

Robinson College

POLITICAL ACTIVITY POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Charity Commission requires all charities to have a policy on campaigns and political activity. The Commission uses the term 'political activity' to describe activities or campaigning to change or influence policies or decisions taken by national, devolved, local or overseas government, or by international, national or local public bodies.
- 1.2 Charities can take part in political activity that supports their purpose and is in their best interests. Political activity, however, must not become the reason for the charity's existence. Charities must remain independent and must not give their support to a political party. Charities can support a policy that is supported by a political party or candidate and can work with political parties or candidates to influence their decisions, provided this supports the charity's purpose.
- 1.3 This policy draws a clear distinction between political activity carried out by or on behalf of the College, which is restricted in principle, and that carried out by individuals or groups of individuals, which is protected by the right to freedom of speech.

2. Activities by or on behalf of College

- 2.1 When representing the College, or making any decision or carrying out any activity on its behalf, members and employees of the College must observe the following principles.
 - (a) The College may engage in political dialogue, but only if that is done in pursuit of the College's charitable purpose.
 - (b) The College will not endorse political parties or individual politicians.
 - (c) The College will not normally align itself (or otherwise) with the opinions held by visiting speakers.
 - (d) Before taking a position or stance on any political, ethical or social issue, the College must assure itself that doing will not significantly inhibit the freedom of speech of any of its members or any of its staff, or adversely affect their interests or compromise the College's independence.
 - (e) The College will not make any financial donations to support any political candidate or party.

3. Activities by individuals or groups

- 3.1 All members and employees of the College are at liberty to express political beliefs. They are free to support, condemn, condone, discuss, and debate all issues, including geopolitical and complex social issues, within the law.
- 3.2 They do so on their own behalf and not on behalf of the College. If there is likely to be any doubt as to whether a view is expressed on behalf of the College, the member or employee in question should make it clear that they are acting or speaking in a personal capacity.

- 3.3 The College encourages its members and employees to engage in robust, challenging, evidence-based and civil debate as a core part of academic enquiry and College life, even if they find the viewpoints expressed to be disagreeable, unwelcome or distasteful. The importance of not silencing unpopular views, and steps to protect freedom of speech in College, are set out further in the College's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

4. Political campaigning in College

- 4.1 The College will operate in line with its Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and will not prevent access to any democratic process. At the same time, the College wishes to regulate campaigning within the College estate, in order to protect its studious environment as a place of learning, education, religion and research.
- 4.2 The following principles are particularly relevant during a general or local election campaign, but are of general application:
- (a) Electoral communications received by external post will be dealt with in the same way as other post received by the College for its resident members.
 - (b) Door-to-door delivery of written material is not permitted within the College estate. For an exception to this, see paragraph f.
 - (c) Written material relating to an election issued by a candidate or their agent or representative may be delivered in bulk to the Porters' Lodge. It will then be made available to resident members by being placed in common rooms, but will not be put into individual pigeon holes.
 - (d) Door-to-door canvassing by a candidate or their agent or representative is not permitted in the College estate. For an exception to this, see paragraph (f).
 - (e) Meetings in connection with elections may be held in College, according to the normal rules for meetings. A member of the College must be identified as the event organiser before a meeting can take place.
 - (f) Any member or employee of the College engaged in a political campaign may, as an expression of lawful free speech, distribute leaflets and campaign on College premises to which they have normal and legitimate access. They should make clear that they are acting in a private capacity and not on behalf of the College. They may not fly-post and, in distributing leaflets and otherwise campaigning, they should behave reasonably and must not infringe the College's code of discipline.

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Owner: Finance Bursar