

External Speaker Process and Guidance

Process

Introduction

Queen Mary, University of London Students' Union (the Union) welcomes events that host external speakers, both on and off campus or online, organised by our student groups. Freedom of expression and freedom of speech are basic human rights that are protected by law. The Union is committed to providing a forum that facilitates this whilst also providing a safe space for our students.

We want all activities hosted by our student groups to be:

- Safe
- Without risk to the reputation of the Union or University
- Within the law
- A positive experience for members, students and attendees
- Inclusive of all members

There are many different types of external speaker events, and this guidance document will cover some examples and what to consider when planning and hosting an external speaker event.

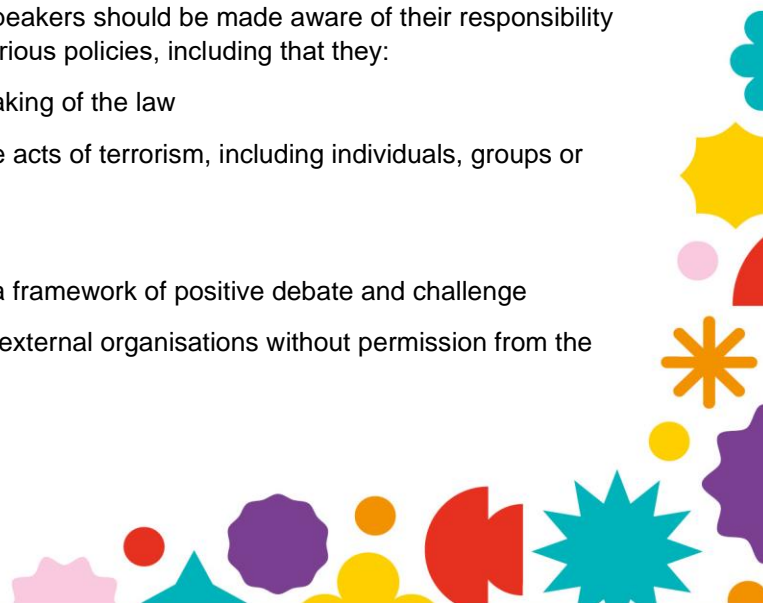
External Speaker definition

An external speaker refers to a person or organisation that is not part of the Union, the University, the College or the Barts Trust, who is invited to speak at any student group event on or off campus, or online. This includes guests invited to speak but not physically present, and the playing of a prerecorded speech.

Any affiliated student group event with external speakers, organised in or outside of the Union or QMUL buildings/property or online, is still within the responsibility and liability of the Union.

The President of the group, or a delegated committee member organising the external speaker event, is responsible for the activities that take place within it. All speakers should be made aware of their responsibility to abide by the law as well as the Union's and QMUL's various policies, including that they:

- Must not incite hatred, violence or call for the breaking of the law
- Are not permitted to encourage, glorify or promote acts of terrorism, including individuals, groups or organisations that support such acts
- Must not spread hatred and intolerance
- Must seek to avoid insulting other groups, within a framework of positive debate and challenge
- Are not permitted to raise or gather funds for any external organisations without permission from the Union



Initial Process

All external speakers require approval from both the Union and the University.

Student groups must notify the Union of any events that involve external speakers with at **least 10 working days'** notice prior to the event. For speakers to be considered at the weekly meeting the request must be submitted by Friday 12noon the week prior, any speakers submitted after this will be reviewed the week after, so this must be considered in event planning. Any request made outside of this time frame will be rejected or postponed aligning with the notice period.

Students are advised to submit any request for a speaker that may be high risk with at least **20 working days'** notice as this gives the Union and QMUL enough time to investigate the speaker and event, and to take any regulatory steps to allow the event to proceed. If there is not enough time to take necessary safeguarding measures, it is highly likely the speaker and event will be rejected or postponed aligning with the notice period on this basis.

External speakers must be registered through the correct form:

- Through the relevant room booking form if hosting the event on campus, or
- Through the external speaker form if hosting the event online or off campus.

You can find the relevant forms on our website [here](#).

