

## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR STUDENT-LED GROUP SOCIAL EVENTS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The University recognises that there are many different organised student-led groups within its community (often referred to as Clubs or Societies). These groups exist for a variety of reasons: to participate in specific activities, to share passion for a subject, or to practise a chosen lifestyle, culture or religion. Membership of these groups is often diverse, incorporating many different cultures, religions, lifestyles and ages (with some student members being under the age of 18).
- 1.2 The University is committed to ensuring that all activities take place in a safe and inclusive manner, without causing undue pressure and distress to members, or a negative impact to the local community. The University aims to balance the “four freedoms” of free speech, academic freedom, freedom from hate and the freedom to protest to value the rights, responsibilities and dignity of individuals. All students are encouraged to share in the benefits of being a member of such groups and/or participating in the organised activities led by them (often referred to as ‘socials’) and to have the expectation to do so safely within an atmosphere of tolerance and respect. This Code of Conduct works together with the University’s [Freedom of Expression Code of Practice](#) and [Speaker and Event Approval Procedure](#), along with other associated policies referred to in section six below that set out the rights, legal obligations and principles that the University and individuals should observe to protect freedom of expression.
- 1.3 The University recognises that student-led organised social events play an important role in fostering a sense of belonging within the University community. These activities help students to make friends, develop networking skills and to work better together as well as contributing positively to overall wellbeing.
- 1.4 This code sets out how the University expects student-led group social events to be conducted, and sets out the expected standards of behaviour for event organisers and participants. Students organising or participating in student-led group social events are expected to act responsibly and with consideration for the safety, dignity and wellbeing of others. Students may be regarded as representing the University when organising and/or participating in such events. Students have the right to be a member of a group without facing discrimination, embarrassment, humiliation or abuse from others and must not be subjected to coercion, pressure or any forced expectation to take part in any activities during organised social activities. This includes situations where pressure is indirect, such as fear of being excluded or non-participation being perceived to have an

impact on a student's status within a group. All members of the group should be sensitive to the needs, circumstances, beliefs and feelings of others (whether they are members of the group or are bystanders) and should be aware of their own attitudes and behaviours, and their impact on others.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 A student-led '**social event**' is defined as:

An event, held at any time whether in-person or online, whereby the members of a group gather at a specific place (on or off-campus) and time and have a clear purpose or theme. These activities may be linked to a course or society, for example, often involve booking rooms and advertising and may or may not involve an external speaker(s) and/or participants from outside of the University. For example, but not limited to, society social activities (quizzes, cultural celebrations), welcome activities, Course-Rep social gatherings, sports dinners, training, conferences or speaker events.

Student-led social events are allowed at Keele University.

2.2 An '**induction**' is defined as:

An event where new members are introduced to the rules, structure and other members of the group they have joined. Inductions often take the form of a social event.

Inductions are allowed at Keele University.

2.3 An '**initiation**' is defined as:

An instance in which members (often, but not limited to, new members) of the social group are encouraged, expected or forced either directly or indirectly, through pressure to perform a task or tasks as a means to gaining entry, credibility, or status within that club and where that task may compromise a person's dignity.

Initiations are not allowed at Keele University, even if everyone consents to the activity. Consent cannot be freely given where there is real or perceived pressure to participate.

## 3. SCOPE

3.1 This Code of Conduct covers all group social events held on and off campus.

3.2 All students involved in group social events of any kind for new and existing members must follow this code of conduct. Failure to do so will result in disciplinary action being taken against them under Regulation B1 (Student Discipline) and/or the Students' Union in accordance with the Student Non-Academic Discipline code of Practice.

3.3 It is the responsibility of the group's social secretary (or the organiser of the event, where no social secretary exists) to ensure that all members are aware of the need to act responsibly

and respectfully at all times and in all situations. Responsibility may also extend to group committees and, where appropriate, the group collectively.

#### 4. CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

##### Freedom of Expression

- 4.1 The University is committed to securing and promoting freedom of speech within the law in accordance with its statutory duties, including those set out in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. The University will take reasonably practicable steps to ensure that staff, students, members and visitors are able to express lawful views and opinions without undue interference, recognising the importance of open and robust debate within an academic community.
- 4.2 In organising or participating in student-led group social events, students must exercise freedom of expression in a manner that is consistent with the rights, dignity and safety of others and in compliance with applicable legislation and University policies. This includes adherence to the University's Freedom of Expression Code of Practice and any relevant approval processes for events and external speakers. Freedom of expression does not extend to unlawful conduct, including harassment, discrimination, or behaviour which would otherwise breach the [Student Non-Academic Discipline Code of Practice](#).
- 4.3 Where events involve external speakers or activities that may present a higher risk, students must follow the University's [Speaker and Event Approval Procedure](#), including any requirements for prior approval and risk assessment.

