CHURCHILL COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE CB3 0DS

Churchill College Freedom of Speech Code of Practice

Owner	College Council
Contact	Governance.manager@chu.cam.ac.uk
Approved By	College Council
Approval Date	30.09.2025
Next Review Due	
Version and Recent Changes	V1 Approved by Council July 2024 V2 – Approved by Council 30 Sep 25

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Churchill College is fully committed to the principle, and to the promotion, of freedom of speech. As a constituent College of the University, Churchill College recognises its obligations under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which amends and supplements certain sections of HERA.

1.2 This Code of Practice sets out the College's commitment to freedom of speech, outlines the various legislative frameworks under which such freedoms must be upheld and may be circumscribed, and summarises the procedures used by the College to manage these issues. The purpose of this code is to ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, freedom of speech within the law is secured for students, Fellows, and staff of the College, as well as for invited speakers, and that academic freedom within the law is secured for academic staff.

1.3 Churchill College is committed to protecting the lawful expression of speech in an academic context, but this does not include unlawful speech. This means that speech that amounts to unlawful harassment, victimisation or discrimination is not protected. Similarly, unlawful incitement of religious or racial hatred, or speech that is otherwise unlawful, is not protected.

2. SCOPE

2.1 This Code of Practice applies to:

(i) all Members, staff and students of the College; and
(ii) visiting speakers and all other persons invited or otherwise lawfully participating in College activities on College premises.

2.2 For the avoidance of doubt, this Code of Practice does not apply to purely commercial meetings or events on College premises.

2.3 References in this Code of Practice to "College premises" means those premises over which Churchill College exercises control, whether indoor or outdoor.

2.4 The University of Cambridge and its associated Cambridge Students' Union both have their own duty to secure freedom of speech within the law and have both issued their own Code of Practice on this topic.

2.5 The activities of the Junior Combination Room and Middle Combination Room (the College's undergraduate and postgraduate student unions) are subject to this Code of Practice and adherence of these student union(s) to the Code is monitored by the College.

3. KEY CONCEPTS AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

3.1 Freedom of speech means the freedom, within the law, to receive and impart ideas, opinions or information by means of speech, writing or images (including in electronic form) without interference.

3.2 Academic freedom, in relation to academic staff at the College, means their freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without loss of their jobs or privileges at the College, or the likelihood of their securing promotion or different jobs at the College being reduced.

3.3 These concepts are underpinned by the Human Rights Act 1998, which brings the European Convention on Human Rights into direct effect in national law. Article 10 of the Convention articulates freedom of expression as a human right and sets out the limited circumstances in which that right might be circumscribed (such as to protect public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, or for the protection of the reputation or rights of others). These concepts also exist within other UK legislation. Universities and similar institutions in England (including the College) have duties under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (as amended by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023) to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure and promote freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law for staff and students and for visiting speakers.

3.4 Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a duty on certain bodies, including higher education institutions such as the College, in the exercise of their functions to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. This necessitates the establishment of protocols and procedures by which to assess the risks associated with meetings or events that are College hosted, affiliated, funded, or branded. This Act also requires the College to have particular regard to its other duties with regard to academic freedom and freedom of speech. Debate, discussion, and critical enquiry are, in themselves, powerful tools in preventing people from being drawn into terrorism.

3.5 Under the Equality Act 2010, Fellows, staff and students must not be subjected to unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation or threats of violence on the grounds of race, sex, age, religion or philosophical belief, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, or pregnancy or maternity. However, the

provisions of the Equality Act 2010 are not to be interpreted to undermine freedom of speech and academic freedom. As a result, students' learning experience and the working environment of Fellows and staff may include exposure to research, course material, discussion or speakers' views that they find offensive, contentious or unacceptable, but are nonetheless within the law, and unlikely to be considered unlawful harassment or discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

3.6 There are other legislative requirements that may be relevant in particular cases, such as offences under the Terrorism Acts if speech encourages terrorism or amounts to the incitement of religious or racial hatred or hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation under the Public Order Acts, as well as statutory requirements relating to the holding of processions and assemblies. The College is not under any obligation to secure or promote freedom of speech that contravenes any legislative requirements.

