Freshers’ Events Guidelines 2018

Background

Many Alumni Groups host pre-arrival Freshers’ Events in August and September for students starting a course at the University in Michaelmas Term. Freshers’ Events provide an opportunity for incoming students to make some friends, ask questions and get an idea of what to expect when they arrive. Attendees can benefit greatly from speaking to current students, recent graduates and alumni offering information and advice for living and studying at Cambridge. Freshers’ Events also enable Groups to engage meaningfully with students and stay connected to the University.

In 2017, Groups hosted 53 Freshers’ Events, which were attended by 731 incoming students – an increase of 29% from 2016. 90% (131) of attendees that completed a follow-up survey were either very satisfied or satisfied with the event they attended.

Purpose of guidelines

This document sets out an approach so that ‘Freshers’ Events’ hosted by University Alumni Groups are welcoming and accessible to incoming students. It aims to advise Alumni Group representatives on:

(i) good practice in planning, promoting and prioritising the wellbeing of undergraduate and postgraduate students attending Freshers’ Events; and
(ii) hosting events that support the Collegiate University in tackling myths and misconceptions about Cambridge.

Freshers’ Events that fall within the guidelines will be supported and promoted by the Collegiate University.

Guidance on venue

The Collegiate University encourages Freshers’ Events that are accessible and inclusive and that make attendees feel comfortable and safe. Despite best intentions, some venues may have the effect of making some attendees feel daunted or demoralised and even worried that Cambridge might not be for them. The guidelines also seek to safeguard students and alumni alike by reducing any perceived or actual risks associated with minors being in the company of adults, on private property, who have not had a Disclosure and Barring Service check. Holding an event in a public environment does not remove that risk, but it does reduce it.

• It is recommended that the venue is neutral, public and accessible.

• Traditional private members’ clubs (such as the Oxford and Cambridge Club, London) are best avoided, but can be considered if no other venue is available, provided that there is no dress code and that it is made clear to attendees that they are not required to become members of the club, or pay an entrance fee over and above any small charge associated with attending the event.

• Other types of private members’ clubs or associations (such as private sports clubs) are suitable venues, on the same provisos as for traditional private members’ clubs.

• Please do not hold the event in a private house (such as a Group member’s home).
Guidance on dress code

Groups are encouraged to hold Freshers’ Events that are informal and inclusive and an effective way to convey this tone to attendees is to let them wear whatever they feel comfortable in. Dress codes can be problematic, because they can inadvertently exclude students who do not own the required garments or who feel uncomfortable wearing them. The guideline below seeks to address this.

- It is recommended that there is no dress code. Where a venue operates a dress code, it is suggested that the Group seeks to arrange with the venue a concession to the code for the duration of the event.

Guidance on serving and drinking alcohol

If a Group is considering providing alcohol at the event, it is important to bear in mind that attendees could be under the legal drinking age for their location. There are risks associated with serving alcohol and Groups should take measures to keep attendees safe. The guidance below seeks to address this.

- Groups offering alcoholic drinks are requested to do so in line with local licensing laws and to observe the minimum legal drinking age for their country/region.

- Where alcohol is offered (for example, a glass of wine on arrival or as a toast), Groups are asked to safeguard attendees from alcohol misuse and peer pressure to drink alcohol.

- Please ensure that non-alcoholic drinks are readily available.

Guidance on charging attendees

Many students are on a tight budget and might be unable to afford to attend the event if they are to be charged. Groups are therefore encouraged to waive, or at least cap, any fees in order to make their events inclusive to student on all budgets. The following guidelines seek to address this.

- It is recommended that attendees are not charged an entrance fee or for refreshments.

- If charging is unavoidable:
  - it is recommended that a venue offering low or concessionary rates for hire and refreshments is booked
  - it is recommended that the charge is capped at £5 (or local equivalent) per attendee and covers any reasonable costs (such as for venue hire, first drink and nibbles) that will enable the attendee to participate fully in the event
  - the charge is to be advertised up front to prospective attendees
  - charges are to be used only to recoup the Group its outlay for hosting the event, or to cover venue hire or refreshments (these events are not intended to generate a profit).

- To keep costs down, some Groups hold their Freshers’ Events in a member’s place of business. Many Groups use any profits generated from other events to subsidise their Fresher’s Events. Some Groups choose to split the costs among members.