

External Speaker Policy

Version 2

July 2026

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1. Introduction

As set out in the University's Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice, Freedom of Speech within the law and academic freedom are fundamental at UWE Bristol. We are committed to upholding freedom of speech at every opportunity, and this should only be limited where, based on risk assessment, there are genuine safety concerns or where speech is unlawful. This is in line with the high level of legal protection afforded to freedom of speech.

Holding open, challenging debates rather than silencing the views of those we do not agree with, helps to advance understanding and address prejudice and discrimination. Events and external speakers are key to supporting a vibrant university community.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set in place a governing framework for events with external speakers in line with the University's Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice and corresponding external legal and regulatory requirements. The policy outlines the context for the approval of events involving an external speaker. This policy aims to ensure that event organisers are aware of the framework we operate within when facilitating external speakers and the measures that may be required to support their event. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice, further guidance provided on the University's website (<https://www.uwe.ac.uk/events/external-speakers>) and, for staff, the University's Organising an Event Guide provided on the intranet.

3. Definitions

An "external speaker" is deemed to be anybody who is neither a registered student nor a paid/unpaid employee of the University of the West of England who will be addressing a group at an event.

For academic colleagues, "events" include lectures or seminars in the academic space.

An "event" includes any gathering that is hosted on university premises, an external venue or online in the name of the university, where a platform is being given to any external speaker or group of speakers. This might include, but is not limited to lectures, research seminars, student society events, meetings and debates and academic conferences including in a teaching, learning or research setting or in the context of co-curricular or extra-curricular activity.

The "event organiser" (normally a member of staff or a student) is accountable and has responsibility for ensuring their external speaker event is planned, managed and run in accordance with the University's values, policy documents and legal obligations. The event organiser is responsible for consulting with appropriate colleagues on safety matters.

A "stall" is a temporary pop-up stand, booth or compartment where goods can be sold/given away, or where information is displayed/provided/recorded. Stall requests submitted by staff or students that provide information or instruction or promote a certain view, or organisation will be assessed in line with the External Speaker Policy.

Individual students are not permitted to invite external speakers to speak at UWE Bristol without an internal academic sponsor.

External requests for events/stalls with external speakers will be assessed in line with this policy.

Recorded or live events involving speakers projecting directly and specifically to university premises are also covered by this policy.

Academics bringing external speakers into the University for the purposes of learning and teaching (where this is not open to the public or external audience) should use the [External Speaker Risk Assessment form](#) when one of the following is deemed to be true.

Question 1: Does the proposed speaker have a media profile? (Do they feature regularly in the newspapers, social media, and/or TV)

Question 2: Could the proposed speaker be seen as a controversial figure?

Question 3: Could the topic of the event attract controversy?

Question 4: Is the proposed speaker/theme likely to attract attendance from individuals/groups that have previously been known to express views that may be in breach of the Freedom of Speech Policy?

If the answer to each of these questions is no, completion of the form is not required where the event is contained within the curriculum and is not open to the public or external audiences.

If any are answered as yes, a further three questions will be asked, and a full risk assessment form will be sent for completion.

In all cases, visitors should sign in at the designated reception point as advised by the host and the visit should proceed in line with the University's wider guidance for managing visitors.

4. Organising an event

Anyone organising an event that involves an external speaker or speakers to be hosted by the University must ensure that:

- This policy and the Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice and associated processes are followed.
- Where required, all such events have a completed External Speakers Risk Assessment Form submitted to the Events Team for approval.
- Any requested modifications are implemented before the event takes place.
- Wider guidance and requirements regarding organising an event are followed to ensure the event is delivered safely and successfully.

Where an event is assessed as low risk in relation to the matters covered through this policy, the University will only require 14 days' notice of such events. However, if an event or speaker is assessed as having potential risk, organisers should allow the University up to 21 days' notice to ensure there is adequate time to implement modifications. If additional notice is required, the University will aim to respond as quickly as possible.

Under no circumstances should an event be advertised or take place if the External Speaker Policy and process have not been followed or an event has not been approved. Failure to comply with the External Speaker Policy may result in the room booking and/or the event being cancelled and the organiser may be subject to formal action under the University's normal disciplinary processes.

