Services: Question 4.3

478 participant responses

In terms of the activity or output where the limitation might be felt, Professional Services and 'Other' staff again said in the majority that they had **not perceived any limitations** (73% or n=348). The activities or outputs that showed somewhat higher perception as having some limitations imposed were **official University events** at 12% (n=59). Other available items all received less than 10% endorsement.

Figure 27: Professional Services Staff Perceptions of Limitations to Someone's Teaching or Research on Controversial Topics, by Activity or Output

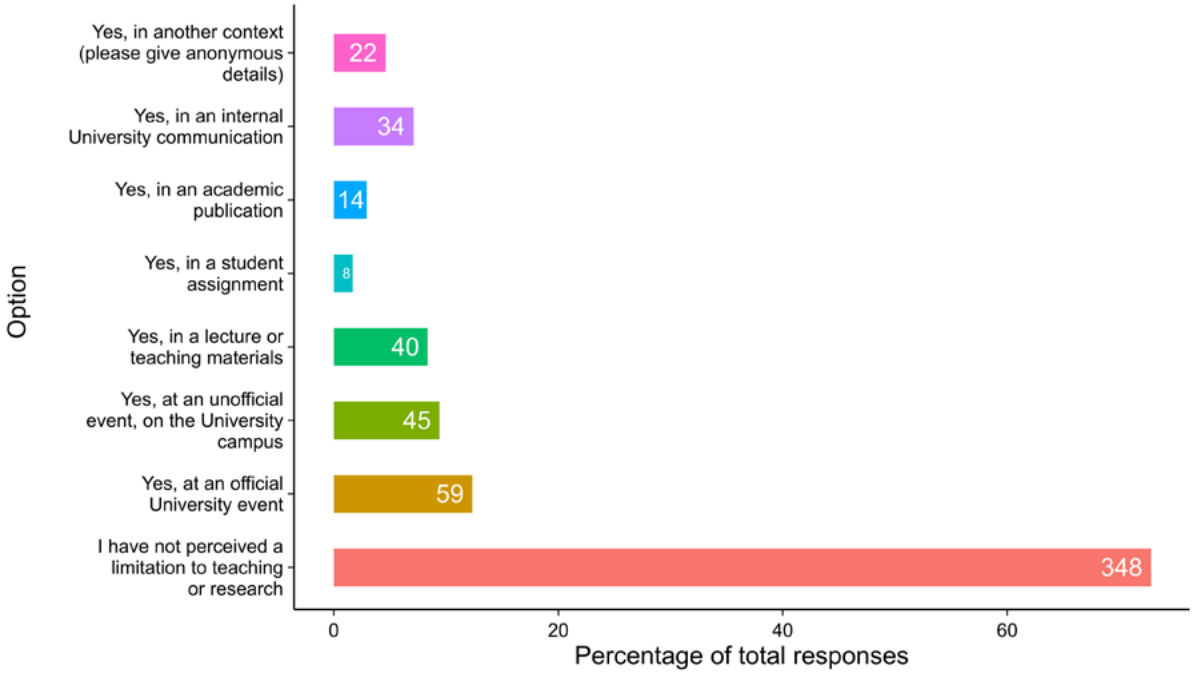
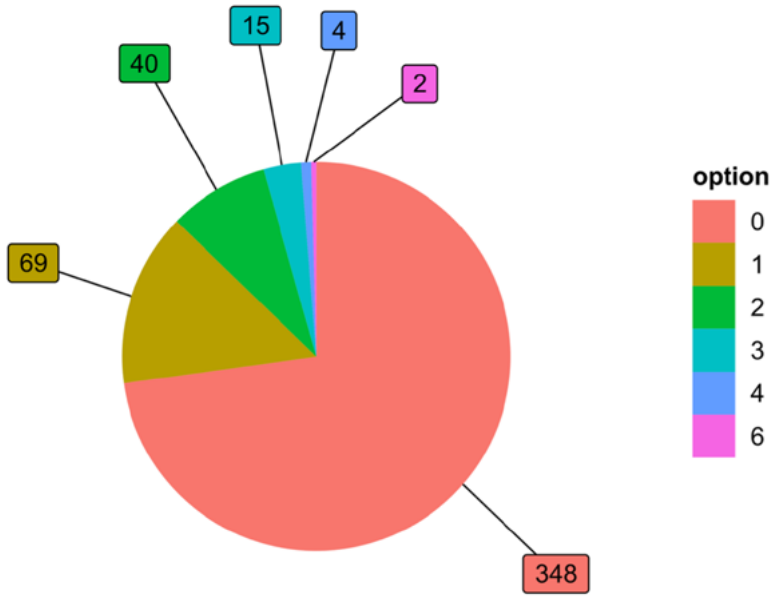


Figure 28 shows the distribution of respondents according to the number of types of activity or output in which they perceived a limitation. As previously, very few people provided 'other' category responses though one exemplar also referenced regulatory frameworks, apparently favourably: *'The kinds of events we can support depend on the subject matter and decisions are made to prioritise the safety of our staff, students and attendees'* [PS].

Figure 28: Professional Services Staff Perception of Limits on Someone's Teaching or Research on Controversial Topics, by Activity or Output, Number of Options Selected