4. VALUES

4.1 Among the College's core values are 'freedom of thought and expression' and 'freedom from discrimination' and it encourages its staff, students and visitors to engage in robust, challenging, evidence-based and civil debate as a core part of academic enquiry and wider College activity, even if they find the viewpoints expressed to be disagreeable, unwelcome or distasteful. These values extend to the student unions of the College. The steps the College takes to embed its values in practice are set out in section 5 below.

4.2 The College fosters an environment in which all of its Fellows, staff and students can participate fully in College life, and feel able to question and test received wisdom, and to express new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of intolerance or discrimination. In exercising their right to freedom of speech, the College expects its Fellows, staff, students and visitors to be tolerant of the differing opinions of others. The College also expects its Fellows, staff, students and visitors to be tolerant of the diverse identities of others. While debate and discussion may be robust and challenging, all speakers have a right to be heard when exercising their right to free speech within the law. Neither speakers nor listeners should have reasonable grounds to feel censored or intimidated.

4.3 The College will ensure that Fellows and staff are able to exercise freedom of thought and expression within the law without placing themselves at risk of losing their job, Fellowship or other supernumerary position, or any College privileges and benefits they have or affecting the likelihood of their securing other jobs or roles in the College. The College expects all Fellows, staff and students to engage with intellectual and ideological challenges in a constructive, questioning and peaceable way. The right of Fellows, staff and students to freedom of assembly, and to protest against certain viewpoints, should not obstruct the ability of others to exercise their lawful freedom of speech.

5. STEPS THE COLLEGE TAKES TO ENSURE FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

5.1 The College will ensure that its teaching, curriculum, programmes of events (both of the College and its student union, policies and procedures reflect its duties to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law and the very high level of protection for the lawful expression of viewpoints and for speech in an academic context, including but not limited to:

a) its processes for programme development and approval, quality assurance and academic assessment;
b) its processes for admission, appointment, reappointment and promotion;
c) its policies relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (including the public sector equality duty) and the Prevent duty;
d) its processes for facilitating research; and
e) its codes of conduct and other behaviour policies, which will ensure no individual will be subjected to disciplinary sanction or other less favourable treatment by or on behalf of the College because of the lawful exercise of freedom of speech or academic freedom.

5.2 The College does not enter into non-disclosure agreements related to complaints about sexual misconduct, bullying or harassment.

5.3 The College has processes in place to identify and manage any risks to freedom of speech or academic freedom arising from the terms of certain overseas funding, including funding from endowments, gifts, donations, research grants and contracts, and educational or commercial partnerships.

5.4 The College shall:

5.4.1 ensure that this Code of Practice is brought to the attention of new students at registration and new Fellows and staff during induction;
5.4.2 draw the attention of Fellows, students and staff to this Code of Practice annually, and ensure that it is referred to in other College documentation as appropriate;
5.4.3 ensure that all relevant Fellows and staff are aware of and/or receive appropriate training on freedom of speech and academic freedom;
5.4.4 ensure that all relevant decision-makers, in making any decision or adopting any policy that could directly or indirectly (and positively or negatively) affect freedom of speech, act compatibly with the College's free speech duties as they apply in the relevant circumstances;
5.4.5 periodically seek feedback from Fellows, staff, students and other stakeholders to secure their views on whether freedom of speech and academic freedom at the College are being adequately protected and take the responses into account;
5.4.6 ensure that there are adequate measures in place to raise concerns about freedom of speech and academic freedom;
5.4.7 ensure that when new policies and procedures are introduced consideration is given to their impact on freedom of speech and academic freedom;
5.4.8 ensure that it has appropriate processes for the holding of events and meetings as set out in section 6 below;
5.4.9 monitor any concerns that have been raised about freedom of speech and academic freedom to ensure that they are addressed so far as is reasonably practicable and to address any lessons learned and draw the attention of complainants to its processes for investigating complaints and the OfS complaint scheme as set out in section 7; and
5.4.10 take steps to secure compliance with this Code of Practice, including where appropriate taking disciplinary action.

