



Reuben College Policy on Freedom of Speech

Agreed by GB, under delegated authority, and with effect from 1 October 2021

This policy and procedure operate alongside the University's Code of Practice on Meetings and Events, available [here](#).

Preamble

Free speech is the lifeblood of a university. It enables the pursuit of knowledge. It helps us approach truth. It allows students, teachers and researchers to become better acquainted with the variety of beliefs, theories and opinions in the world. Recognising the vital importance of free expression for the life of the mind, a university may make rules concerning the conduct of debate but should never prevent speech that is lawful. Inevitably, this will mean that members of the College are confronted with views that some find unsettling, extreme or offensive. The College must therefore foster freedom of expression within a framework of robust civility. Not all theories deserve equal respect. A university values expertise and intellectual achievement as well as openness. But, within the bounds set by law, all voices or views which any member of our community considers relevant should be given the chance of a hearing. Wherever possible, they should also be exposed to evidence, questioning and argument. As an integral part of this commitment to freedom of expression, we will take steps to ensure that all such exchanges happen peacefully. With appropriate regulation of the time, place and manner of events, neither speakers nor listeners should have any reasonable grounds to feel intimidated or censored. It is this understanding of the central importance and specific roles of free speech in a university that underlies the detailed procedures of Reuben College, laid out here.

Members, students, and employees of the College must conduct themselves so as to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students, and employees of the College and for visiting speakers. The freedom protected by this Code of Practice is confined to the exercise of freedom of speech within the law. The College believes that a culture of free, open and robust discussion can be achieved only if all concerned avoid needlessly offensive or provocative action and language.

The College expects speakers and those taking part in meetings or protest activities to respect its values, to be sensitive to the diversity of its community and to show respect to all sections of that community. An event which is likely to give rise to an environment in which people will experience, or could reasonably fear, harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse or violence, particularly because of their ethnicity, race, nationality, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender, disability or age, is also likely to be unlawful.

Section 43 of the Education (No 2) Act 1986 requires the College to issue and keep up to date a code of practice to be followed by members, students, and employees of the College for the organisation of meetings and other events, which are to be held on College premises, and for the conduct required of members, students, and employees of the University in connection with meetings and other events. No revision of this Code will take effect until due notice has been given by Governing Body. Advice on any aspect of this Policy Statement and the Code of Practice may be obtained from the Senior Tutor.

Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech

1. **This Code applies to all members of the College, including fellows, students, and employees and to those hiring College premises for any function. It applies to all College premises, outdoor as well as indoor meetings, and to events organised, branded and/or funded by the College at other venues or online¹.**
2. An intentional or reckless breach of this Code of Practice is a breach of the College's rules and may be the subject of disciplinary action. Where the acts of individuals involve alleged breaches of criminal law, the College will assist the prosecuting authorities in implementing the due process of law and any internal disciplinary proceedings may be deferred or suspended pending the outcome of criminal proceedings.

Meetings and events to which this Code applies

3. This Code applies to a meeting or an event where the nature of the meeting or event, the identity of the speaker or speakers or some other factor gives rise to reasonable concern on the part of the organisers, College Deans, Senior Tutor, or other individuals that the proposed meeting or event;
 - may give rise to an environment in which people will experience, or could reasonably fear, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse or violence, particularly (but not exclusively) on account of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation;
 - is likely to pose a risk to the safety of those lawfully on College premises; and/or
 - that it may prompt a risk to public safety.

Organisation of meetings or events

4. **The organisers of every such meeting or event taking place on College premises** must seek the approval of the Senior Tutor or Deans for the holding of that meeting not less than seven working days before the event is scheduled to take place. By this time organizers should supply details of the date, time and place of the meeting, the names, addresses, and Colleges (if any) of the organisers, the name of the organisation making the arrangements, and the name of any expected speaker, whether or not a member of the College by email to info@reuben.ox.ac.uk.

For the academic year 2021-22, when booking Linacre College Rooms, Reuben students must follow the procedure set out at <https://www.linacre.ox.ac.uk/handbook/room-bookings-members> and the accompanying Linacre College Policy as well as Reuben's own. Linacre staff will be able to forward to their Reuben counterparts (including Senior Tutor and Deans) questions regarding 'Reuben branded' events, events with outside speakers, and/or events otherwise likely to fall under the Code.