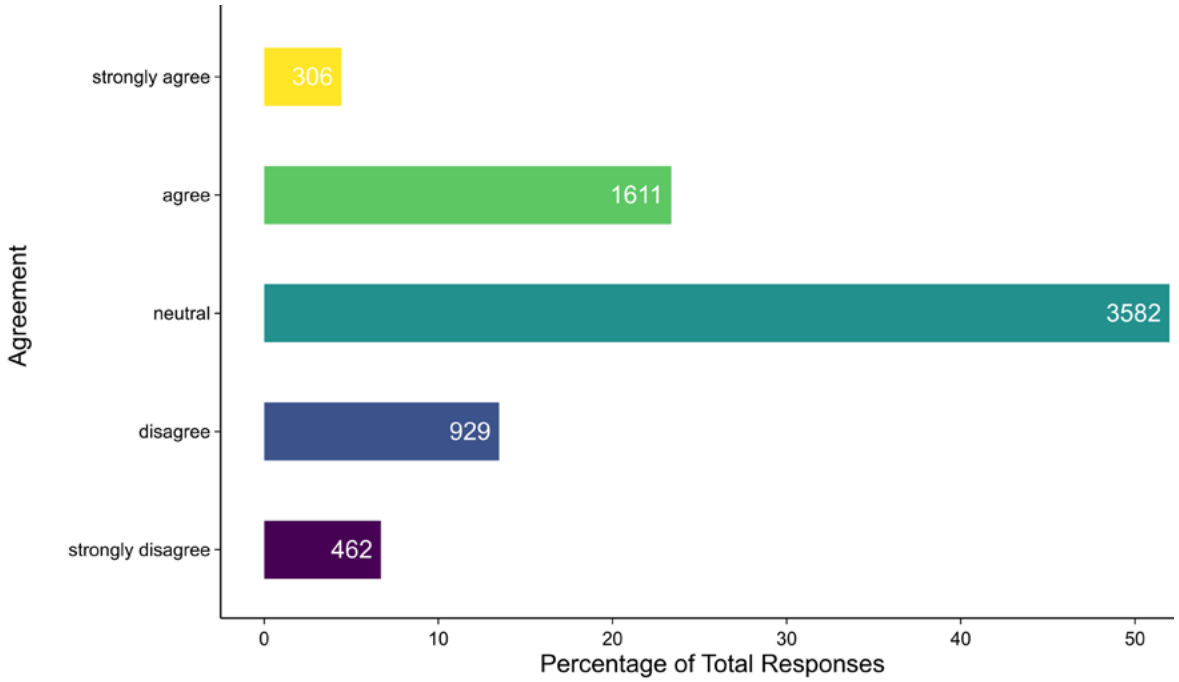
Based on the 478 Professional Services and 'Other' respondents who answered Question 4.3. Numbers in the legend indicate how many types of activity or output were selected as contexts of perceived limitation; slice labels show respondent counts. Zero denotes an explicit response of no perceived limitation.

Question 5.1

1,162 participant responses

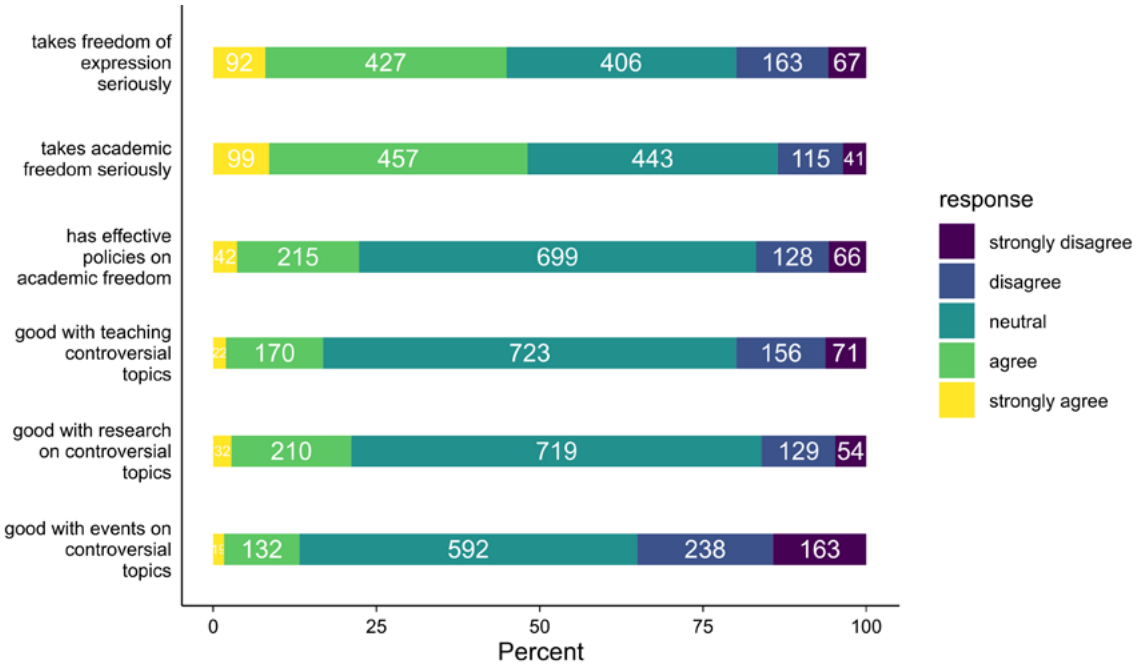
This question asked all participants what they thought about the University of Edinburgh's approach to academic freedom and freedom of expression. Summing responses across all items in this question, the most common response was neutral at 52% (3,582 responses). Percentages reported in the text below use the number of answers to each individual item: 1,155 for taking academic freedom seriously; 1,155 for taking freedom of expression seriously; 1,150 for effective policies; 1,142 for teaching; 1,144 for research; and 1,144 for events. The overall summary pools 6,890 answers across these six items.

Figure 29: Staff Views on the University's Policies on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Overall



Breaking down responses by item, respondents agreed most (*strongly agree* or *agree*) that the University **takes academic freedom seriously** (48% or n=556) and that it **takes freedom of expression seriously** (45% or n=519). It was less clear whether they felt the University does a good job when it comes to the **teaching of controversial topics**, with the majority giving a *neutral* response (63% or n=723). Similarly, when it comes to **research on controversial topics**, *neutral* was the majority response (63% or n=719). On the question of whether the University does a good job when it comes to **events about controversial topics**, the majority response was still *neutral* (52% or n=592) but a reasonable minority also *disagree* (21%, n=238) or *strongly disagree* (14% or n=163). On the question of whether the University has **effective policies** to protect academic freedom, 61% of responses were neutral (n=699) showing slightly more agreement at 22% (or n=257) as opposed to disagreement at 17% (or n=194).

Figure 30: Staff Views on the University's Policies on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, by item



Note: Percentages in this chart and the preceding results paragraph use the number answering each individual item. Labels within the bars show response counts.

