

University of Cambridge

Code of Practice on Meetings and Public Gatherings on University Premises

From 1 August 2024 this Code of Practice on Meetings and Public Gatherings on University Premises was rescinded, having been amalgamated into the [University Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#).

Note

This Code is reproduced in the [Statutes and Ordinances](#) (Ordinances, Chapter II, pp.209-210 of the 2023 edition).

Section 43 of the Education (No2) Act 1986, referring to freedom of speech in universities, polytechnics, and colleges, requires the Council 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 which are to be held on University premises, and for the conduct required of members, students, and employees of the University in connection with such meetings and events. This Code of Practice therefore applies to all members, students, and employees of the University, in respect of all University premises, whether indoors or outdoors, and which for the purposes of this Code includes the premises of the University of Cambridge Students' Union. The Code should be read in conjunction with the University Statement on Freedom of Speech.¹

Members, students, and employees of the University are reminded that alleged breaches of the general regulations for discipline or of the rules of behaviour applicable to current registered students or of any relevant conditions of employment may be brought before the relevant disciplinary authority.

Authority and approval processes for meetings and events on University premises

Any meeting or event on University premises should have at least one organiser who is responsible for the meeting or event and is a member, student, or employee of the University. If a meeting or event is proposed by an external group or individual without such an organiser, it may only proceed on condition that an individual to whom this Code applies is identified or nominated as the organiser responsible for the meeting or event.

Authority is required for meetings and events to be held on University premises, whether indoors or outdoors. In the case of accommodation assigned to a single Faculty or Department, the permission of the relevant Faculty or Departmental authorities is required. In the case of accommodation not so assigned, permission must be obtained from the central University authority responsible for the accommodation concerned and, if a room is to be reserved, a booking must be made through that authority at least fourteen working days in advance of the proposed event. Further details of who to contact are available in the Guidance for booking meetings and events.²

It is anticipated that, in the vast majority of cases, the authority in question will straightforwardly consider the 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 because of the duty to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism or for some other valid reason as indicated in the University Statement on Freedom of Speech, there is a process of escalation to a Referral Group.³ Only the Referral Group may refuse permission in this way and on these bases. The request should be forwarded to the Referral Group with a statement of the concerns. This referral should be made at least seven working days in advance of the proposed meeting or event. Members of the University who are concerned that a particular forthcoming meeting or event should be escalated to the Referral Group may do so directly. The Referral Group will, in consultation as necessary, determine whether the meeting or event can go ahead as originally planned, or in alternative premises, at a later date, or in a different format. 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. 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.

Any decision by the Referral Group (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.

Organisation and management of meetings and events on University premises

Once approved, the organisers of meetings and events must comply with any conditions set by the University authorities concerned for the organisation of the meeting or event. 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 Proctors and/or University Security 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, and the responsibility for fulfilling them, rests with the organisers.

Notification to the Proctors

In addition to seeking the permission referred to above, the organisers of all meetings and events to be held on University premises which are to be addressed or attended by persons who are not resident members of the University (except for academic meetings organised by the authority of a Faculty or Department, or for any meetings or classes of meetings approved for the purpose by the Senior Proctor as being commonly or customarily held on University premises) are required to give notice to the Senior Proctor. This notice may be given separately or by using the form used to book University premises, a copy of which may be sent by the University authority concerned to the Senior Proctor. The organisers may also, if they wish, communicate directly with the Proctors to give further details. Information is required at least seven working days in advance (although the Senior Proctor may, at their discretion, agree to receive information closer to the time of the meeting or event). The information needed is the date and time of the meeting or event, the place, the names, addresses, and Colleges (if any) of the organisers, the name of the organisation making the arrangements, and the names of any expected speakers (whether or not members of the University).

The organisers of any meeting must comply with instructions given by a Proctor or other University officer, or by any other person authorised to act on behalf of the University, in the proper discharge of their duties.

Colleges

The provisions of section 43 of the Education (No 2) Act 1986 apply also to the Colleges in respect of their own members, students, and employees, and in respect of visiting speakers. Colleges are also subject to the duties under section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Each College is requested by the University to designate a senior member who will be responsible for enforcing the provisions of both the above Acts in that College. Members of the University are reminded that University disciplinary regulations apply on College premises and that a College may invite the Proctors to enter its premises.

Other legal considerations

The attention of organisers of meetings and events is drawn to sections 11 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986, concerning the conduct of processions and assemblies. Other legal requirements may also affect the conduct of meetings and events. These include incitement to violence, to breach of the peace, or to racial hatred. Meetings and events, even if directed to lawful purposes, cease to be lawful if they cause serious public disorder or breach of the peace. Attention is also drawn to the provisions of the Licensing Acts, which apply to certain University premises, including the University Centre. These Acts require the licensee to maintain good order on licensed premises, and give the licensee the power to expel persons from the premises if they consider it necessary.

The application of this Code

Any person who is in any doubt about the application of this Code to any meeting or event in the University must consult the Senior Proctor, who, in consultation with the officers of the Governance and Compliance Division, will determine whether the provisions of the Code apply.

Footnotes

¹ See <https://www.governanceandcompliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/governance-and-strategy/university-statement-freedom-speech>.

² See https://www.em.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/uoc_event_booking_guidance_0.pdf.

³ The Referral Group (email: referralconfidential@admin.cam.ac.uk) has the following membership: the Chair of the Committee on Prevent and Freedom of Speech (Chair); the Senior Proctor; a University Teaching Officer; the Head of Education Services; the Head of Public Affairs; and either the President (Undergraduate) or President (Postgraduate) of the University of Cambridge Students' Union (for unreserved business). Its Secretary is the Secretary to the Committee on Prevent and Freedom of Speech.