

Organising External Speakers & Other Events Policy

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Associated Documents

Policy
Safeguarding Policy (England)(Scotland)(Wales) Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech Student Behaviour Charter Global Staff Code of Conduct H&S Policy and associate Procedures Use of Technology Policy Whistleblowing Policy

Legislation and Government Guidance
<i>Education Act (no. 2)1986</i> Prevent Duty: HE Prevent Duty: FE Counter Terrorism and Security Act, 2015 Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation, 2018 Equality Act, 2010 Human Rights Act 1989 Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) 2023

Approved

Provost	Signature and date
Professor Elena Rodriguez-Falcon Provost and Chief Innovation Officer	 27/08/2026

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1. Introduction

Centres must have regard to the importance of lawful free speech for staff, students and visiting speakers and should read this policy in conjunction with the *Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech*.

Centres in England have an additional duty to take reasonably practicable steps to secure free speech within the law for staff, students and visiting speakers; and to maintain a free speech code of practice, promoting the importance of free speech within the law and academic freedom.

Study Group is committed to fostering a culture of tolerance which is essential to the academic debate of a wide range of ideas, including those that may challenge commonly accepted ideas and conventional wisdom, whilst supporting the safeguarding of students. Invited external speakers bring different perspectives and experiences to these debates and as such Study Group encourages all staff to support teaching and learning (online or face-to-face), inside and outside of the classroom, where appropriate with external speakers. This policy, and its associated local procedures, details the requirements for this to be managed safely whilst maintaining its duty to secure freedom of lawful speech in accordance with the *Education Act 1986*, *Higher Education Act (Freedom of speech) 2023* and the *Equalities Act 2010*.

Speech which is unlawful is not free speech within the law and is not protected. Those organising an event who invite speakers who might reasonably have suspected would use the platform to break the law, may be breaking the law themselves.

Study Group has a zero-tolerance approach to unlawful discrimination, bullying and harassment or any act which incites or promotes violence or terrorist activity. Centres should have due regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism in compliance with the *Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015*, and due regard to protect students from harassment and sexual misconduct.

This policy should be also be read alongside the relevant *Safeguarding Policy* and *Code of Practice Freedom of Speech*

2. Scope

This policy applies to all permanent, contracted agency and supply staff who:

- Work at, or visit, any centre within the Study Group portfolio in the UK;
- Deliver teaching and learning online and/or face-to-face;
- Have direct or regular contact online and/or face-to-face with students in order to carry out their daily duties;
- Are organising external speakers or other events and activities onsite.

It also applies to students organising events or speakers.

An external speaker is defined as any person invited to speak to staff or students who are not an employee of Study Group and, as such, this policy relates to external speakers booked and managed by the Centres, including the Digital Learning Hub.

This policy does not replace that of any university with which Study Group has a collaborative agreement in place and, as such, university staff members or external speakers booked by a partner university fall outside of the scope of this policy. This policy also applies to speakers from partner universities who provide progression advice and guidance to students on the Digital Learning Hub.

Where Centre events and activities are held on university premises that are not leased by Study Group, Study Group will comply with the university's relevant requirements, policies, and codes of practice, including those relating to free speech, academic freedom, and visiting speakers (or equivalent).

3. Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this policy is to set out individual and centre-specific responsibilities when organising events and/or inviting and facilitating external speakers either on or off campus, or for online activities. It sets out the steps to be taken to manage risk and to prevent the spread of intolerance whilst protecting the right for lawful free speech (duty in England) and provides the expectations of behaviour, for both students and staff, when encouraging the free debate of ideas inside the learning environment.

This policy aims to ensure:

- All events for invited speakers can go ahead unless there are exceptional circumstances to prevent this;
- All students are safe;
- Proportionate due diligence measures have been taken;
- Timely risk assessments are in place for all events and external visitors;
- Where appropriate, there is a partnership approach to any event organised by the university which is open to Centre students;
- All staff are aware of their responsibility to foster academic freedom and free lawful speech as part of the students' learning;
- Students and staff know to whom concerns should be raised;
- There is an identified person responsible for approval of an event

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The following responsibilities have been assigned to ensure safety in relation to external speakers.