6. COLLEGE AND STUDENT UNION EVENTS AND MEETINGS – PROCEDURES AND CONDUCT OF ATTENDEES

6.1 Active speaker programmes are fundamental to the academic and other activities of the College and Fellows, staff and students are encouraged to invite a wide range of speakers

and to engage critically but courteously with them, including as set out at paragraph 6.6 of this Code. This Code of Practice provides the only mechanism by which the College can cancel or impose conditions on College and student union meetings or events where this action is deemed necessary as a result of the event's subject matter and/or speaker(s). This is to ensure that the use of College premises is not inappropriately denied to any individual or body of persons on any ground connected with their beliefs or views or the policy or objectives of a body (with the exception of proscribed groups or organisations) of which they are a member. However, all speakers should anticipate that their views might be subject to robust debate, critique and challenge.

6.2 The starting point should always be that the event should go ahead, and that cancellation is exceptional and undesirable. Depending on the circumstances, it may however be reasonable to refuse permission for a College meeting or event where the College reasonably believes (from the nature of the speakers or from similar activities in the past whether held at the College or otherwise) that:

(i) the views likely to be expressed by any speaker are contrary to the law;
(ii) the speaker is likely to incite breaches of the law or to intend breaches of the peace to occur;
(iii) the meeting will not permit contrary or opposing viewpoints to be held or expressed;
(iv) the speaker and/or the organisation they represent advocates or engages in violence in the furtherance of their political, religious, philosophical or other beliefs;
(v) the views likely to be expressed by any speaker are for the promotion of any illegal organisation or purpose, including organisations listed on the government's list of proscribed terrorist groups or organisations; or
(vi) it is in the interest of public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime, the proper functioning of the College or the protection of those persons lawfully on College premises, that the meeting does not take place.

6.3 The lawful expression of controversial or unpopular views will not in itself constitute reasonable grounds for withholding permission for a College or student union meeting or event.

6.4 Where the College is reasonably satisfied that the otherwise lawful expression of views at an event or meeting on College premises is likely to give rise to disorder or threats to the safety of participants or the wider College community, the College shall consider what steps it is necessary to take to ensure the safety of all persons and the security of College premises. These may include, but are not limited to: requirements as to the provision of security/stewards, the speaker being part of a panel, ensuring that a member of staff is in attendance, or that the event or meeting should take place in alternative premises, at a later date, or in a different format. The College may impose such conditions and requirements upon the organisers as are reasonably necessary in all the circumstances, ensuring that the conditions and requirements go no further than is necessary to address the risks it has identified. The College will only pass on the costs of security for using the premises to those arranging the relevant event or meeting in exceptional circumstances, such as where the costs are wholly disproportionate to the numbers likely to be attending the event and the event could be held in a more proportionate way, or where the visiting speaker could reasonably be expected to have their own security because of the political or state office they hold. Any request to a meeting or event organiser to pay security costs in exceptional circumstances will be in writing and will explain those costs and any appeal mechanism. Any request to pay security costs will not be influenced to any degree by the ideas or opinions of any individual involved in organising the event or meeting, or by the

policy or objectives of, or the views of any of the members of, any body involved in organising the event or meeting.

6.5 These narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of speech are not intended ever to apply in a way that is inconsistent with the College's commitment to the completely free and open discussion of ideas.

6.6 Those attending events and meetings at the College are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the following principles:

(i) everyone has the right to free speech within the law.
(ii) the aim of events at the College is to expose Fellows, staff and students to the widest possible range of views, within the law.
(iii) protest is itself a legitimate expression of freedom of speech but protesters should recognise the rights of others participating in the event or meeting, and in particular not violate the rights of others to speak during the event. Protest must not shut down debate.

6.7 Where any person or body to whom this Code of Practice applies is seeking to hold a College or student union event or meeting on College premises which is outside of normal academic operations the processes in the Annex shall be followed, except where the event or meeting is purely commercial.

7. BREACHES AND COMPLAINTS

7.1 Where the College receives a concern about the exercise of academic freedom or freedom of speech or where it has received a concern about a possible infringement or departure(s) from the values and procedures set out in this Code of Practice, it will consider which of its procedures are most appropriate to consider the concern, making such enquiries and seeking such information as it considers necessary. Such consideration may lead to further investigation in accordance with the College's Freedom of Speech complaint procedure. Complaints should be raised in the first instance by emailing information@chu.cam.ac.uk.

