

EGOS Colloquium 2026

Belfast Local Hub: Queen's Business School, Queen's University Belfast
Pre-colloquium Workshops on Wednesday 8 July 2026

Beyond institutional logics: post humanist theorisation and (y)our institutional stances on academic freedom

Workshop convenors:

Mark Palmer (Queen's Business School, Queen's University Belfast)

Nicola Barron (Queen's Business School, Queen's University Belfast)

Discussants: *Patrick Haack (Business School, University of Lausanne and visiting professor at Queen's Business School); Colin Harvey (School of Law, Queen's University Belfast); Noel Castree (School of Geography, University of Manchester); Fionola Meredith (Journalist and author); Stephen Roulston (School of Education, Ulster University); Matt Milliken (School of Education, Ulster University); Barry McCaffrey (Journalist and author); Trevor Birney (Journalist and author)*

In spring 2023, 72 permanent missions of States to the United Nations in Geneva released a joint statement in which it was recognised that attacks on academic freedom are on the rise. In this context, this workshop aims to discuss the role and meaning of academic freedom in the university environment – what does academic freedom mean in our teaching, research, policy and community engagement work?

In making the case for an institutional stance perspective, we consider whether and how universities have gone too far and surrendered their uncritical reverence to institutional field logics? This discussant-led workshop also considers the related questions:

- When might academics uphold and assert academic freedoms in their work?
- When might academic institutions assert a stronger institutional stance on matters of academic freedom in the face of institutional logics?
- When might that institutional stance be partisan or non-partisan?

Our workshop provides an opportunity to exchange lived experiences of academic freedom as well as learning from investigative journalistic freedom experiences. The convenors shall offer some personal reflections on the (dis)entanglements of humans and non-humans in our own theorising of institutional stances in policy engagement. Along with other cases, we shall discuss at the workshop the following:

- Universities asserting a legal stance. Harvard University and the US Department of Justice legal case dispute.

- Universities links with persons in the Epstein Files and the implications for university affiliations and reputation. The case of institutional artifacts (i.e. the George Mitchell bust and picture) and honorary doctorates.
- Universities operating beyond the minimal legislative requirements. The UK Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 came into force on 1 August 2025.
- Direct lobbying by politicians to the Vice-Chancellor's Office involving face-to-face meetings and public signalling communication. Professor Colin Harvey, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast.
- Universities issuing public statements on individual pieces of research. Academic leadership support, retraction practice and apologies in the case of Ulster University's academic education policy researchers, Dr Milliken and Dr Roulston.
- University progression committees on methodology and ethical questions in the case of Alice Goffman and her published work 'On the Run').
- Journalists challenging institutional standards. The case ruling of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) in London finding that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Metropolitan Police acted unlawfully by two Belfast journalists, Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney, on their documentary 'No Stone Unturned' on the Loughinisland killings.

Participants will explore how academics can move beyond institutional logic reverence to revive, reclaim and reassert their institutional stances in shaping organisations, communities and society at large. By fostering discussion on academic freedom, we seek to understand better how to enhance research and teaching quality, relevance and societal impact. The discussants will provide short presentations on the idea of academic freedom being; • institutionally much broader than legislative provisions, • requiring stronger institutional stances and leadership, • a safe space 'on campus' in working with frontier ideas, • a basis for a more tolerant civilizing space and place in civil society.

Complementary workshop goals include:

1. To facilitate sharing of lived experiences on academic freedom by bringing together academics with journalists.
2. To enable active participation and collaborative learning, between academia and the media, fostering reflection on the uncritical reverence to institutional field logics.
3. To create a safe space 'on campus' and establish understanding how institutional stances can temper appeals to extreme, enabling the conditions for more tolerance in civil society.

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