

BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

Terms of Reference

Objectives

'To monitor and defend academic freedom¹ in the research, study and teaching of Middle East Studies in the UK and anywhere in the world, including in academic institutions in the Middle East and North Africa.'

It will do so by:

(a) monitoring issues of academic freedom relating to the Middle East and North Africa and to the study of those regions;

(b) defending academic freedom through communications on behalf of the Society;

Considerations

In pursuing these objectives the Committee shall bear in mind the Society's Articles of Association and charitable status. The Committee shall also keep in mind the need to respect the principles of equality, diversity and inclusivity to which the Society is committed.

The Committee shall also have in mind that BRISMES should represent the concerns not only of its own members but also those of all academics and students involved in Middle East Studies.

Other professional academic societies, including sibling Middle East Studies associations, either have active Committees on Academic Freedom or are active in defending academic freedom. The Committee will consider whether in some cases an appropriate course of action would be to work in coordination with or in support of such academic organisations in pursuit of the Committee's goals.

Composition of the Committee on Academic Freedom

1. The membership of the Committee shall be as follows:

The BRISMES Vice-President, who will act as Chair of CAF.

¹ Academic Freedom' is defined in the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel as 'the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.'

Five other members of Council, selected by vote of Council according to their expertise and procedures laid out in 4, 6 and 7 below.

Nine other members elected by BRISMES Members according to their expertise and procedures laid out in 5-7 below.

2. The minimum number of members of the Committee, including the Vice-President, will accordingly be six, and the maximum fifteen.
3. The Committee will be chaired by the Vice-President, or if not available or able, by another member agreed upon by the Committee.
4. Areas of expertise needed by the Committee will be publicised and Council members will be invited to express an interest in serving on the Committee.
5. Areas of expertise needed by the Committee will be publicised and BRISMES members will be invited to express an interest in serving on the Committee.
6. Committee members from the Council will be elected by a vote of Council, and non-Council committee members will be elected by a vote of the BRISMES membership. In the elections for non-Council committee members, one position shall be reserved for a member of the Graduate Section, who must be enrolled as a student at the time of their expression of interest.
7. The normal term of office of members of the Committee will be for three years, with the possibility of renewal once only. Terms will be staggered to ensure continuity. No member may serve for more than two terms until after a further year has elapsed.

Mode of Operation

The Committee will convene one meeting a year, in conjunction with the Annual Conference, but will otherwise normally work by email. Should an additional meeting be required, this will normally be arranged in advance of a Council meeting, so that the minutes/resolutions can be put before Council.

The Committee shall produce a report for the AGM, and further reports for Council as necessary.

Administration

The BRISMES Administrator will service the Committee and will be copied into correspondence and will attend and minute its meetings. External communications on behalf of the Committee will be signed by both the President and chair of CAF.

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Operating Guidelines

1. Issues for consideration may be brought to the Committee's attention by a member of the Committee itself, by a member of BRISMES Council, by another BRISMES member, or by an external party.
2. As soon as an issue has been brought to the Committee's attention, a member of the Committee shall be identified by the Committee Chair as Co-ordinator for that issue.
3. The Co-ordinator will be responsible for drafting an appropriate statement or other communication, circulating it to other Committee members, and co-ordinating an agreed response.
4. The Co-ordinator will normally be expected to circulate an initial draft document to other Committee members within two weeks of the issue being raised.
5. Except in cases of urgency, Committee members will normally be allowed a minimum of one week to comment on any draft circulated.
6. If the Co-ordinator, after considering the issue, concludes that it would not be appropriate for BRISMES to issue any communication, they will recommend accordingly to the Committee.
7. Members of the Committee shall declare any conflict of interest relevant to the discussion of particular cases. In the event of an issue or document being put to a vote, members who have declared a conflict of interest will refrain from voting.
8. No statement or other document shall be released by the Committee unless it has been approved by a majority of Committee members. In the event of a tied vote on a statement or other document, then the chair shall have a second or casting vote.
9. In the event that a member of the Committee who is also a member of BRISMES Council believes that an intervention by the Committee will be in contravention of BRISMES' charitable aims, that Committee member will bring the issue to the attention of Council, which will decide the appropriate course of action.
10. All external communications will be signed by the President and the chair of CAF.
11. All Committee correspondence will be copied to the BRISMES Administrator, who will be responsible for arranging the delivery of the communication by email or other appropriate means.