7.2 The Office for Students (OfS) operates a free speech complaints scheme. Under that scheme, the OfS can review complaints about free speech from members, students, staff, applicants for academic posts and (actual or invited) visiting speakers. Information about the complaints that the OfS can review is available on its website. [1]

8. MONITORING AND REVIEW

8.1 The College Council will periodically review the contents and operation of this Code of Practice. Reports on its operation will be made to Governing Body.

The point of contact for any query about this Code of Practice and its Annex is the Governance Manager (governance.manager@chu.cam.ac.uk)

Annex: Processes for Meetings and Events on College Premises (Excluding Commercial Conferencing Books)

A1. This Annex is issued under paragraph 6.7 of the College's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, which reads: "Where any person or body to whom this Code of Practice applies is seeking to hold an event or meeting on College premises which is outside of the normal academic curriculum the processes in the Annex shall be followed, except where the event or meeting is purely commercial."

Booking a Meeting or Event on College Premises

A2. Bookings for all events to be held on College premises should be made through the College's Conference Office.. Any meeting or event on College premises to which this Annex applies should have at least one organiser who is responsible for the meeting or event and is a member, member of staff, or student of the College. If a meeting or event is proposed without such an organiser, it may only proceed on condition that a member, member or staff or student is identified or nominated as the organiser responsible for the meeting or event.

A3. Permission is required for meetings and events to be held on College premises, whether indoors or outdoors and if a room is to be reserved, a booking must be made through that authority at least ten working days in advance of the proposed event.

A4. Any meeting or event on College premises to which this Annex applies should have at least one named organiser who is responsible for the meeting or event and is a member, member of staff, or student of the College. If a meeting or event is proposed without such an organiser, it may only proceed on condition that a member, member or staff or student is identified or nominated as the organiser responsible for the meeting or event.

A5. The Conference department will refer student bookings to the Dean for approval, utilising the same booking form as for external events and those organised by staff and Fellows.

A6. It is anticipated that, in the vast majority of cases, the College will straightforwardly consider a booking request as part of normal business. However, in the exceptional circumstances that the authority in question considers that the holding of the meeting or event might reasonably be refused on any of the grounds set out at paragraph 6.2 of the College's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, the organisers of that event may direct an appeal to the Master.

A7. The request should be forwarded to the Master with a statement of the concerns. This appeal should be made at least seven working days in advance of the proposed meeting or event. Members of the College who are concerned that a particular forthcoming meeting or event should be escalated to the Master may do so directly. The Master will, in consultation as necessary, determine whether the meeting or event can go ahead as originally planned, or should be subject to reasonable conditions such as those set out in paragraph 6.4 of the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. Only in exceptional circumstances, when there are risks which cannot be mitigated or the event organiser refuses to meet any conditions imposed, will permission be withheld.

A8. Any decision by the Master (including one upheld on appeal) that a meeting or event should not take place, or may only take place subject to conditions, is binding and takes precedence over any other decision which may have been taken by any other body or officer in the University, subject to the right of appeal set out below.

A9. An organiser who is unhappy with the Referral Group's decision has the right of appeal to the Vice-Chancellor's deputy appointed for this purpose.

Management of a Meeting or Event on College Premises

A10. Once approved, the organisers of meetings and events must comply with any conditions set by the College. Such conditions may include the requirement that tickets should be issued, that an adequate number of stewards or security staff should be available, ., that the Dean and/or Senior Tutor and/or the Police should be consulted and their advice taken about the arrangements, and that the time and/or place of the meeting should be changed. The cost of meeting the conditions, apart from security costs, and the responsibility for fulfilling them, rests with the organisers. Security costs will be borne by the College other than in exceptional circumstances, as set out in paragraph 6.4 of the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

A11. In addition to seeking the permission referred to above, the organisers of any meeting or event to be held on College premises (especially one which is to be addressed or attended by persons who are not resident members of the College or University) which the organisers believe might attract significant protest and at which lawful free speech might be compromised should consult the College Porters at the earliest opportunity and ideally at least seven working days in advance via porters@chu.cam.ac.uk.

A12. The organisers of any meeting or event must comply with any lawful and reasonable instructions given by a College officer, or by any other person authorised to act on behalf of the College, in the proper discharge of their duties.

A13. College members are reminded that University disciplinary regulations apply on College premises and that a College may invite the University Proctors to enter its premises.

Footnotes (these do not form part of the Code)

[1] The OfS complaints scheme is operational from 1st September 2026.