The University acknowledges that there are occasions where opportunities for speakers arise at short notice or situations are fast changing. Where it has not been possible to follow these processes in the defined timescale, the University will still consider late bookings and accommodate them where possible but cannot commit to agreeing bookings outside of the specified timescales. In these instances, organisers should complete and send forms as usual and follow up with a phone call to the Events Team.

5. Assessment of events

In enabling events with external speakers to take place, assessment will be undertaken in accordance with this Policy, the [Freedom of Speech Policy](#) and all other relevant rules and regulations.

In deciding whether to approve an event with an external speaker, the University will consider its legal duties, including the following:

- Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023;
- Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015;
- Equality Act 2010;
- Health & Safety at Work Act 1974.

The expression of views that may be controversial, but do not breach the law, will not constitute reasonable grounds for refusal. Reasonable grounds for refusal would include, but are not limited to:

- The event being considered to give rise to a breach of the University's Standard of Conduct expected of students or the terms and conditions of employment for a member of staff.
- The event being considered likely to incite those attending to commit a criminal act.
- The event being likely to give rise to an environment in which people will experience, or could reasonably fear, harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse or violence, particularly because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.
- The safety of the speakers or attendees being compromised, before, during or after the event.
- The event being in direct support of a proscribed terrorist organisation or an organisation whose aims and objectives are illegal or of doubtful legality or in the view of the University lead to the expression of views contrary to the criminal law.

The University will withhold the right to use the University premises if it fears there is a likelihood of this Policy and the Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice being breached.

In the spirit of debate, the University will normally seek to ensure that events or speakers identified as posing a risk will go ahead subject to the agreement of appropriate safeguards. Refusal or cancellation of an event will only occur in exceptional circumstances, for example, upon the advice of Police or Department for Education.

Following assessment, where a proposed speaker or event presents potential risks and/or possible reputational damage, the request will be referred from the Events Team to the University's Safeguarding Manager for approval. The Safeguarding Manager will seek advice and

guidance from relevant internal and external stakeholders. Where an event is assessed as high risk, these events will require the approval of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Registrar or nominee. In such cases, the Events Team will notify the organiser of the outcome of the approval process and necessary modifications within the specified time.

The University reserves the right to cancel, postpone or request modification to any event at any time should such risks be identified. The University may, amongst other things:

- Ensure the presence of University Security to ensure good order;
- Ensure the presence of a Duty Manager of the University and/or the Students' Union at UWE to ensure good order;
- Alter the proceedings of the meeting and/or its facilitation, such as appointing an alternative independent Chair;
- Request stewards be provided by the organisers;
- Place a limitation on what attendees may bring to a venue, which may include banning food or drink or anything that could be used as a potential weapon;
- Bag searches and ID checks;
- Place a ban on banners, flags, placards or similar items being allowed into a venue and its immediate surroundings;
- Place a limit on attendees or to whom it is advertised/accessible to (i.e.-University audience or open to the general public);
- Seek declaration of attendees in advance of the event;
- Request submission of the speeches or presentations in advance of the event;
- Reserve the right to input into communications about the event (before and after);
- Cancel, prohibit or delay at any time.

As set out in the University's Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice, the University will typically cover the costs of security for events held on our premises. However, in certain circumstances, such as when security costs are disproportionate to the number of attendees, or when visiting speakers are expected to provide their own security due to their political or state office, these costs may be passed on to the event organisers. The University will not cover security costs where the visiting speaker is not invited by a student or employee of the University. In the event that security costs are to be passed on to the organiser of the event, the University will supply the organiser of the event with a clear written summary of its calculation of the expected security cost and an explanation for this calculation. The summary may be appealed by submitting an appeal in writing to the Clerk to the Board of Governors.

Event organisers will be consulted on any conditions or modifications in advance of the event taking place and they will then be responsible for informing the external speaker of the outcome.

If there are breaches of policies at any event the matter may be referred for disciplinary or legal action.

6. External speaker events organised by the UWE SU

Events hosted and organised by The Students' Union at UWE, and its affiliated groups are subject to [The Students' Union policies and procedures](#).

The Students' Union will share all external speaker risk assessments with the Events Team who will undertake an independent risk assessment and approval process, in accordance with this policy.

