Robinson College
University of Cambridge

University Statement on Freedom of Speech

University of Cambridge

Statement

The University of Cambridge, as a world-leading research and teaching institution, is fully committed to the principle, and to the promotion, of freedom of speech and expression. The University's core values are 'freedom of thought and expression' and 'freedom from discrimination'. The University fosters an environment in which all of its staff and students can participate fully in University life, and feel able to question and test received wisdom, and to express new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without fear of disrespect or discrimination. The University will ensure that academic staff have such freedom within the law and within the University's own provisions without placing themselves at risk of losing their job or any University privileges they have. The University expects all staff and students to receive and respond to intellectual and ideological challenges in a constructive and peaceable way. The University instils the capacity for critical engagement in its students, allowing them to engage with a wide range of viewpoints and to listen, dissect, analyse, reason, adjudicate and respond to those viewpoints.

These commitments are reinforced by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and by domestic legislation. Universities in England and Wales have a statutory duty under section 43 of the Education (No.2) Act 1986 to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that lawful freedom of speech and expression is secured for all staff and students and for visiting speakers. As part of this statutory duty the University is also required to issue and keep up to date a code of practice to be followed by all members, students and employees of the University for the organisation of meetings and other events whether indoors or outdoors on University premises, including on CUSU and GU premises. The University accordingly has implemented the Code of Practice on Meetings and Public Gatherings on University Premises ('the Code'). The Code also sets out the conduct required of all individuals involved in such meetings and events. This Code is set out below.

In addition, section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 ('the Act') places a duty on certain bodies, including Higher Education Institutions, 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 events that are University affiliated, funded or branded. The Act also requires those bodies to have particular regard to statutory duties on the University with regard to academic freedom and freedom of expression.

An active speaker programme is fundamental to the academic and other activities of the University and staff and students are encouraged to invite a wide range of speakers and to engage critically but courteously with them. Debate, discussion and critical enquiry are, in themselves, powerful tools in preventing people from being drawn into terrorism. The University has drawn up this Statement with these principles in mind.

This Statement and the Code provide the only mechanism by which the University can cancel or impose conditions on University 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 University 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 organisations) of which they are a member.

External speakers who are known to be members of proscribed organizations, or who are likely to encourage support for proscribed (or outlawed) organizations under UK law, should not be invited to speak at University events.

The University will not unreasonably refuse to allow events to be held on its premises. The lawful expression of controversial or unpopular views will not in itself constitute reasonable grounds for withholding permission for an event. Reasonable grounds for refusal would include, but are not limited to, the fact that the event is likely to:

- Include the expression of views that risk drawing people into terrorism or are the views of proscribed groups;
- Incite others to commit a violent or illegal act;
- Pose a genuine risk to the welfare, health or safety of members of the University or the general public, or give rise to a breach of the peace.

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