When submitting your request, you must include:

- A description of the event
- The topic of the event
- Discussion points the speaker will cover

This helps determine event and speaker risk. No event involving external speakers may be promoted or confirmed until both the Union and University have approved the speaker. Approval may include measures that need to be met to host the external speaker and so an external speaker event cannot be publicised until these have been completed.

The Union and University reserves the right to cancel, prohibit or delay any event with an external speaker if the policy is not followed, or if health, safety and security criteria cannot be met.

Any failure to disclose the full details of an external speaker may result in the event/booking being cancelled and could result in disciplinary action.

Replacement external speakers are not usually accepted and will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Types of events

The potential types of external speaker events you could host are, but not limited to:

- Debate
- Panel
- Training/ Workshop

- Conference
- Question & Answer (Q&A)
- Delivering a talk/speech on a certain topic

If you need help deciding what type of external speaker event you want to run, you can contact your staff support to discuss this and go through how best to organise the event as well.

Academic Department Events

The Union encourages Academic Societies to work closely with their respective departments. Some of the most successful societies, who offer a great experience for their members, are those which develop solid working relationships with their Academic and Support Staff.

All student group events must be booked and organised in accordance with the Union's procedures. This is to ensure that all events and speakers are recorded and approved by the Union and communicated to the University as necessary.

A department may support a society to run an event in various ways (e.g., finance or logistics) but any external speaker request must adhere to the formal Union process if it is a society event.

If a department organises an event which a society is helping to promote, it must not be advertised as a society event. The department should therefore assume the obligation to ensure they have followed the correct University process when booking external speakers.

Approving Speakers

This is a two-stage process which is first approved by the Union and then the University.

Completed forms are processed by the Customer Service Team who complete an external speaker risk assessment by checking the information provided by the student, including any links provided as well as searching the internet for information. This search will consist of reviewing the first six pages of the Google results and speakers' social media profiles and consists of checking the following:

- Press articles referring to the speaker
- Critical press articles referring to the speaker, or to their organisation
- Speaker's own social media (e.g., Meta, X, Instagram)
- Events advertising that the speaker is in attendance (particularly at universities)
- Speaker's own website or blog
- Forums and blogs referring to the speaker's talks/writing

All speaker requests are then reviewed by the Executive Officers on a weekly basis. This is done with support and provided guidance from the Student Engagement Manager, or a nominee on their behalf.

Reasons an external speaker request is deemed high risk include:

- Any person or group is on/or linked to the UK Government list of proscribed terrorist organisations.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>

- The likelihood of the speaker's presence at the event may result in a platform for the expression or promotion of extremism or radicalisation as described in the Charity Commission Guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-charities-from-abuse-for-extremist-purposes>
- The speaker is part of an organisation generally considered to be extremist by NUS, the Students' Union and related searches.
- The speaker is known to have spoken at another institution on a topic that has caused fear or intimidation of students or staff.
- A speaker is accepted in mainstream as being highly controversial.
- A speaker is known to/or likely to cause harm to specific groups of students.
- A speaker has a link or links to any person or group that has, in the team's internet searches, related to any controversy of a negative or positive nature.
- A speaker has a significant profile (50,000+ social media followers), or reports of mainstream media coverage and attracts a following that could cause crowd control and health and safety issues. A speaker can be deemed high profile if the search returns reports of mainstream media coverage (national or regional) and has 10,000+ social media followers.
- A speaker impedes the duty of the Union to be independent from party politics as defined in the guidance on campaigning and political activity by charities. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities>
- A speaker is on tour.

The Executive Officers and Student Engagement Manager, or their nominee, will consider the risk of the event during the external speaker meeting. This will be determined based on:

- If the topic could be of harm to students.
- If the topic targets a certain characteristic of students.
- If the topic promotes fear.
- If the topic could be considered controversial.

