Dublin International Study Centre

External Speakers Policy

Contents

External Speakers Policy

Section One: Purpose

1.   This policy provides a clear, structured framework for the approval, oversight, and participation of external speakers invited to contribute to academic, enrichment, or support activities at DISC.t ensures that external engagements enhance the learner experience while complying with legal, regulatory, safeguarding obligations, and upholding the importance of lawful free speech.

Section Two: Aims

2.   The External Speakers Policy aims to:

- **Ensure Student Safety and Wellbeing:**

    Actively safeguard all students by ensuring that external speakers and their content do not compromise learner welfare, and that events comply with safeguarding, equality, and legal requirements.

- **Promote Enriching and Relevant Engagements:**

    Ensure that external speakers contribute constructively to academic, enrichment, and support activities, and their input is appropriate and relevant to DISC's programmes and learner development.

- **Uphold Lawful Free Speech and Academic Freedom:**

    Encourage free and open debate, including controversial or challenging ideas, while ensuring that all expression remains within the law, aligns with institutional values of respect and tolerance, and supports a positive learning environment.

- **Embed Quality Assurance and Regulatory Compliance:**

    Integrate the approval, oversight, and evaluation of external speakers into DISC's Quality Assurance framework, in line with QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines, the Education Act 1998, and national legislation including the Equal Status Acts (2000–2018) and the Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) Act 2005.

- **Implement Robust Oversight and Risk Management:**

    Apply proportionate risk assessment and due diligence procedures for all external speaker events, ensuring potential risks—such as extremism, discrimination, or safeguarding concerns—are identified, managed, and escalated appropriately.

- **Foster Transparency, Accountability, and Continuous Improvement:**

    Ensure that all processes for inviting, approving, and evaluating external speakers are clear, documented, and regularly reviewed as part of DISC's ongoing commitment to accountability and quality enhancement.

- **Promote Inclusive and Respectful Engagement:**

  Encourage external engagements that reflect a diversity of views, disciplines, and backgrounds, while maintaining an environment of mutual respect, equality, and dignity for all learners and staff.

Section Three: Scope

3. This policy applies to all external individuals or organisations invited to speak, present, or otherwise contribute, whether in-person or online, at any DISC activity. This includes, but is not limited to:

   - Guest lecturers and industry professionals.

   - Cultural, wellbeing, or civic speakers.

   - Representatives from NGOs, universities, public agencies, or community organisations.

   - Any external contributor engaged during induction, workshops, events, or co-curricular programming.

   - Any physical or digital materials associated with external contributors, including documents, leaflets, presentations, or linked websites.

Section Four: Regulatory and Quality Assurance Alignment

4. This policy is developed with the following national standards and institutional obligations:

   1) QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016):

      - Programme Validation Manual for FET Programmes: emphasising the role of external contributors in aligning with validated programme outcomes and delivery standards.

   2) Children First Act 2015 and the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012–2016: governing child protection and Garda Vetting for individuals engaging with learners under 18.

   3) ELE Code of Practice (2022).

   4) DISC Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct: outlining expected behaviours for all external visitors and staff.

Section Five: Roles and Responsibilities

5.   The effective management of external speakers requires collaboration across key staff roles to ensure events are relevant, compliant, and safe for all learners. The table below outlines the specific responsibilities assigned to staff involved in the planning, approval, and delivery of sessions involving external contributors.

Role	Responsibility
Programme Manager	Reviews and approves proposals where speakers contribute directly to academic or developmental learning. Provides oversight or advice on enrichment activities (e.g. volunteering talks) to ensure alignment with student development and programme goals.
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Provides guidance where proposed speakers or activities relate to student wellbeing, mental health, or pastoral support. Ensures that external contributors engaged in these areas are appropriate, safe, and consistent with DISC's welfare policies.
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Screens for safeguarding and vetting needs; ensures compliance with under-18 protection standards.
Head of Quality	Ensures compliance with QQI, ELE, and Garda vetting obligations; oversees quality assurance processes.
Student Experience Officer	Coordinates logistics, supports visitor sign-in and reception protocols, and collects feedback.

Section Six: Approval Process for External Speakers

6.   To ensure the appropriateness, safety, and educational value of all external contributions to the International Foundation Year (IFY) programme, DISC has established a formal approval process. This process ensures alignment with safeguarding protocols, quality standards, and learner welfare policies.