Questions 5.2 and 5.3

625 participant responses. Open text answer.

Framework analysis of open-text responses about what the University should do next combined responses in relation to questions about academic freedom and freedom of expression, because no systematic differences were apparent. We identified five major categories of response. The first two relate to the need to increase protections – some flagging the rights of minoritised groups and some concerned for protections for academics expressing controversial views. Respondents highlighted the need for policy developments and better communication across the University. And finally, there was a strong theme of concern around the interaction of freedoms with the University's current strategic approach to financial sustainability – detailed further below. Throughout these responses, examples relating to views on Israel-Palestine and on sex and gender were frequently raised.

Protect the Rights of Minority Groups

Responses within this class related to calls for the University to do more to protect the rights of minority and stigmatised groups, especially in relation to LGBTQ+ peoples. Participants expressed that the language of academic freedom has often been co-opted by bad faith actors to promote bigotry and hate speech: *'Recognise how concerns around academic freedom have been co-opted by some parties on the reactionary right'* [A], *'stop platforming people at events designed to question the existence of trans people'* [PS]. Respondents referred

to the University's screening of the film *Adult Human Female*. Respondents recommended that any policy on freedom of expression and academic freedom should be situated within a context of harm reduction: *'There has to be a moral stance about who is hurt or not hurt, and that favours inclusivity and protecting people at risk. I do not think that 'academic freedom' should be used as a way to protect hate speech'* [A].

Other responses within this class related to student protests. Respondents called for the University to better support students' right to protest as part of protecting academic freedom. Some described the University's responses to student protests in support of Palestine as an affront to academic freedom: *'The university needs to stop persecuting students who stand up for legitimate causes like boycott, disinvestment, and sanction on Israel'* [A]. Related to this point, multiple respondents noted that protecting academic freedom and freedom of expression would require divestment from companies that profit from ongoing conflict and de-adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism: *'break strong ties with companies and government that do not improve these liberties'* [A].

Protect Academics Speaking on Controversial Topics

These responses related to calls for the University to more boldly support staff and invited speakers discussing controversial topics. Participants expressed that the University needs to address protests and attempts to silence or intimidate people speaking on controversial topics, and that the University's failure to do so had created a culture of self-censorship. Respondents within this class discussed fears of 'cancellation' when discussing their views: *'At present there is a great deal of self-censorship with regards to events dealing with controversial matters. They are not held, are held outwith the University premises, are held with severely restricted attendance lists'* [PS], *'There is always the worry of being cancelled'* [A]. Respondents recommended that the University should proactively hold debates on controversial issues and foster a culture in which people felt free to discuss issues regardless of controversy. Multiple respondents specifically highlighted protests against the screening of the film Adult Human Female and the renaming of the David Hume Tower as threats against academic freedom.

Notably there is a conflict between responses classified within this class and responses classified within the 'Protect the Rights of Minority Groups' class, exposing a clear division in where respondents perceive protections are most needed. These calls for stronger protection sit alongside the quantitative finding that a majority of academic respondents reported no perceived limitation on their teaching or research on controversial topics, while 46% reported at least one such limitation (Question 3.2). Support for the airing of controversial views is also compatible with concerns about whether those freedoms are adequately protected in practice.

Development of New Policies

Responses classified here related to suggestions for the implementation of new policies related to academic freedom and freedom of expression. A repeated suggestion was for the creation of a clear and impartial process to handle conflicts surrounding academic freedom: *'When concerns arise […] there should be a clear, fair, and impartial process for raising them'* [A]. Respondents also called for a thorough review of existing policies on academic freedom and for the involvement of the Academic Senate in developing new policies: *'Academic freedom is a critical issue that requires the governance of the Academic Senate'* [A]. A number of respondents also suggested that the University should adopt a policy of institutional neutrality on controversial issues.

Communication

Responses within this class related to the need for more clarity on new and existing policies regarding academic freedom and freedom of expression. A recurring theme within this class was that participants had no knowledge of the University's existing policies or work being done on these topics. Respondents suggested that efforts needed to be made to ensure that everyone – including academic staff, professional services staff, and students – were aware of the University's policies and procedures. It was emphasised that information on policies needed to be clear, transparent, and easily accessible: *'Communicate with staff, clearly, what "Academic Freedom'" actually is, with examples'* [PS], *'Make students – and staff – more aware of the importance and definition of academic freedom'* [A].

Respondents recommended that the concept of academic freedom should become a key part of the University's training and academic development: *'Provide a mandatory short course on LEARN to illuminate these key points'* [PS], *'a CPD course or similar could be offered if it isn't already available'* [PS]. Respondents also recommended continued engagement across the University on the topic of academic freedom through hosting workshops and lectures with both staff and students.

Job Security and Managerial Influence

The final class of responses related to the need to improve job security and anxieties about managerial influence on teaching and research. Respondents stated that a lack of job security impacts academic freedom through making people less likely to speak up on potentially controversial issues: *'When people are very worried about this [keeping their job], they will be less likely to speak up and cause controversy'* [A], *'the attack on academic freedom right now comes from the senior management team, who are creating insecurity around academic freedom by being untransparent about what is going on'* [A].

Respondents expressed a lack of faith in current University leadership to protect academic freedom. These respondents suggested a need to restructure the governance of the University and address issues within upper management of the University: *'For the university to take a trustworthy stance on freedom of expression, the leadership who speak for the University have to be trusted'* [A], *'The structure of governance at universities in Scotland should be reformed so that a majority of court members are elected by staff and students'* [A].

Discussion

Headline Results

The survey found substantial confidence among respondents in their understanding of academic freedom and freedom of expression. Most academic respondents also reported feeling confident often or very often about their academic freedom across the teaching, research and events items. Among the 666 academic respondents answering Question 3.2, 54% (n=362) reported no perceived limitation on their teaching or research on controversial topics, while 46% (n=304) reported at least one limitation. The survey drew 1948 responses from the 14357 staff invited, a response rate of 13.6%. The direction of any non-response bias is unknown, and staff who feel constrained in expressing themselves may be among those least likely to complete a survey on this subject; this finding should be read with that in mind. Although the overall impression is of confidence in this space, there is also evidence across multiple questions that a minority of respondents felt neutral or unclear about specific matters. It is important to have captured this perspective since it would have been easy for those respondents to have simply disregarded the survey invitation.