##### Expected Standards of Behaviour

- 4.4 All students should be made aware prior to or at the beginning of any kind of social events that at no time is the completion of any tasks or activities mandatory. Students should not be adversely affected for saying no.
- 4.5 Students must not feel coerced, pressured or forced into taking part in any games, ceremonies or activities. Peer pressure is not acceptable.
- 4.6 In addition, the following are activities (not exhaustive) which the University considers to be unacceptable at any time. Any student or group found engaging in these activities (even if individuals are willing to take part) will be subject to disciplinary action:
- Forcing or requiring someone to drink alcohol or to take banned substances
  - Consumption of various foodstuffs or drink, that could potentially cause harm or be demeaning
  - Varying states of nudity which compromise dignity, safety or wellbeing.
  - Consumption of any bodily fluids.
  - Any other behaviour that causes, or is likely to cause, harm, distress, humiliation, or degradation to any individual.

- 4.7 Under no circumstances can the membership of a university group be awarded for anything other than legitimate entry requirements.
- 4.8 Under no circumstances should any damage be purposefully caused to any persons, property, or to the build and natural environment of the University.
- 4.9 No groups or students should organise or take part in initiation ceremonies.
- 4.10 Groups must abide by any national, local or University rules/guidance relating to public health.
- 4.11 Behaviour at group social events may constitute a breach of Regulation B1 where it aligns with behaviours outlined in the [Student Non-Academic Discipline Code of Practice](#), including but not limited to coercive behaviour, harassment, bullying, threatening behaviour, or conduct causing harm or distress.

## **5. REPORTING CONCERNS AND ACCESSING SUPPORT**

- 5.1 The University promotes a culture of respect and zero tolerance of harassment, abuse and misconduct through initiatives such as the Never OK campaign. Students are expected to uphold these principles in all group social settings. Further information is available via the Never OK webpages.
- 5.2 Students who experience or witness behaviour that may breach this Code are encouraged to report their concerns. Reports can be made via Report and Support, Student Services, or directly to the Student Discipline Team, in line with the Student Non-Academic Discipline Code of Practice.
- 5.3 Reports will be considered in accordance with the Student Non-Academic Discipline Code of Practice. The University will assess each report and determine the appropriate course of action, which may include informal resolution or formal disciplinary investigation.
- 5.4 Support is available through Student Services and the Advice and Support at Keele service (Keele Students' Union) for students involved in or affected by incidents arising from group social events. Students also have access to a 24/7 Student Assistance Programme helpline.
- 5.5 Where behaviour may constitute a criminal offence, the University may report matters to the police or support individuals in doing so. The University does not act as a substitute for the criminal justice process but may take action under its own procedures where appropriate.

## **6. University Disciplinary Action**

- 6.1 Disciplinary action will be taken by the University against any individuals that are found to have breached this code of conduct during any induction or other social event. Where appropriate, action may also be taken in relation to groups, committees, or organisers. The disciplinary action taken, and any penalties subsequently imposed, will depend on the nature of the breach. The range of penalties that can be given are set out in the [Student Non-Academic Discipline Code of Practice](#).

- 6.2 Any reports of behaviour that may breach this code of conduct and/or constitute a breach under Regulation B1 (Student Discipline) will be assessed and may be subject to investigation under the appropriate process in accordance with the [Student Non-Academic Discipline Code of Practice](#). Students will find sources of support available to them in section 19 should they become subject to disciplinary procedures.
- 6.3 Where necessary, immediate risk mitigation measures may be applied in accordance with Section 6 (Risk Mitigation) of the Student Non-Academic Discipline Code of Practice. This may include temporary restrictions or exclusion from specified facilities, activities, or the University, where this is considered necessary to protect individuals, the University community, or the integrity of the process.
- 6.4 The University may share relevant information with the Students' Union where appropriate, in line with data protection and institutional procedures, to enable consideration of any action within their own governance frameworks.

## 7. LINKS

Regulation B1: Student Discipline <https://www.keele.ac.uk/regulations/regulationb1/>  
 Information on the Student Discipline process - <http://www.keele.ac.uk/studentdiscipline>  
[Student Non-Academic Discipline Code of Practice - Keele University](#)  
[NeverOK - Keele University](#)  
[Report + Support - Report + Support - Keele University Report + Support](#)  
[Freedom of Expression Code of Practice](#)  
[Speaker and Event Approval Procedure](#)  
 KeeleSU Discipline Policy - <https://keelesu.com/advice/academic/discipline/>

## 8. DOCUMENT CONTROL INFORMATION

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