

St Peter's College Code of Practice on Meetings and Events

Last reviewed and approved by the Governing Body in November 2023. This document incorporates the College's *Free Speech Statement* which was approved by Governing Body on 15 June 2016 (paragraphs 2 – 4).

Introduction

1. The legal duty of UK universities to protect free speech is enshrined in legislation, including the Education (No 2) Act 1986 and the Human Rights Act 1998, and academic freedom is protected by the Education Reform Act 1988. [Section 43 of the Education \(No 2\) Act 1986](#) specifically requires universities to:
 - a) 'take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students and employees of the establishment and for visiting speakers'; and to
 - b) 'ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, that the use of any premises of the establishment is not denied to any individual or body of persons on any ground connected with
 - (i) the beliefs or views of that individual or of any member of that body; or
 - (ii) the policy or objectives of that body.'; and to
 - c) issue and keep up to date a code of practice for meetings and events.

Freedom of Speech

2. 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.
3. 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.
4. It is this understanding of the central importance and specific roles of free speech in a university that underlies the detailed procedures of St Peter's College.

Scope

5. This Code of Practice must be followed by all members (including students) and employees of the College and visiting speakers in respect of:

- a) all meetings and other events, to be held outdoors or indoors, on College premises and/or online, including those organised by third parties; and
- b) all meetings and other events, which are College funded, affiliated or branded regardless of location or format.

6. In any case where the College is proposing to grant permission to an outside organisation or group to hold meetings or events on College premises, the outside organisation or group shall be required to act in accordance with this Code of Practice.

7. 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 Dean, who will determine whether the provisions of the Code apply.

Organising meetings and events

8. Members and employees of the College who are organising meetings or events or are responsible for administering external bookings of College premises are responsible for assessing whether there are any major risks or issues in the context of this Code, in particular with reference to paragraphs 2-4, 10 and 14. (If they are in any doubt or have any questions or need for further information, they are encouraged to discuss the situation with colleagues locally in the first instance, and then seek advice, as appropriate, from the Dean.)

8. It is not anticipated that events and meetings which have been organised as part of the academic curriculum would cause concern such as to require formal referral to the Dean under the provisions of this Code.

9. Students wishing to hold a meeting or event – whether outdoors or indoors, on College premises and/or online, or elsewhere if affiliated to College in any way – should seek permission using the booking form available on the SPC intranet. The booking form should be submitted as far in advance of the meeting or event as possible, so as to give the College ample time to consider all aspects of the proposed event and discuss any concerns raised with the organisers well ahead of whatever date the organisers might wish to issue invitations or publicise the event. At a minimum, five days should be allowed for the form to be processed.

If there are concerns about a meeting or event

10. If the organiser(s) of a meeting or event have concerns that it:

- a) 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; or
- b) is likely to pose a risk to the safety of those lawfully on College premises; or that it may prompt a risk to public safety,

then they should refer the matter at the earliest opportunity to the Dean.

11. Any member or employee of the College who has concerns about a prospective meeting or event should bring their concerns promptly to the attention of the Dean. Such referrals should be made at least seven working days in advance of the meeting or event (although the Dean may, at their discretion, agree to consider concerns raised closer to the time of the meeting or event than this).

12. Concerns might arise if the identity of the speaker or speakers or some other factor gives rise – via the initial risk assessment or subsequently – to reasonable concern on the part of the organisers, the Dean or other members or employees of College that the proposed meeting or event may be disrupted or may result in violence, disorder, harassment or any other unlawful activity.

13. As required by [section 12 of the Terrorism Act 2000](#), the College will not give permission to hold a meeting or event where it is known that:

- a) the proposed speaker belongs to, or professes to belong to, a [proscribed organisation](#); or
- b) the proposed speaker will use the event to support, or to further the activities of, a proscribed organisation.

Role of the Dean

14. In the context of this Code, the Dean is entrusted with the duty to assess the implications of events formally referred to them and to act in accordance with the College's legal responsibilities, including:

- a) the importance of academic freedom (as required eg by the Education Reform Act 1988);
- b) the need to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured (as required eg by the Education (No 2) Act 1986);
- c) the rights and freedoms enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and incorporated into domestic law by the Human Rights Act 1998;
- d) to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different groups in accordance with the Public Sector Equality Duty; and
- e) the [Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015](#) which requires universities and other 'specified authorities' to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (section 26 (1)) and which also provides that 'when carrying out the duty imposed by section 26 (1)', universities 'must have particular regard to the duty to ensure freedom of speech; and to the importance of academic freedom.'

15. The Dean shall act in a risk-based and proportionate manner and with the presumption that, wherever possible, events and meetings should be allowed to proceed.

16. The Dean has the power to postpone or relocate a meeting or event or to impose conditions. Such conditions may include a requirement that tickets should be issued, that an adequate number of stewards should be in attendance or that the police should be consulted about the arrangements. The responsibility for fulfilling these conditions rests with the organisers.

17. The Dean 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. The Dean will consult as necessary with the Bursar, the Vice-Master, the College Registrar and with other College officers; with the University Marshal; and with the police about forthcoming meetings and events covered by this Code. In any case where serious disruption may be anticipated which may not be

effectively addressed by any condition specified under paragraph 16 above, the Dean shall have power, having taken into consideration any advice received, to order or to advise the cancellation, postponement, or relocation of the meeting.

18. The Master will not normally be involved in initial decisions since they may need to consider an appeal against the initial decision. The Dean will communicate their decision promptly and will set out the reasons for the decision.

Appeal

19. If an organiser of an event or meeting, or any other member or employee of the College who has consulted the Dean with concerns about a meeting or event is not content with the outcome of a decision of the Dean, they may write to the Master, setting out clear reasons for their discontent with the decision and requesting a reconsideration of the decision.

20. The Master or the Master's delegate (as appropriate) will communicate their decision on the appeal promptly and will set out the reasons for the decision.

Breaches of this Code

21. An intentional or reckless breach of this Code of Practice or a frivolous, vexatious and/or malicious referral may lead to disciplinary action being taken under the appropriate University procedure. 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.

Conduct at meetings or events

22. 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 Dean, by any other College officer or person authorised to act on behalf of the College, or by police.

23. It is the duty of every member 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 Code or any limitations imposed or directions given by the police or other relevant public authority.

24. 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 does not breach the College's *Student Regulations*.

Review of this Code

25. Governing Body shall review the operation of this Code every year as part of the annual review of the execution of the PREVENT duty, with a view to ensuring that freedom of speech is upheld and, in particular, is not compromised by the fulfilment of the PREVENT duty.