Confidence varied across the activities considered. Among both academic and Professional Services respondents, freedom to protest attracted the lowest proportion of 'often' or 'very often' confidence ratings (Figures 17–20). These findings describe respondents' confidence in exercising their freedoms; they do not establish whether infringements of rights occurred. In addition, examination of whether individual people have experienced multiple constraints (e.g. from different University actors or in different contexts) suggests that this was a minority experience, reported by between 13% and 26% of those asked, depending on the question (Figures 22, 24, 26 and 28). Of the minority who reported any such perception, the largest group selected a single example, with diminishing numbers reporting across multiple scenarios (Figures 22, 24, 26, 28).

Among academic respondents, self-censorship and students were the most frequently selected sources of perceived limitation on teaching or research on controversial topics (Figure 21). In the separate question about activities and outputs, lectures or teaching materials were the most frequently selected context of perceived limitation (Figure 25). This may reflect generational differences and the rapidly evolving nature of what it is "OK" to say, and staff working to modify a potential gap between their views or language and the expectations of their students. However, this is conjecture and follow-up qualitative data collection would add value to explore these phenomena further.

Specific Findings

The survey exposes some contrasts in staff knowledge and views about academic freedom and freedom of expression. Analysis of proximity of staff-provided definitions to the official language of University policy showed that staff language sat moderately close to institutional language, but a wide spread. This may suggest some degree of variation in understanding between members of staff, though the measure captures the proximity of staff wording to the policy text rather than, in itself, the accuracy of staff understanding. Meanwhile, for freedom of expression, staff responses showed a less close match to the official definition, but were also more tightly packed. The similarity scores for freedom of expression were more tightly clustered than those for academic freedom, indicating less variation in alignment with the respective University definition. This does not, by itself, establish that respondents' definitions were similar to one another. Respondents reported less agreement with knowing their rights in relation to freedom of expression than with understanding the concept of academic freedom (Question 2.1). Among academic respondents, confidence in freedom to protest was lower than confidence in each of the four academic-freedom items concerning its general security, teaching, research and events (Question 3.1).

Some survey questions were designed to help us understand attitudes of our staff body to occasions where someone exercises their right to academic freedom, or freedom of expression, by expressing a controversial view. The responses indicate substantial support among respondents for the exercise of academic freedom even when it has the potential to shock or offend. The survey measures attitudes at a single point in time and cannot establish what has produced them, so we draw no conclusion here about the contribution of institutional action.

Digging into the detail a little more, the majority of staff felt it was important for an expression of these freedoms to avoid causing non-physical harm, and to meet minimum standards of scholarly rigour. There was also substantial majority support for the ideas that teaching, research or events on controversial topics should be expressed by individuals with relevant expertise, incorporate a range of views, and take account of others' wellbeing. A reasonable minority also felt that the potential negative effects of an exercise of academic freedom or freedom of expression would be worse if the negatively-affected people were from a minority or under-represented group. This pattern shows recognition of the challenges of maintaining rights in a University community while fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for people from diverse backgrounds. That said, only 10% of respondents (n=116) selected community harmony as an expectation when exercising these freedoms. This suggests that respondents gave community harmony less priority than considerations such as scholarly rigour and others' wellbeing. It does not establish that respondents regarded harmony as unimportant or incompatible with academic freedom and freedom of expression, because the question did not ask why particular expectations were selected or left unselected. When it comes to protest, there was general support for the right to protest, but a strong preference within that for public criticism or opting out, rather than disruption of events or classes. The qualitative findings identify respondents' concerns and priorities. Calls for policies, guidance or support may reflect gaps in provision, limited

awareness of existing measures, or concerns about their effectiveness. The recommendations should therefore be considered alongside existing University initiatives, with attention to their visibility, accessibility, and effectiveness.

Limitations and Reflections

The recruitment strategy reached staff of all grades, role-types and parts of the University. Recorded response rates by area ranged from 3.1% to 11.8%, but these comparisons are incomplete because 39.3% of respondents (n=765) did not state their unit and a further 34 selected 'Other'. The distributions of responses suggest we heard from people with a range of views on the topics covered, including those whose opinions were neutral on any given item, although this does not establish that the range among respondents matches the range across the staff body. In a necessarily controversial space, it is essential that these central perspectives are captured to avoid mis-representing the collective balance of opinion.

Despite the effectiveness of the strategy, we did find that a large number of people dropped out at the mid-point of the survey. This was the only compulsory question in the survey, which asked people to state whether they were academic or professional services staff. It was necessary to permit branching and tailored questions for academic versus professional services staff. There are lots of reasons why this drop-out might have happened. Some staff might have wanted to skip the question and been unable to do so. Others may have wrongly assumed that this signalled the end of the survey (or the final, demographic section) and chosen not to continue. Nonetheless, 1,221 respondents answered the role question, providing a substantial sample for the subsequent sections, although the number answering each later question varied.

We asked all staff whether they had the right to academic freedom and to freedom of expression. The pattern of responses was mixed, and we particularly note the large number of Professional Services staff who stated that they did have academic freedom. This should not be read straightforwardly as misunderstanding. Scottish legislation defines those whose academic freedom the University must aim to uphold by reference to engagement in teaching, the provision of learning, or research rather than by employment category, and the University's own Ordinances and conditions of employment adopt the same test. Staff whose formal role is designated professional services may deliver teaching and student supervision or contribute to research, and may therefore fall within scope. Professional services status does not of itself exclude a member of staff, and academic qualifications or scholarly background alone do not of themselves confer academic freedom. A clean boundary based on job category is therefore not available, and this survey was not designed to establish which respondents fall within the functional test.

One final limitation concerns the interpretation of the substantial proportion of neutral responses across multiple questions. We did not ask people directly about whether their research or teaching, or events they host, raise issues of academic freedom – in other words, we didn't explicitly ask about whether people work on controversial topics. There's an important future need to distinguish between the views of people who do cover controversial matters – for whom academic freedom may be a highly pertinent right – and those whose work never or rarely raises the need to invoke that right.