7. Managing events

Event organisers have a responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that no enforced segregation by any protected characteristic takes place at any event, unless it is specifically for religious worship or practice or for reasons of health and safety, and that attendees have the freedom to choose where they sit. Event organisers must not knowingly facilitate discrimination by others at the request of an external speaker or any individual attending or wishing to attend an event.

The protection of freedom of speech does not allow a speaker to break the law or breach the lawful rights of others. It should be noted that these provisions do not create a broad right not to be offended; the expression of views which some people may find objectionable or offensive is not prohibited generally by law and students should be able to confront and debate opinions and ways of thinking which may be different to their own.

The event organiser is required to ensure that all reasonable and practical measures are taken in relation to the arrangement of the meeting, event or activity and to its conduct, to prevent any breach of the law, or University policy and regulation.

The event organiser or designated lead is required to be present at the meeting, event or activity.

8. Managing external speakers and attendees

It is the responsibility of the event organiser to ensure that all external speakers receive a copy of the Guidelines for External Speakers and the Freedom of Speech Policy.

All speakers and attendees are expected to act with civility, consideration and respect for others in the University and the local community.

9. Data Sharing

Where it deems there is a legitimate reason to do so, the University reserves the right to share information on the external speakers it has hosted, and/or those it deemed to be a risk, with other relevant agencies.

In accordance with its obligations as detailed in the Prevent Duty Guidance, the University will report any major incidences of concern involving external speakers on campus to the Office for Students (OfS).

10. Complaints

Failure by a member of staff or student to comply with this policy will be treated seriously and may be subject to formal action under the University's normal disciplinary processes.

In the event that a member of staff, student or visitor considers there to have been a breach of this policy, they have the right to make a formal complaint by emailing complaints@uwe.ac.uk.

11. Policy ownership and oversight

This policy will be reviewed every three years, unless there are internal or legislative changes that necessitate earlier review.

Document name:	External Speaker Policy
Version number:	V2
This version approved by:	Academic Board 1 July 2026
Effective from:	1 July 2026
Next review date:	March – July 2029 (or before this time to reflect external or internal changes as required).
Senior Policy Owner:	Katie Jenkins, Director Student Recruitment and Marketing
Policy Author:	Gemma Mannell, Events Manager
Overseeing committee:	Academic Board
Compliance measures:	Concerns about the implementation of this policy should be raised through the University's complaints process - complaints@uwe.ac.uk .
Related policies, procedures and codes of practice:	Freedom of Speech Policy
Related legislative and/or regulatory requirements	Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023; Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015; Equality Act 2010; Health & Safety at Work Act 1974. Office for Students Conditions of Registration: E2 – public interest governance principles.

Examples of risk levels

Level of risk	Examples	Level of checks
Low	The topic or subject matter of the event is clearly described and does not appear contentious e.g. NHS speaker addressing a nursing conference, national power company speakers attending a regular business event for research, enterprise and innovation. There is no history of issues with any previous visit by the same speaker or information	Standard External Speakers Risk Assessment Form completed. For events that are contained within the learning and teaching space and not open to the public or external audiences, where all questions are answered as "No," form completion is not required.

	from any other agency or institution to suggest otherwise.	
Medium	The topic or subject matter is open to wide interpretation and/or potential misuse. Vague information or insufficient details to make an informed evaluation have been provided. Any views presented during the event may remain unchallenged by opposing views in the same forum.	Intermediate External Speakers Risk Assessment Form completed. Some questions answered as "Yes." Additional fact finding and research is required. The event organiser may need to complete a full risk assessment. The event may be referred to the Safeguarding Manager and modifications may be required.
High	The topic or subject matter is controversial, is likely to link to proscribed organisations or has potential to radicalise people or be used to draw people into terrorism. Details of the speaker and/or the organisation remain unclear after more information is requested. Information is obtained which suggests that the speaker or organisation involved has held previous meetings elsewhere which have raised concerns. Concerns are raised by Student Union officers or staff.	Enhanced External Speakers Risk Assessment Form completed. Some questions answered as "Yes." Additional in-depth enquiries and fact finding are required. The event is referred to the Safeguarding Manager. Advice should be sought from external agencies as necessary e.g. the police, regional Prevent coordinator, community groups, local authority, other universities. Modifications will be required/event may not be given approval.

External Speaker Process

