HUGHES HALL
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

HUGHES HALL CODE OF PRACTICE ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Hughes Hall is fully committed to the principle, and to the promotion, of freedom of speech within the law as defined in 3.1.

1.2 This Code of Practice sets out the College's commitment to freedom of speech within the law, 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.

2. SCOPE

2.1 This Code of Practice applies to:

2.1.1 all Fellows, other Senior Members, staff and students of the College; and

2.1.2 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 Hughes Hall 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.[1]

2.5 The activities of the College student union (the MCR) are subject to this Code of Practice and adherence of this student union 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. The use of the term 'Freedom of Speech' within this document should always be taken to read 'Freedom of Speech within the law'.

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 all Fellows, other Senior Members, staff and students and for visiting speakers.[2]

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, other Senior Members, 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 all Fellows, other Senior Members and staff may include exposure to research, course material, discussion or speakers' views that they find offensive, contentious or unacceptable, but are nonetheless within

[1] The statutory duty on Cambridge Students' Union, and the requirement for it to have issued a Code of Practice, is not in force and is due to be repealed. The statutory duty on each Cambridge College, and the requirement for each of them to have issued a Code of Practice, came into force on 1 August 2025.

[2] The main amendments to the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 effected by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 came into force on 1 August 2025. Prior to that date, the applicable statutory duty (in section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986) was for universities to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure freedom of speech within the law for staff and students and for visiting speakers.

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 The College values freedom of thought and expression and freedom from discrimination and it encourages its Fellows, other Senior Members, 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 union of the College (the MCR). The steps the College takes to embed its values in practice are set out in section 5.

4.2 The College fosters an environment in which all of its Fellows, other Senior Members, 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, other Senior Members, staff, students and visitors to be tolerant of the differing opinions of others, in line with the College's core value of freedom of expression. The College also expects its Fellows, other Senior Members, staff, students and visitors to be tolerant of the diverse identities of others, in line with the College's core value of freedom from discrimination. 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, other Senior Members 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, other Senior Members, staff and students to engage with intellectual and ideological challenges in a constructive, questioning and peaceable way. The right of Fellows, other Senior Members, 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, other Senior Members, and staff during induction;

5.4.2 draw the attention of Fellows, other Senior Members, 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, other Senior Members 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, other Senior Members, 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, other Senior Members, 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:

6.2.1 the views likely to be expressed by any speaker are contrary to the law;

6.2.2 the speaker is likely to incite breaches of the law or to intend breaches of the peace to occur;

6.2.3 the meeting will not permit contrary or opposing viewpoints to be held or expressed;

6.2.4 the speaker and/or the organisation they represent advocates or engages in violence in the furtherance of their political, religious, philosophical or other beliefs;

6.2.5 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

6.2.6 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:

6.6.1 everyone has the right to free speech within the law.

6.6.2 the aim of events at the College is to expose Fellows, other Senior Members, staff and students to the widest possible range of views, within the law.

6.6.3 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 the normal academic curriculum 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 disciplinary procedures (Fellow, other Senior Member, staff or student), or the College's grievance or complaints procedures.

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.

8. MONITORING AND REVIEW

8.1 The Prevent Committee and College Council will periodically review the contents and operation of this Code of Practice and report on its operation.

8.2 The point of contact for any query about this Code of Practice and its Annex is the Senior Tutor, email: compliance@hughes.cam.ac.uk.

Annex: Processes for meetings and events on College premises

The starting premise should be that all events should go ahead and that cancellation is exceptional and undesirable. The procedures include demonstrable ways for the College to consider steps it is necessary to take to ensure the safety of all persons and the security of College premises. (These 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.)

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 a College 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."

EVENTS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

1. This procedure deals with both risk assessment and management of various College events, especially those which include external speakers and/or attendees. Note:
    - 'external' means anyone who is not either a member of Hughes Hall or a member of staff
    - private meetings of Senior Members or College-approved events like dinners and concerts are not normally included – if in doubt, check with the Senior Tutor

2. It also demonstrates Hughes Hall's compliance with the legal duties set out in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and the Prevent duty guidance issued by government.

3. Hughes Hall is strongly committed to the principle of freedom of speech within the law. Every event organiser must ensure that their event complies with the College's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

4. The organiser of a proposed event which will be held in the College must be either a Fellow, Senior Member, staff member or student of Hughes Hall, and complete either a Conference booking form, available from conferences@hughes.cam.ac.uk or a MCR Room Booking Form, available at Room Booking – Hughes Hall MCR (cam.ac.uk). If a meeting or event is proposed without such an organiser, it may only proceed on condition that a Member, Senior Member, member of staff or student is identified or nominated as the organiser responsible for the meeting or event.

5. The forms capture data on the type of event, subject areas of speakers, any contentious or controversial topics that might be covered, how these will be handled and a referral flag to the Senior Tutor if the event requires further scrutiny.

6. The Conference Team and/or Senior Tutor will assess the proposed event in light of legislation and guidance, and will authorise it as proposed, or authorise it with conditions, or decline the request.

7. Hughes Hall reserves the right to seek further information, to stipulate conditions, or in exceptional circumstances, to decline a request for an event held at the College. Hughes Hall reserves the right to review its decision if the organiser does not communicate changes of plan to the College and to cancel an event, even at the last minute, if it becomes aware of significant unauthorised changes.

8. Once approved, the organisers of meetings and events must comply with any conditions set by Hughes Hall. Such conditions may include:
    - change of time or location
    - limits on attendance or activities
    - provision of a chairperson or additional contributor(s) with alternative perspective(s)
    - presence of Hughes Hall Senior Members or staff members
    - an adequate number of stewards or security staff are available

The cost of meeting the conditions, apart from security costs, and the responsibility for meeting them, rests with the organisers. Security costs will be borne by Hughes Hall other than in exceptional circumstances, as set out in paragraph 6.4 of the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

9. The reasons for declining an event are set out at paragraph 6.2 of the College's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

10. If a booking is declined, or is only permitted with conditions, the organiser may appeal to the Bursar indicating clearly why you consider the Senior Tutor's reasoning to be inappropriate. The Bursar's decision is final.