

# Code of Behaviour

Parts of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 came into effect on 1 August 2025. These strengthen the legal duties of universities in relation to free speech and academic freedom. Regulation of the new duties is undertaken by the Office for Students (OfS), which has published regulatory guidance on the topic.

The University is fully committed to securing and promoting freedom of speech within the law for staff, students and visiting speakers in all activities relating to academic life. The University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech sets out the University's values, approach and associated procedures in detail (<https://www.governanceandcompliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/governance-and-strategy/university-code-practice-freedom-speech>).

This document is currently being reviewed against the OfS' regulatory guidance. Any amendments arising from the review will be subject to approval being sought through the University's normal governance processes. In the meantime, **this document is to be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with the Code of Practice; in the case of any perceived conflict, the provisions of the Code of Practice will take precedence insofar as that is lawful and reasonably practicable.**

For further information on the new legislation, please see the Governance and Compliance Division website (<https://www.governanceandcompliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/governance-and-strategy/higher-education-freedom-speech-act-2023-overview>).

We are each individually responsible for our own actions and for recognising the impact of our behaviour on others. Acknowledging the University's core values of freedom of thought and expression and freedom from discrimination, we should always strive to:

- Foster a **trusting** environment that enables honest and supportive working and studying conditions
- Recognise that our actions can impact others and show **courtesy** and **consideration** in our interactions with others, even if we disagree with their views
- Discuss views that others may find disagreeable or distasteful in a **constructive** and lawful way, in line with the University Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech
- Treat each other **fairly** and **without bias**
- Recognise and **acknowledge** the contribution of others to our work
- Honour the need for **confidentiality** when the nature of our work requires it
- Maintain appropriate and **professional** relationships with all members of the University, in particular students and those in subordinate positions to us
- Promote a culture where colleagues can **speak out** about inappropriate behaviour
- Support our colleagues experiencing inappropriate behaviour by **intervening**, speaking out and **helping** where we feel able.

In order to maintain a culture of courtesy and professionalism, **we must never bully, harass, discriminate, victimise or commit sexual misconduct**, by avoiding such behaviour as:

- **Talking down** to, belittling, gratuitously interrupting or preventing others from speaking
- Directing **inappropriate language**, such as swearing, towards others or making degrading comments about individuals or groups of individuals
- Making **inappropriate derogatory remarks** about a colleague's performance in public, whether directly (such as in a meeting) or indirectly (for example, by needlessly copying people into an email)
- **Humiliating others** by shouting at them, either publicly or privately
- **Maliciously ignoring** individuals or groups of individuals, or inhibiting the ability of others to perform their roles by withholding information or excluding them from necessary meetings and discussion
- **Imposing overbearing** and intimidating levels of supervision or management
- **Undermining** the reputation of others through malicious rumours or false allegations or by breaching confidential conversations
- Making **jokes, remarks or gestures** relating to **race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability or age** that are degrading or discriminatory even if this is independent of our intentions.
- **Mocking, mimicking or belittling** a colleague, student or visitor because we perceive them as different to us, or using this difference as a reason to treat them unfairly
- Behaving in a **controlling** or **coercive** way, such as placing excessive pressure on others to subscribe to a particular political or religious belief
- Circulating or displaying any type of communication on any form of media that would otherwise constitute a form of **inappropriate behaviour** contrary to this Policy
- Making **unwelcome** and **unpermitted sexual advances**, suggestive behaviour or touching someone against their will or without their consent, even if it is perceived as harmless by the individual behaving this way
- **Retaliating to allegations** of inappropriate behaviour, including threatening those who have made the allegations, providing unfair or misleading references, or blocking access to career development opportunities.

**All University employees and workers have a responsibility to act in line with this Code.** College employees and workers, academic visitors, volunteers, retired staff, suppliers and others are also expected to behave in a manner that is consistent with the Code if undertaking their work or services specifically in the University environment or when engaging in activities related to the University.



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