Robinson College
University of Cambridge

Political Activity Policy

Political activity undertaken by the College and its members

1. Purpose

1.1 This Policy sets out how Robinson College approaches political activity, political campaigning and political expression. It reflects the Charity Commission's guidance on campaigning and political activity by charities.
1.2 For this purpose, political activity includes activities or campaigning intended to change or influence the policies or decisions of government or public bodies, in the United Kingdom or overseas.
1.3 Charities may undertake political activity that supports their charitable purposes and is in their best interests. Political activity must not become the reason for the charity's existence. The College must remain independent and must not support a political party or candidate, although it may support a policy advanced by a party or candidate where doing so furthers its charitable purposes.

2. Scope and principles

2.1 This Policy applies to activity carried out by or on behalf of the College, and to political campaigning undertaken on College premises by College members and employees.
2.2 A distinction is made between political activity undertaken in the name of the College, which is subject to charitable-purpose and independence requirements, and lawful political expression by individuals or groups, which is protected by freedom of speech.
2.3 This Policy is read alongside the College's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. Nothing in this Policy is intended to replace or restrict the protections provided by that Code or by law.

3. Activity by or on behalf of the College

3.1 When representing the College, making decisions or undertaking activity on its behalf, College members and employees must observe the following principles:
(a) The College may engage in political dialogue only where this supports its charitable purposes.
(b) The College will not endorse political parties or individual politicians.
(c) The College will not normally align itself with, or express opposition to, the opinions of visiting speakers.
(d) Before taking a position on a political, ethical or social issue, the College must consider whether doing so would significantly inhibit freedom of speech for its members or staff, adversely affect their interests, or compromise the College's independence.
(e) The College will not make financial donations to support political parties or candidates.

4. Political expression by individuals and groups

4.1 College members and employees are free to express political beliefs and, within the law, to support, condemn, condone, discuss and debate political, geopolitical and complex social issues.
4.2 Such views are expressed in a personal capacity and not on behalf of the College. Where there could reasonably be doubt, the individual should make clear that they are speaking or acting for themselves.
4.3 The College encourages robust, challenging, evidence-based and civil debate as part of academic enquiry and College life, including where views are considered disagreeable, unwelcome or distasteful. Further protections for lawful expression are set out in the College's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

5. Political campaigning on College premises

5.1 The College will act consistently with its Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and will not prevent access to democratic processes. It will nevertheless regulate campaigning on its estate to protect the College as a place of learning, education, religion and research.

5.2 The following arrangements apply generally and are particularly relevant during local and general elections:

(a) Electoral communications delivered by external post will be treated in the same way as other post received for resident members.

(b) Door-to-door delivery of written campaigning material by external candidates or representatives is not permitted on the College estate, subject to paragraph (f).

(c) Written election material from a candidate, agent or representative may be delivered in bulk to the Porters' Lodge. It will be made available in common rooms rather than placed into individual pigeonholes.

(d) Door-to-door canvassing by a candidate, agent or representative is not permitted on the College estate, subject to paragraph (f).

(e) Election-related meetings may be held at the College under its normal meeting rules. A College member must be identified as the event organiser before the meeting takes place.

(f) A College member or employee involved in a political campaign may distribute leaflets and campaign in areas of the College to which they normally have legitimate access, as an exercise of lawful freedom of speech. They must make clear that they are acting personally and not for the College. Fly-posting is not permitted, and campaigning must be reasonable and comply with the College's disciplinary rules.

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