

External Speaker and Event Procedures

1. Context

Freedom of expression within the law is central to the concept of a university. To this end, the University seeks to foster a culture which permits freedom of thought and expression within a framework of mutual respect.

The University's statutory responsibilities regarding events and speakers are governed by a wide range of legislative requirements including:

- The duty to have particular regard to the need to ensure freedom of speech, including its obligations under the Human Rights Act (1998)
- The duty to protect academic freedom (Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005)
- The duty to prevent people being drawn into terrorism (Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015)
- The duty (Terrorism Act, 2000) not to arrange or assist in arranging a meeting in the knowledge that the meeting is to support the activities of a proscribed organisation, or is to be addressed by a person who belongs or professes to belong to a proscribed organisation
- The duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination against certain groups, and advance equality of opportunity between groups, (Equality Act 2010)
- Obligations under criminal law eg with regard to use of threats, incitement of violence, inflaming religious or racial hatred
- Obligations under charities law, ie whether the proposed activity is consistent with the University's charitable objects
- A general duty of care to students, staff and visitors, including avoiding placing students, staff or visitors in situations that may expose them to risks to their health and safety.

2. Scope

This policy applies to non-curriculum linked speakers, conferences, events and/or speeches and guest speakers held at or in the name of Birmingham City University, whether booked by University Staff, students or external parties. This includes events held virtually via collaboration tools such as MS Teams or Zoom.

3. Procedures

These procedures enable the University to assess the potential risks of an event involving an external speaker in compliance with the Statutory Prevent Duty under the Counter-Terrorism Act 2015. A Prevent-related risk may arise from the speaker, the organisation they represent, the topic of the event, or the audience, or any combination of these.

Faculties and Professional Services are responsible for ensuring that these procedures are followed when making arrangements for an event, to allow the University to assess the potential risk in line with the Prevent Duty.

Executive Deans and Heads of Professional Services are responsible for determining where responsibility for coordinating arrangements for an event sits within their areas.

Where the person responsible for an event, 'The Organiser', considers that there may be a potential risk under the Prevent Duty, they are required to complete the *External Speaker and Event Form* and send it to the Assistant Director for Security Services, who will then advise on how to proceed. If the Organiser considers that there is no risk of an event in relation to the topic, audience or speaker, then refer to section 2 of these procedures.

The *External Speaker and Event Form* must be:

- Completed to allow Security Services to make an assessment with regards to the safeguarding and wellbeing of students and staff; and to any risk of publicity, positive or negative, for the University;
- Where a risk assessment of a proposed event needs to be made, the form needs to be completed by the organizer and sent via email to Security Services (security.services@bcu.ac.uk);
- Forms should be sent at least two weeks ahead of the planned date of the event and with the support of a University Line Manager, Head of Department, Director of Service or nominee, or Chief Executive of the Students' Union or nominee.
- The Head of Security will aim to respond within one week of receipt of the completed form. If required the Head of Security will seek advice from the Prevent Champion or other member of the Vice-Chancellor's Office; or from external contacts.

Where an event has been approved to proceed the Organiser will be required to appoint sufficient stewards to a number approved by the University Security Services to assist them to conduct an orderly external speaker event. Any variation to the arrangements for external speakers or event should be notified in sufficient time to enable the University to assure itself that the revised arrangements are satisfactory. The University reserves the right to cancel the booking if any changes to arrangements for the event are not notified to the University in sufficient time.

Where the decision is taken to cancel external speakers or an event, the University will endeavour to ensure that the Organiser receive reasonable notice. It is the responsibility of the Organiser of the meeting or event to ensure that those who may have been expected to attend are notified of its cancellation.

Under no circumstances should an event be advertised or take place if the External Speaker and Event Procedures has not been followed or the event has not been approved. Failure to comply with the External Speaker and Event Procedures may result in the room booking being cancelled and the organiser may be subject to formal or informal action under the University's relevant disciplinary policy.

Dealing with potentially controversial events

The University's *Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and External Speaker and Event Policy* makes clear our commitment to open, tolerant debate. While debate about controversial subjects is a legitimate activity within the University, particular care needs to be taken to ensure that balance is observed, and that no platform is given to speakers who promote, condone or encourage others towards violent or non-violent extremism.

The Organiser can mitigate the risk of a potentially controversial event by:

- Reading the *Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech* and the *External Speaker and Event Policy*; and ensuring that they comply
- Ensuring that the event is chaired or facilitated by an experienced individual who will allow for a fair, open and balanced debate/event
- Ensure that the numbers of stewards and security staff are proportionate to the expected size of audience;
- Ensuring that the necessary background checks and due diligence have been conducted and advice sought concerning a potentially controversial topic, audience or external speaker or (associated) organisation; and
- Communicating the ground rules and expectations of the event in terms of freedom of speech, fairness, respect and balance, in advance of and/or before the event.

If in doubt, the Organiser is encouraged to contact the University Secretary for advice.

The University reserves the right to refuse permission to hold events on its premises which might be deemed inappropriate, by the nature of the external speakers present, by the topics discussed or the views likely to be expressed.

The University, through the University Secretary or nominee, also reserves the right to cancel or refuse permission for a controversial event if there are reasonable grounds to expect that the health and safety of the attendees may be at risk or that the law of the land may be breached.

4. Conduct

The University expects external speakers to act in accordance with the law and not to breach the lawful rights of others.

Set out below are some examples of the University's expectations. Please note that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of unacceptable conduct by external speakers.

During the course of the event at which he/she or they participate, **no speaker(s) shall:**

- Act in breach of criminal law.
- Incite hatred or violence or any breach of the criminal law.
- Encourage or promote any acts of terrorism or promote individuals, groups or organisations that support terrorism.
- Spread hatred and intolerance.

- Discriminate against or harass any person or group on the grounds of their sex, race, nationality, ethnicity, disability, religious or other similar belief, sexual orientation or age.
- Defame any person or organisation.
- Raise or gather funds for any external organisation or cause without express permission of the University.

During the course of the event at which he/she or they participate, **all speaker(s) shall:**

- Comply with the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.
- Comply with the University's [External Speaker Policy](#).
- Present ideas and opinions, in particular those that may be contentious or potentially offensive, in the spirit of academic debate, being open to challenge and question.
- Follow the University's policy on and instructions relating to [health and safety](#).

5. Booking rooms for external speaker events

All University space is managed through the Termttime timetabling system, which is the responsibility of the Timetabling Manager, Campus Management Services/ Academic Services.

Consequently, all requests to hold events on University premises that are additional to the coreteaching timetable, whether involving external speakers or not, must be organised via the [University Events Team](#)

6. Review

The *External Speaker and Event Procedures* will be reviewed by the University Executive Group every three years or sooner where new developments in relevant legislation or operational practices require.

Last reviewed: December 2022

Procedure's owner: University Secretary