The Executive Officers and Student Engagement Manager, or their nominee, may conduct a short investigation into the speaker. In making recommendations, they will assess risk based on the potential for:

- Any decision to limit freedom of speech as per the University's code of practice in pursuance of the 1994 Education Act.
- The event going ahead to cause the Union to be in breach of its own policies.
- The event going ahead to cause the Union to fail its wider legal duties.
- The going ahead to cause reputational risk to the Union.
- The speaker's presence on campus to cause fear or alarm to members of the student body.
- The speaker's presence on campus to give rise to break of peace and/or overcrowding issues leading to health and safety fears.

- Any other factor which is deemed appropriate to consider.

The Executive Officers will then decide to make one of the following recommendations:

- Reject the event on behalf of the Union.
- Fully approve the event, unrestricted on behalf of the Union.
- Approve the event based on regulatory steps designed to reduce risk.

Regulatory steps may require but is not limited to:

- A copy of the speech to be delivered by the speaker and format of the event be sent in advance to the Union.
- The event to be filmed by an independent body.
- The event to be recorded via digital platform or capture recording.
- The event to be observed by the Union elected officers or staff, or University or third-party officials.
- The event to be stewarded or subject to security being present.
- An event promoting a particular view including an opportunity to debate or challenge that view.
- An event originally open only to the group's members to be open to all members of the Union.
- An independent student or officer to chair or facilitate questions and discussions.
- The event to be ticketed and attendees to be checked in.

When considering any regulatory steps designed to reduce risk, the potential for the step itself to cause risk will also be considered.

The Union will communicate the decision to the student groups and University. In any case, the University may place regulatory or extra regulatory steps for external speaker events. External speaker risk assessments can be sent to the student group if requested.

Appeals

If you want to appeal the decision made by the executive officers in terms of the mitigations for your external speaker, then you will need to respond to the email outlining the outcome. This needs to be submitted within 5 working days of receiving the decision. The Student Engagement Manager will then try to arrange a meeting with you to discuss this further and outline why the decision was made. You can also request to discuss the risk assessment for your external speaker.

Student Guidance

Once your event has been approved by the Union and QMUL, you must discuss with your committee members and Union staff which steps you will need to take to ensure the successful organisation of your event.

The following points outline some of the actions that can be taken to ensure that sensitive issues are handled properly and are the best practice for all speaker events.

Security

If a speaker is considered to be high risk, then a mitigation may be that security is needed. This could be due to the external speaker being someone considered high-profile, for example if the mayor of London was invited to speak on campus, then they would have their own security, and the University would need to provide security as well. The Union will try and help to facilitate a discussion between your student group and security to go over what will happen on the day and who the contact point will be.

Promotion

You cannot promote an external speaker event until both the venue has been confirmed and the external speaker has been approved. If your speaker has not been approved, then you cannot advertise who will be speaking at your event. Once your speaker has been approved then you can promote the event.

You may also decide you do not want to promote the venue if you know the speaker will be popular and you can only have a certain number of people attend based on venue capacity. You can get tickets set up that send the location to ticketholders.

How to engage in positive debate

As encouraged by the charter for responsible debate:

Informed

- Aim to ensure accuracy and base your contributions on evidence and experience.
- Talk to people with different beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds.
- Be honest in how you communicate and speak with conviction for what you believe.

Respectful

- Listen carefully, open-mindedly, and with empathy.
- Use emotional language judiciously, avoiding disrespectful or inflammatory language.
- Show appreciation for good points made by others, acknowledging when they change your mind.

Inclusive

- Communicate in ways that unite rather than divide.
- Try to address imbalances in power, knowledge, and accessibility.
- Seek to identify common ground and shared purpose.

Topic and Title

Express the topic for discussion or the motion for debate carefully. Try to make sure that it does not build in a presumption in favour of one side of the argument or another, or implicitly cast aspersions on those who take

a particular view. It must also avoid inciting hatred. For example, “Should the time limit for legal abortions be cut?” provides a way of discussing a sensitive issue in a way that respects all people’s views, whereas “Maintaining the 24-week limit for legal abortions is immoral” casts the same discussion in a less sensitive way.

Briefing

Provide all chairs and speakers, whether internal or external, with a clear brief about their role at the event, the topic under discussion, the format of the event and make clear that it should be conducted within the spirit of these guidelines.

