



## Name of Policy: Freedom of Speech

**RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE:** General Purposes Committee

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:** Principal Bursar

**LINKED DOCUMENTS: College:** Room Booking Policy; Research Ethics for College-only Staff Policy; Social Media Policy

**LINKED DOCUMENTS: Other:** University Freedom of Speech Bill

**Annual Review date:** First meeting of Hilary Term

### PURPOSE OF POLICY

1. This document sets out the framework within which members of the College, staff and visitors enjoy the right to freedom of speech.
2. The freedom protected by this policy is confined to the exercise of freedom of speech within the law, in particular the [Higher Education \(Freedom of Speech\) Act 2023](#), which places a duty on the College to promote freedom of speech.
3. This Policy covers all events taking place on college premises; or events held elsewhere which are college funded, affiliated or branded.

### POLICY

4. The Governing Body of the College will ensure it is understood by the College community as a whole that principles of free expression, academic freedom, autonomy, confidentiality, privacy and equality of rights according to law provide the overarching context within which the College's *Prevent* duty will be considered. The *Prevent* duty strategy will be implemented in a manner that is proportionate and positively secures and protects these rights (Annexe A).
5. Members, students, and employees of the College are required at all times to 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.
6. 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. Only criminal speech is proscribed
7. Whilst there is no legal prohibition on offending others, the College expects speakers and those taking part in meetings and other events to respect its values, to be sensitive to the diversity of its community and to show respect to all sections of that community. Speakers and audience alike should be reminded of their responsibilities to observe the relevant College's policies on harassment and to conduct civil academic discussions at all times.



8. Any significant infringements of the provisions of this policy may render those responsible liable to disciplinary action under the College's disciplinary procedures.
9. In any case where the College is proposing to grant permission to an outside organisation or group to hold a meeting or event on College premises, the provisions of this policy will apply.

## ANNEXE A

*A Free Speech Statement for the University of Oxford/ all Oxford colleges*

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 University/College are confronted with views that some find unsettling, extreme or offensive. The University/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 the University of Oxford/St John's College, laid out in this Freedom of Speech Policy.



## POLICY HISTORY

<b><i>Date of GB approval</i></b>	<b><i>Brief summary of changes</i></b>	<b><i>Confirmation that linked documents have updated if necessary</i></b>	<b><i>College policy register updated</i></b>
June 2016	Generation of policy	Confirmed	Yes (Sandra Campbell)
March 2017	Policy reviewed by Committee	Confirmed	Yes (Sandra Campbell)
March 2018	Policy reviewed by Committee and subsequently approved by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Sandra Campbell)
Jan 2019	Policy reviewed by Committee and subsequently approved by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Sandra Campbell)
Feb 2020	Policy reviewed by Committee and subsequently approved by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Kate Doornik)
Jan 2021	Policy reviewed by Committee and subsequently approved by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Sandra Campbell)
Jan 2022	Updated linked Documents, hyperlinked to University statement Policy reviewed by Committee and subsequently approved by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)
Jan 2023	Reviewed by GB, no amendments	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)
Jan 2024	Reviewed by GB, linked to HE Freedom of Speech Act 2023	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)