Recommendations

Recommendation one

The University could do more to support understanding across the community of the distinction between 'academic freedom' and the related concept of 'freedom of expression', with particular attention to the proportion of staff who believe that they hold neither.

Of those answering, 66% understood that they hold academic freedom and 73% that they hold freedom of expression, while 17% believed they held neither (Question 1.8; Figure 9). Knowing one's rights in relation to freedom of expression was the weakest item in the knowledge block, with 54% disagreeing, strongly disagreeing, or neutral (Question 2.1; Figure 11).

The survey did not establish why respondents selected 'neither'. Their answers may reflect misunderstanding of formal entitlement, perceived lack of protection in practice, or another interpretation of the question. Communication addressed to all staff, rather than framed principally around academic practice, could help clarify entitlement, while concerns about protection in practice would also require attention through the processes discussed in Recommendation six. Such communication could explain what each right protects and where its legal limits fall, make clear the basis on which academic freedom applies (Recommendation 2), and emphasise that holding one right does not displace the other.

Recommendation two

The University could provide greater clarity about the basis on which academic freedom applies, including engagement in teaching, the provision of learning, or research.

Of 486 Professional Services respondents, 226 (47%) reported understanding that they hold academic freedom (Question 1.8; Table 4). This finding suggests that job category alone may not provide a sufficiently clear basis for communicating who may exercise academic freedom, particularly where Professional Services staff are also engaged in teaching, learning or research.

Recommendation three

Future qualitative work should investigate what staff mean when they report self-censorship.

Self-censorship was reported as a perceived limitation on teaching or research on controversial topics by 25% (n=164) of the 666 academic respondents who answered Question 3.2 and was selected more frequently than any other listed source of limitation.

Of all 666 academic respondents answering this question, 362 (54%) reported no perceived limitation. Among the remaining 304 respondents who reported at least one limitation, 164 (54%) selected self-censorship (Question 3.2; Figure 21).

Future work could usefully distinguish appropriate scholarly judgement from ordinary professional restraint, and both from circumstances in which staff genuinely feel unable to speak.

Recommendation four

The University could provide greater clarity about the forms of protest in which staff may engage.

Freedom to protest was the weakest confidence item for academic staff: 32% (n=212) felt confident only sometimes, 15% (n=101) rarely and 9% (n=58) very rarely, so 56% of the 667 respondents fell at sometimes or below. On the other four items in the block, confidence (often or very often) ran between 61% and 76%: research questions 76% (n=508), topics taught 68% (n=455), academic freedom secure in general 65% (n=431), and events organised 61% (n=408) (Question 3.1; Figure 18). Protest was also the weaker of the two items for Professional Services staff, at 41% (n=189), against 48% (n=217) for the events they organise, on a base of 456 (Question 4.1; Figure 20).

Staff nonetheless hold clear views on what legitimate protest looks like. Of 1,175 respondents, 71% (n=830) judged public criticism of institutions justified and 58% (n=685) judged opting out of workplace events justified, while 66% (n=773) judged the disruption of academic classes unjustified and 56% (n=659) said the same of the disruption of campus events (Question 2.7; Figure 16).

Recommendation five

The University could make more visible the criteria by which it approves and supports events on contested topics.

Of the six statements in Question 5.1, the statement about the University's handling of events on controversial topics attracted the highest proportion of disagreement: 21% (n=238) disagreed and 14% (n=163) strongly disagreed that the University does a good job on events about controversial topics, with 52% (n=592) neutral, leaving around 13% in agreement (Question 5.1; Figure 30).

Staff are clear about what they think should matter. Of 1,183 respondents, 92% (n=1,089) endorsed a minimum standard of scholarly rigour; relevant expertise, range of views and wellbeing were each endorsed at around 60%; and the prioritisation of community harmony by 10% (n=116) (Question 2.5; Figure 14). Future planning around contested events could usefully make these foundations more visible.

Recommendation six

The University could do more to make its existing policy visible and accessible, alongside providing a clear route through which concerns can be raised and decisions explained.

On whether the University has effective policies to protect academic freedom, 61% (n=699) were neutral, against 22% (n=257) agreeing and 17% (n=194) disagreeing (Question 5.1; Figure 30). The open text records a recurring theme of no knowledge of existing policy, repeated calls for a clear, fair and impartial process for raising concerns, and calls for the involvement of the Academic Senate in policy development (Questions 5.2 and 5.3).

Taken together, these findings suggest that visibility and accessibility may be at least as important as the existence of policy itself.

Recommendation seven

The survey should also be replicated with students in order to examine their views on these matters and provide a more complete picture of the University community.

The present survey captures staff perspectives only. A corresponding student survey is due to launch shortly and will allow the University to examine where staff and student perspectives converge or differ, providing a more complete evidence base for future policy and practice.

Conclusion

This survey set out to establish what staff at the University of Edinburgh understood by academic freedom and freedom of expression. Furthermore, it considered what they expect of colleagues exercising those rights, what they have experienced in their own working lives, and how they view the University's handling of these matters. By including Professional Services staff alongside academic colleagues, it responds directly to the call for empirical work covering all categories of university staff (Jiang & Devaney, 2025).

The picture that emerges is of respondents who generally expressed confidence about their own position and support for the exercise of these rights by others. Firstly, concerning confidence, most academic respondents reported feeling confident often or very often about their academic freedom in their recent working life: 76% (n=508) felt confident often or very often in relation to the research questions they address, 68% (n=455) in relation to the topics they teach, and 65% (n=431) about the security of their academic freedom in general (Question 3.1). Among the 456 Professional Services and 'Other' respondents answering Question 4.1, 48% (n=217) reported feeling confident often or very often in relation to the events they organise, and 41% (n=189) in relation to freedom to protest. Across the two items, the most frequently selected categories were 'often' and 'sometimes'; a minority of ratings indicated confidence rarely or very rarely.