Proposal Submission

7.   Staff must complete an External Speaker Proposal Form at least 10 working days in

advance of the proposed session.

8. The proposal must outline the speaker's identity, credentials, topic, and relevance to the IFY programme.

Risk and Safeguarding Review

9. A brief risk assessment must be carried out for all external speakers, with particular attention given to sessions involving under-18 learners. The DSL will assess whether Garda Vetting is required (see Section 7.2). In addition to basic safeguarding checks, reasonable due diligence enquiries will be undertaken to ensure speakers are appropriate and do not pose reputational or welfare risks to students, staff, or DISC.

10. Checks may include (as appropriate to the context):

- Internet searches, including website links and comments noted on the risk assessment.

- Social media searches, including links to profiles (e.g., Twitter/X, LinkedIn) and comments recorded.

- Review of publications or recorded media, in order to identify any concerns regarding discriminatory, extremist, or inappropriate views.

- Copy of the speaker's CV, where relevant to their proposed session.

- Sight of the speaker's Garda Vetting, if appropriate to the role and context.

Approval

11. Proposals are reviewed jointly by the Programme Manager and the DSL. Written approval must be granted prior to confirming any arrangements with the speaker. All approvals must be logged in the External Speakers Register, maintained by the Head of Quality, which records:

- Speaker name, organisation, and contact details

- Event/session title, date, and type (academic, enrichment, welfare, etc.)

- Purpose and relevance to DISC provision

- Risk assessment outcome and due diligence checks undertaken

- Approval decision (with date and names of approvers)

- Any conditions of approval (e.g., supervision required, restrictions on topics/materials)

12. Records will be retained in line with DISC's Data Retention Policy and may be shared with Study Group, QQI, or external auditors as part of quality assurance monitoring.

Reception Sign-In Protocol

13. All external speakers and visitors must:

    - Sign in at DISC reception.

    - Present valid photo identification.

    - Always wear a visitor badge while on site.

14. In addition, speakers must sign the DISC External Visitor Declaration Form, confirming their agreement to:

    - Adhere to DISC's Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.

    - Respect learner welfare, inclusion, and confidentiality.

Section Seven: Content Expectations and Acceptable Conduct

15. External speakers invited to DISC are expected to uphold the institution's educational, ethical, and safeguarding standards. All contributions must be appropriate to the academic level of the learners and reflect DISC's commitment to inclusion, critical thinking, diversity of perspectives, and learner welfare.

16. This policy applies equally to academic lectures, civic and cultural talks, wellbeing and welfare sessions, and enrichment activities.

17. While DISC is committed to supporting freedom of expression and academic freedom, such freedoms must be exercised lawfully and responsibly.

18. All external speaker content must comply with Irish law, including legislation on equality, defamation, public order, counter-extremism, and safeguarding of under-18s.

19. Speech or material that incites hatred, promotes discrimination, or undermines the safety and dignity of students or staff will not be permitted.

20. Welfare-related talks (e.g., on health, wellbeing, or personal development) must be delivered by individuals with suitable expertise and sensitivity and must signpost students to appropriate support services where relevant.

21. Speakers are expected to engage respectfully with questions and to encourage open, critical, and balanced discussion.

22. All presentation materials (physical or digital) should be made available for review in advance, where requested, as part of the approval process.

23. Deliver content that is educationally appropriate for learners at NFQ Level 5.

Recording Protocol

24. Sessions must not be recorded without:

- Prior written approval from the Programme Manager; and

- Informed consent from all participants, including learners and staff.

Section Eight: Garda Vetting and Safeguarding Requirements

25. DISC is committed to upholding the highest standards of safeguarding, particularly in relation to learners under the age of 18. Garda Vetting and supervision protocols are in place to ensure compliance with legal and institutional responsibilities.

26. Garda Vetting is required for external speakers who:

- Have regular or ongoing contact with learners under the age of 18; or

- Deliver a series of workshops or activities as part of the programme.

27. Garda Vetting is not required for:

- One-off guest speakers who deliver sessions in the presence of DISC staff, where no unsupervised contact with learners occurs.

28. Safeguarding Oversight:

- The DSL will assess whether Garda Vetting is necessary for each engagement.

- The DSL is also responsible for ensuring that appropriate supervision is in place for all external engagements involving minors.