5. **The organizers of every such a meeting or event which is subject to this Code but which is not taking place on College premises, but for example virtually or off-site,** must seek the approval of the Senior Tutor or Deans and should supply details of the date, time and place of the meeting, the names, addresses and Colleges (if any) of the organisers, the name of the organisation making the arrangements, and the name of any expected speaker, whether or not a member of the College by email to info@reuben.ox.ac.uk not less than seven working days before the event is scheduled to take place.
5. Any member of the College or member of staff who has concerns about a prospective meeting or event which is subject to this Code (whether or not it is to take place on College premises) must

¹ 'College' here means both Reuben premises and, whilst sharing space with Linacre College, Linacre College, its premises, and joint events.

bring their concerns promptly to the attention of the Senior Tutor or Deans as soon as possible.

6. The College's Senior Tutor and Deans are responsible for approving suitable arrangements for such meetings and events and may make such directions (including conditions under paragraph 9 below), or issue such guidance, as is necessary to ensure that the nature and conduct of the meeting is lawful and in accordance with the provisions of this Code.
7. The Senior Tutor or Deans may cancel any meeting or event where the required information has not been provided seven working days in advance and may also, at their discretion, agree to receive information closer to the time of the meeting than this.
8. The organisers of meetings and events should comply with any conditions set by the Senior Tutor and Deans concerned with the arrangements for the conduct of the meeting. Such conditions may include a requirement that tickets should be issued, that an adequate number of stewards should be provided, that the police should be consulted about the arrangements, and that the time and place of the meeting should be changed. The cost of meeting the requirements, and the responsibility for fulfilling them, rests with the organisers (save for official academic meetings or events, where the expense rests with the department, faculty or college concerned).
9. The Senior Tutor and Deans will act in a risk-based and proportionate manner and with the object, wherever possible, of enabling events or meeting to proceed. They will not seek to curtail or cancel a meeting or event unless in their considered opinion the meeting or event infringes on the legitimate rights and freedoms of others or poses a significant risk to health and safety or there is some other substantial and lawful ground for the curtailment or cancellation. They will consult as necessary with the President, or in their absence the Vice-President, and where necessary with the University Marshal and police about forthcoming meetings and events covered by the Code. In any case where serious disruption may be anticipated which may not be effectively addressed by any condition specified under paragraph 9 above, or where a condition specified in paragraph 7 has not been complied with, the Senior Tutor or Deans shall have power, having taken into consideration any advice received from the Marshal and/or police, to order or to advise the cancellation, postponement, or relocation of the meeting. If, after their own assessment, the Police consider that they need to deploy officers, they can and occasionally do, levy a charge which the organisers would usually be expected to meet.
10. All decisions will be reached by the Senior Tutor or Deans following careful consideration of the evidence available to them and will be limited to those actions that are reasonable, proportionate and necessary to prevent crime or disorder, or otherwise protect the legitimate rights and freedoms of others.
11. If an organiser is unhappy with the outcome of a decision of the Senior Tutor or Deans they may write to the President or, in their absence the Vice-President, requesting a reconsideration of the decision.

Conduct at such meetings or events

12. The organisers and those in attendance at any meeting or event must comply with any reasonable instructions given during the course of a meeting or event by the Senior Tutor or Deans, by any other College officer or person authorised to act on behalf of the College in the proper discharge of their duties, or by police.
13. It is the duty of every member, student, and employee of the College not to impede any person entitled to be present from entering or leaving a place where the right to freedom of speech is being or is to be exercised. This duty is subject only to such conditions as may have been specified

in accordance with the terms of this Policy or any limitations imposed or directions given by the police or other relevant public authority.

14. Nothing in this Code shall be taken to prohibit the exercise of the right to protest by peaceful means; provided always that such protest is conducted lawfully within the general principles and other requirements of this Code, and the College's rules and regulations.

Other legal requirements

15. The College is mindful of its pro-active duties under equality legislation. The right to freedom of speech is constrained by laws protecting others from discrimination, victimisation and harassment, protecting national security and public safety, preventing disorder or crime and terrorism, protecting the reputation and rights of others, and preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence.

Applications of the Code

16. Any person who is in any doubt about the application of this Code of Practice to any meeting, event or public gathering on College premises is under an obligation to consult the Senior Tutor or College Deans, who will determine whether the provisions of the Code apply.