Secondly, respondents expressed substantial support for academic activity that may cause shock or offence, while also identifying expectations for how it should be conducted. Asked what should be expected of academic activity addressing controversial topics, 92% (n=1,089) identified a minimum standard of scholarly rigour, while only 10% (n=116) selected the expectation that the activity should prioritise community harmony (Question 2.5). Seventy per cent (n=828) disagreed that restrictions to academic freedom should take account of whether an activity causes shock, and 60% (n=710) disagreed that they should take account of whether it causes offence (Question 2.3). On protest, 71% (n=830) regarded public criticism of institutions as justified, while 66% (n=773) regarded the disruption of academic classes as unjustified (Question 2.7). These responses indicate substantial support among respondents for academic activity that may shock or offend, alongside distinctions between forms of protest they regard as justified or unjustified.

Confidence in the security of one's own rights is not universal, however, and the exceptions are specific rather than diffuse. Asked whether they understood themselves to hold these rights, 17% (n=201) of respondents said they believed they held neither (Question 1.8). Among the 666 academic respondents who answered Question 3.2, self-censorship was the most frequently selected source of perceived limitation on teaching or research on controversial topics, at 25% (n=164), compared with 17% (n=111) naming students and 15% (n=101) naming College or University leaders. In the separate question about settings, lectures or teaching materials were the most frequently selected context of perceived limitation, at 18% (n=119) of the 650 respondents to Question 3.3. Confidence was lowest not in research or in the choice of teaching topics but in the freedom to protest, where 32%

(n=212) of academic respondents felt confident only sometimes, 15% (n=101) rarely and 9% (n=58) very rarely (Question 3.1). On the University's handling of events on contested topics, 21% (n=238) of respondents disagreed and 14% (n=163) strongly disagreed that it does a good job; with 52% (n=592) neutral, this leaves around 13% in agreement, making this the statement with the highest proportion of disagreement among the six statements in Question 5.1. These are the points at which attention is warranted, and for the purposes of this report they are more useful to us than the reassuring aggregate.

Respondents were divided about where protection is most needed. One group held that the language of academic freedom has been used to advance hostility towards minority groups, and that protection should extend to those groups. A second group held that staff and invited speakers addressing contested topics are inadequately supported, and that a culture of self-censorship has followed. Both positions were argued with conviction, and in several instances both drew on the same institutional episodes. We do not think this division is one the University can resolve by adopting one account over the other. Alongside these contrasting views, the qualitative responses included calls for clearer communication and fair, impartial processes for raising concerns. These provide practical directions for University action without requiring agreement on every contested issue.

There is a good deal this survey cannot tell us, and we set those limits out above. They should temper the confidence with which our headline findings are read, and they shape the further work we have recommended. The survey gives the University a basis for action grounded in respondents' priorities and experiences. Their answers identify what they value in scholarly work on contested topics, where they draw distinctions between justified and unjustified protest, and where confidence in exercising their freedoms is weakest. The recommendations set out above follow from that.

Appendix A

Invitation email for staff

Dear staff member,

We are contacting you to invite you to take part in an online survey being carried out at the University of Edinburgh about **Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression**.

This survey is open to all types of University staff regardless of role.

If you would like to take part, please click on this link to read more information and the consent statements, and to **start the survey**:

[link]

This is being carried out by the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Working Group. If you would like more information about the group's activities, you can find out more about us here:

Working Group | Academic freedom & freedom of expression | Academic freedom

Participation is voluntary and there are no direct benefits for taking part, however, you can vote at the end of the survey on which of four local charities you want to receive a donation from us. You have been randomly selected as a representative of your part of the university - we hope you will take the time to complete the survey as not everyone has been offered the opportunity to do so. The survey takes **about 8 minutes**. Your email has been randomly generated, and the research team cannot link your responses to this email address. **The survey is anonymous** and you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not wish to answer.

Please do not forward this invitation to anyone else, as the link is unique and non-transferable.

Thanks for your collaboration.

Best regards,
David Smith

Professor David R. Smith | An t-Àrd-Ollamh David R. Smith
Deputy Head, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS) |
Leas-cheannard, Colaiste nan Ealan, nan Daonannachdan agus nan
Saidheans Sòisealta
Convenor, University Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Working Group | Neach-gairm,
Buidheann-obrach Saorsa Acadaimigeach agus Saorsa Labhairt
University of Edinburgh | Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann
UK

Personal Assistant | Nicky Miller | Neach-cuideachaidh Gnìomh | nmiller5@ed.ac.uk
Senior Executive Officer | Àrd-Oifigear Gnìomha | maureen.connolly@ed.ac.uk

Please note this survey is sent from a Qualtrics domain as part of the process of preserving anonymity of responses.

Sample reminder email for staff (template)

Dear staff member,

We recently contacted you about taking part in a survey being carried out at the University of Edinburgh about Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression.

So far, we have invited XXXX people and just YYY have responded. Please help us increase this number if you can!

If you would like to take part, please click on this link to read more information, and then start the survey:

[link]

Please remember not to forward this invitation on to anyone else, as this is a unique, non-transferable link.

Participation is voluntary and there are no direct benefits for taking part, however, you can vote at the end of the survey on which of four local charities you want to receive a donation from us.

Your email has been randomly generated, and the research team cannot link your responses to this email address.

This is your first reminder; we will send one more after this and then stop.

Thanks for your collaboration.

Best regards,

David Smith

Professor David R. Smith | An t-Àrd-Ollamh David R. Smith
Deputy Head, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS) |
Leas-cheannard, Colaiste nan Ealan, nan Daonannachdan agus nan Saidheans Sòisealta
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UK

Personal Assistant | Nicky Miller | Neach-cuideachaidh Gnìomh | nmiller5@ed.ac.uk
Senior Executive Officer | Àrd-Oifigear Gnìomha | maureen.connolly@ed.ac.uk

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Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire below reproduces the survey from Q1.6 onwards, retaining the original Qualtrics question numbering, wording, response options and routing. The original numbering is preserved, including Q2.7 appearing before Q2.6 and the closing data-quality item numbered Q60.