- All sessions involving under-18 learners must be monitored by a DISC staff member for their full duration.

Section Nine: Post-Event Review and Feedback

29. Following any external speaker engagement, DISC undertakes a review process to evaluate the effectiveness, relevance, and appropriateness of the session. This process supports ongoing improvement, learner protection, and compliance with internal quality assurance procedures.

30. Post-event responsibilities for hosting staff include the following items:

1) Collecting learner feedback (optional but encouraged), particularly regarding:

- Relevance and clarity of content.

- Speaker engagement and communication style.

- Perceived value of the session to the learner experience.

2) Completing a Speaker Review Form, which should capture:

- The nature and outcome of the session.

- Any incidents, concerns, or complaints raised during or after the event.

- Suggestions for improvement or follow-up actions.

3) Submitting all relevant documentation (e.g. Speaker Review Form, feedback summaries, attendance logs) to the Head of Quality for:

- Audit and compliance monitoring.

- Ongoing quality assurance reviews.

- Informing future decisions about speaker invitations and external engagement protocols.

Section Ten: Compliance and Enforcement

31. All staff and external contributors are expected to adhere fully to the procedures and principles outlined in this policy. Compliance ensures the safety, inclusivity, and academic integrity of all events involving external speakers, and upholds DISC's responsibilities under QQI, ELE Code, and safeguarding legislation.

32. Non-compliance with this policy may result in the following actions:

1) Immediate cancellation of the proposed event or session if approval procedures, safeguarding protocols, or content expectations are not met.

2) Exclusion of the external speaker from future participation in DISC activities, where conduct or content is found to be inappropriate, non-compliant, or in breach of institutional values.

3) Referral to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office for further investigation and action, which may include:

- Review of staff compliance with internal protocols.

- Recommendations for policy amendments or additional staff training.

- Escalation to senior management where required.

Section Eleven: Review of Policy

33. Regular, systematic review ensures that DISC's External Speakers Policy remains current, legally compliant, and aligned with best practice in safeguarding and quality assurance. The review cycle also allows the institution to reflect on feedback, incident reports, and emerging sector trends.

Review the timetable and triggers

34. A scheduled review will take place every two years as part of DISC's Quality Assurance (QA) cycle.

35. An interim review will be initiated sooner if there are:

- Changes in Irish or EU legislation affecting safeguarding, data protection, or visitor management.

- Updates to QQI guidelines, the ELE Code of Practice, or other regulatory frameworks.

- Internal audit findings, incident reports, or stakeholder feedback indicating the need for amendment.

Responsibilities

36. The Head of Quality has overall responsibility for coordinating the review, in consultation with the DSL, Programme Manager, and Student Experience Officer.

Section Twelve: Related Policies and Documents

37. This policy should be read in conjunction with other institutional and national documents that support the safe, compliant, and high-quality engagement of external speakers. These related policies and resources provide additional guidance on safeguarding, event planning, quality assurance, and institutional values.

38. The following documents are particularly relevant:

- DISC Code of Conduct (Staff and Learners) – sets expectations for respectful, inclusive, and professional behaviour across all interactions.

- DISC Safeguarding Policy – outlines procedures for protecting under-18s and vulnerable learners, including supervision protocols.

- Garda Vetting Policy and Procedures – details DISC's approach to vetting external contributors where required.

- Event Planning Checklist and Risk Assessment Form – supports staff in preparing for external speaker events, including health, safety, and safeguarding considerations.

- External Speaker Proposal Form – required for all speaker approvals; includes speaker details, topic relevance, and intended audience.

- QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016) – provides regulatory context for governance, programme delivery, and learner welfare.

- ELE Code of Practice (2022) – outlines quality benchmarks for English Language Education, including provisions for external contributors.

- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Tusla) – national framework for safeguarding practices in educational settings.

- Study Group Complaints & Appeals Policy - Students who have concerns about an external speaker or the content of a session may raise these through the Study Group Complaints & Appeals Policy.

Document Control

Document name	External Speakers Policy
Document owner	Deputy Director – Student Experience
Approved by	Academic Board
Approval date	March 2026
Next review date	September 2026
Version	1.0
Policy applies to	
Related documents	Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct, Garda Vetting Policy, Speaker Proposal Form

Version	Date	Update by	Details