

# Royal Irish Academy Statement on the Principles of Academic Freedom

The Royal Irish Academy affirms its commitment to academic freedom as an enabling condition intrinsic to the pursuit and advancement of truth, knowledge and understanding.

Freedom of movement, of expression and communication, of association and of access to data and information, along with the right to education, are foundation stones for academic freedom. The exercise of these freedoms is fundamentally influenced and informed by the social, political, economic and cultural settings in which academic communities sit and operate.

These freedoms are threatened by attacks on the values of systematic academic inquiry and by acts of discrimination, harassment or restriction of movement.

The Royal Irish Academy acknowledges that the interplay of these freedoms is 'often complex and it may be difficult to disentangle the scientific, political, human rights or socio-economic aspects of specific cases' (International Science Council, 2021).<sup>1</sup>

## What is academic freedom?

Academic freedom expresses the principle that in their pursuit of truth, knowledge and understanding, academic researchers and institutions should be free from inappropriate influences and restrictions of a non-academic nature, such as those deriving from political ideologies and economic interests.

Academic freedom is predicated on a civil and respectful intellectual environment, in which due recognition is given to the views and opinions of others, without restricting the spirit of free enquiry and the open discussion of ideas.

Academic freedom confers rights, and imposes responsibilities and obligations, upon the academic community and academic institutions in the activities they undertake in and with society. There is a corresponding requirement for the state to respect the autonomy and independence of academic institutions and researchers.

Academic freedom protects contributions to research, teaching and learning, and to public participation in dissemination and debate, on condition that such contributions draw upon the individual's areas of academic expertise; are based on rigorous argument, solid research, appropriate data and evidence; are communicated responsibly; and are recognised as such by an epistemic peer community.

## Benefits of academic freedom for society

The practical expression of academic freedom makes it possible for academic communities to serve the common good of society and to fulfil their core social missions of:

- pursuing and advancing truth, knowledge and understanding through research, teaching and learning, and discourse;
- the public communication of knowledge and ideas; and
- fostering independent thinking and expression across the academy and its political, administrative and financial governance structures.

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Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann  
Royal Irish Academy

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<sup>1</sup> See the International Science Council statement on the freedoms and responsibilities of scientists, accessible at: <https://council.science/what-we-do/freedoms-and-responsibilities-of-scientists/> (accessed 8 November 2022).