General Understanding

Q1.6 **What is your understanding of "academic freedom"? Please give us your own definition and/or associations.**

Response: open text

Q1.7 **What is your understanding of "freedom of expression"? Please give us your own definition and/or associations.**

Response: open text

Q1.8 **Your academic freedom and freedom of expression. Please select all that you think apply to you.**

- ☐ My understanding is that I have academic freedom (1)
- ☐ My understanding is that I have freedom of expression (2)
- ☐ I believe I have neither of the above (3) [exclusive option]

Q2.1 **Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements relating to your knowledge of academic freedom and freedom of expression.**

Response scale: strongly disagree (1); disagree (2); neutral (3); agree (4); strongly agree (5)

- I am confident that I understand the concept of academic freedom (1)
- I can easily recognise a challenge to academic freedom (2)
- I know the difference between academic freedom and freedom of expression more generally (3)
- I know my rights in relation to freedom of expression (4)

Views on Limitations

Q2.2 **Academic freedom is protected in law. However, there are some specific circumstances where academic activities, such as a lecture, event, or publication, are no longer protected by the law. For example, when an academic activity incites hatred or terrorism, encourages violence, harassment or discrimination, threatens public safety or damages the reputation or rights of others, it may be unlawful. In the next section we are interested in your views on whether you think there should be any other limits to academic freedom, beyond those which already apply in law, e.g. incitement to violence. We're also curious about your views on what might happen if those possible limits were breached. In subsequent questions we refer to these as "reasonable limits". We recognise that different people set limits in different places, or may feel that there should be no limits beyond the law. It is important**

to note that we are only seeking your personal views based on general hypothetical scenarios. These questions and options are not proposals for how any particular issues would be dealt with by the University and should not be understood as taking place in the context of our University or as being subject to any existing University policies. Learning more about your views on the general issue of limits to academic freedom as a concept is the purpose of these questions. Understanding what our community thinks about these matters is important.

Q2.3 **Please share your opinion by rating your level of agreement with these different scenarios: "Any restrictions to academic freedom should take account of whether the academic activity..."**

Response scale: strongly disagree (1); disagree (2); neutral (3); agree (4); strongly agree (5)

- ...causes non-physical harm to people. (1)
- ...causes offence to people. (3)
- ...causes distress to people. (5)
- ...causes shock to people. (7)

Q2.4 **In a scenario where "reasonable limits" are breached, does the nature of the group of people affected by the exercise of academic freedom make a difference in relation to your answers in this survey? Please select all statements with which you agree.**

- ☐ Yes, it is worse when a large number of people are affected (1)
- ☐ Yes, it is worse when a small number of people are affected (2)
- ☐ Yes, it is worse when people from a majority or well-represented background are affected (3)
- ☐ Yes, it is worse when people from a minority or under-represented background are affected (4)
- ☐ No, these things make no difference (5) [exclusive option]

Q2.5 **Please select which of these expectations you believe academics should meet when addressing controversial topics. You can select as many as you wish. "The activity" is broad, and could refer to curriculum content, research topics, campus events or media appearances.**

- ☐ The activity should meet a minimum standard of scholarly rigour (1)
- ☐ The activity should derive from the academic's specific area of scholarly expertise (2)
- ☐ The activity should prioritise community harmony (3)
- ☐ The activity should incorporate a range of views from different sides of a debate (4)
- ☐ The activity should take account of the wellbeing of those exposed to the topic (5)

Q2.7 **An individual at University X wishes to object to the way academic freedom has been exercised. Below are some hypothetical actions they could take. To what extent do you agree that these would be justified?**

Response scale: strongly unjustified (1); somewhat unjustified (2); neutral (3); somewhat justified (4); strongly justified (5)

- Public criticism of institutions (1)
- Disruption of academic classes (2)
- Disruption of campus events (3)
- Opting-out of workplace activities (5)

Q2.6 **If you have any further thoughts on the questions or issues above on the exercise of academic freedom, please share them here:**

Response: open text

Q2.8 **The next part of the survey has slightly different questions depending on your job family. What type of role do you have?**

- ○ Academic (teaching and / or research) (1)
- ○ Professional Services (University administration, support for teaching and / or research) (2)
- ○ Other (please say which) (3)

Routing: respondents selecting Academic received Q3.1-Q3.3. Respondents selecting Professional Services or Other received Q4.1-Q4.3. All respondents then proceeded to Q5.1.

UoE Experiences - Academic branch

Q3.1 **Please tell us about academic freedom and freedom of expression in your recent working life.**

Response scale: very rarely (1); rarely (2); sometimes (3); often (4); very often (5); not applicable (6)

- I feel confident my academic freedom is secure (1)
- I feel confident I have academic freedom in relation to the topics I teach (2)
- I feel confident I have academic freedom in relation to the research questions I address (3)
- I feel confident I have academic freedom in relation to the events I organise (4)
- I feel confident I have freedom to protest when issues arise that I want to challenge (5)

Q3.2 **Have you perceived, in your recent working life, a limitation to your teaching or research on controversial topics by any of the following? You may select all that apply.**

- ☐ I have not perceived a limitation to my teaching or research (1) [exclusive option]
- ☐ Yes, by students (2)
- ☐ Yes, by academic colleagues (3)
- ☐ Yes, by departmental / school leaders (4)
- ☐ Yes, by college / University leaders (5)
- ☐ Yes, by professional services staff (6)
- ☐ Yes, by myself (self-censorship) (7)
- ☐ Yes, in another way (please give anonymous details) (8)

Q3.3 **Have you perceived, in your recent working life, a limitation to your teaching or research on controversial topics in any of the following types of activity or output? You may select all that apply.**

- ☐ I have not perceived a limitation to my teaching or research (1) [exclusive option]
- ☐ Yes, in an academic publication (2)
- ☐ Yes, in a lecture or teaching materials (3)
- ☐ Yes, in an internal University communication (4)
- ☐ Yes, in a student assignment (5)
- ☐ Yes, at an official University event (6)

- ☐ Yes, at an unofficial event, on the University campus (7)
- ☐ Yes, in another context (please give anonymous details) (8)

UoE Experiences - Professional Services and other roles branch

Q4.1 **Please tell us about freedom of expression in your recent working life.**

Response scale: very rarely (1); rarely (2); sometimes (3); often (4); very often (5); not applicable (6)

- I feel confident I have freedom in relation to the events I organise (4)
- I feel confident I have freedom to protest when issues arise that I want to challenge (5)

Q4.2 **Have you perceived, in your recent working life, a limitation to someone's teaching or research on controversial topics by any of the following? You may select all that apply.**

- ☐ I have not perceived a limitation to teaching or research (1) [exclusive option]
- ☐ Yes, by students (2)
- ☐ Yes, by academic colleagues (3)
- ☐ Yes, by departmental / school leaders (4)
- ☐ Yes, by college / University leaders (5)
- ☐ Yes, by professional services staff (6)
- ☐ Yes, by myself (self-censorship) (7)
- ☐ Yes, in another way (please give anonymous details) (8)

Q4.3 **Have you perceived, in your recent working life, a limitation to someone's teaching or research on controversial topics in any of the following types of activity or output? You may select all that apply.**

- ☐ I have not perceived a limitation to teaching or research (1) [exclusive option]
- ☐ Yes, in an academic publication (2)
- ☐ Yes, in a lecture or teaching materials (3)
- ☐ Yes, in an internal University communication (4)
- ☐ Yes, in a student assignment (5)
- ☐ Yes, at an official University event (6)
- ☐ Yes, at an unofficial event, on the University campus (7)
- ☐ Yes, in another context (please give anonymous details) (8)

UoE Policies

Q5.1 **Please rate your agreement with the following statements about the University of Edinburgh's approach to academic freedom and freedom of expression.**

Response scale: strongly disagree (1); disagree (2); neutral (3); agree (4); strongly agree (5)

- The University takes academic freedom seriously (1)
- The University takes freedom of expression seriously (2)
- The University has effective policies to protect academic freedom (3)
- The University does a good job when it comes to the teaching of controversial topics (4)
- The University does a good job when it comes to research on controversial topics (5)
- The University does a good job when it comes to events about controversial topics (6)

Q5.2 **Reflecting on your answers to this survey, what do you think the University should do next, or differently, in relation to academic freedom?**

Response: open text

Q5.3 **Reflecting on your answers to this survey, what do you think the University should do next, or differently, in relation to freedom of expression?**

Response: open text

Demographic Questions

Routing: Q6.1 was displayed only if Q2.8 = Academic (teaching and / or research).

Q6.1 **What type of academic role do you have?**

- ○ Research (1)
- ○ Teaching (2)
- ○ Research and Teaching (3)
- ○ Other (please describe) (4)

Q6.2 **Which college or group are you based at?**

- ○ College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (1)
- ○ College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (2)
- ○ College of Science and Engineering (3)
- ○ University Secretary's Group (4)
- ○ Information Services Group (5)
- ○ Corporate Services Group (6)
- ○ Other (7)

Routing: Q6.3 was displayed only if Q6.2 = College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science.

Q6.3 **Which school are you based in at CAHSS?**

- ○ Business School (1)
- ○ Divinity (2)
- ○ Economics (3)
- ○ Edinburgh College of Art (4)
- ○ Health in Social Science (5)
- ○ History, Classics and Archaeology (6)
- ○ Law (7)
- ○ Literatures, Languages and Cultures (8)
- ○ Moray House School of Education and Sport (9)
- ○ Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences (10)
- ○ Social and Political Science (11)
- ○ Centre for Open Learning (12)
- ○ Edinburgh Futures Institute (13)
- ○ IASH (Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities) (14)

Routing: Q6.4 was displayed only if Q6.2 = College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.

Q6.4 **Which school are you based in at CMVM?**

- ○ Edinburgh Medical School (1)
- ○ Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (2)
- ○ School of Genetics and Cancer (3)
- ○ School of Population Health Sciences (4)
- ○ School of Regeneration and Repair (5)
- ○ School of Neurological and Cardiovascular Sciences (6)

Routing: Q6.5 was displayed only if Q6.2 = College of Science and Engineering.

Q6.5 **Which school are you based in at the College of Science & Engineering?**

- ○ School of Biological Sciences (1)
- ○ School of Chemistry (2)
- ○ School of Engineering (3)
- ○ School of GeoSciences (4)
- ○ School of Informatics (5)
- ○ School of Mathematics (6)
- ○ School of Physics and Astronomy (7)

Q6.6 **What staff grade are you on?**

- ○ UE01 (1)
- ○ UE02 (2)
- ○ UE03 (3)
- ○ UE04 (4)
- ○ UE05 (5)
- ○ UE06 (6)
- ○ UE07 (7)
- ○ UE08 (8)
- ○ UE09 (9)
- ○ UE10 (10)
- ○ Prefer not to say (11)

Q6.7 **How long have you been employed at the University?**

- ○ Less than 3 years (1)
- ○ 3-5 years (2)
- ○ 6-10 years (3)
- ○ 11-15 years (4)
- ○ 16-20 years (5)
- ○ 21+ years (6)
- ○ Prefer not to say (7)

Closing / Administrative Items

Q7.1 **If you wish to withdraw all your answers please write "withdraw" in the subject box and then close the survey. If you wish to submit your answers, please proceed to the next question.**

Response: open text

Q7.2 **I reconfirm that I consent to direct quotes from my responses being published, now that I have completed the survey. I understand that no demographic data will be linked to these quotes.**

- ○ Yes, I consent to direct quotes of my responses being published. (1)
- ○ No, I do not consent to direct quotes of my responses being published. (2)

Q60 **People often do surveys, and while many people take them seriously, other people give joking or random responses. Were any of your answers in this survey random or intended as jokes? (Your response to this question will help us understand your other answers.)**

- ○ Yes, some of my answers were jokes or random responses (1)
- ○ No, I took the survey seriously (2)

Q7.3 **Vote for your preferred charity here - they will receive a portion of a £300 fund, according to the share of the vote received:**

- ○ Shelter Scotland (1)
- ○ Victim Support Scotland (2)
- ○ Edinburgh Food Project (3)
- ○ Counselling in Communities (4)



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