4.1. All Staff and Students

Any staff members or students who are organising an event or inviting an external speaker are responsible for ensuring that:

- They are aware of the requirements of the *Equality Act 2010*, the *Prevent Duty*, the *Harassment and Misconduct Duty* pertaining to external speakers and freedoms of debate/speech by undertaking appropriate training;
- They have read the *Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech*;

- All invited external speakers are checked (where reasonably possible and in proportion) to determine if it is reasonably possible they would use the event to break the law with support of the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL);
- All events including those involving an invited external speaker are appropriately risk assessed and mitigations as permitted by law put in place with the external speaker being made aware of their responsibilities;
- All events involving external speakers are approved by the Director of Campus Operations (DoCO) or in their absence the local Prevent Lead.

If students are organising events, they will be supported by relevant Centre staff.

4.2. Academic Staff

In addition to the responsibilities listed above, academic staff members are also responsible for ensuring that:

- Whilst in the classroom (online or face-to-face), students have an opportunity to express and debate their ideas within a culture of respect and tolerance;
- Suitable challenge or opposing opinion is facilitated during lessons as appropriate;
- They seek advice and guidance from the DSL as the nominated local Prevent Lead when required.

4.3. Director of Campus Operations

The Director of Campus Operations (DoCO) or delegate is responsible for:

- Reviewing and signing off all risk assessments relating to invited external speakers;
- Liaising with the DSL as local Prevent Lead when concerns are raised in accordance with the *Safeguarding Policy* or other legislations;
- Seeking advice from the Central Student Wellbeing team as appropriate.

4.4. Local Prevent Leader

The DSL, or local Prevent Lead if different, is responsible for:

- Reviewing and signing off the risk assessment where the DoCO is unable to as their delegate;
- Providing advice and guidance related to the organisation of events and external speaker requirements in line with *Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech* and relevant legislation, for example the *Prevent Duty*;
- Making appropriate referrals when a concern is raised about an external speaker;
- Seeking advice from the Deputy Provost Education, as the Study Group Prevent Lead, or the Central Student Wellbeing Team as appropriate.

Please refer to the *Safeguarding Policy* for further information on raising concerns.

5. Preparation and Planning

Events and external speakers must not be booked without the express permission of the DoCO.

5.1. Due Diligence

Once an external speaker has been identified, reasonable steps to research their background must be taken by the person organising the event or speaker. Checks are required to ensure that the prospective external speaker is not likely to incite hatred, violence or call for the breaking of the law and is not linked to any organisation advocating extremism in line with the code of conduct for freedom of speech. Evidence of the checks should be added to the mitigations section of the risk assessment. Checks can include:

- Internet searches – with the website links and any comments added to the risk assessment;
- Social media searches – with the social media address link and any comments;
- Reference and/or discussions with the relevant university partner where a speaker is recommended – with notes of who was contacted, dates and any comments on the risk assessment;
- Copy of the speaker's CV if appropriate;
- Sight of the speaker's DBS certificate, if appropriate.

5.2. Criteria Applied to Give Approval for an External Speaker

A review of event content must also be completed, and the material must:

- Not be considered unlawful (see *Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech*);
- Not incite hatred, violence or law breaking;
- Not glorify, encourage or promote acts of violent extremism, terrorism;
- Ensure audiences are aware of alternative views, opinions, providers and outcomes.

Consideration must be given to booking another speaker to counter the views of the original speaker, where appropriate. Approval cannot be withheld because views are counter to the centre's.

5.3. Risk Assessment

All events including those with external speakers must be risk assessed using the template in the *Student Wellbeing Asset Library* on Teams. The risk assessment must include an assessment made against the principles of the *Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech*, *Prevent Duty* and *Harassment & Sexual Misconduct Duty*, other legislation and where appropriate, adhere to the *Study Group Health & Safety Policy*. Any practicable reasonable and proportionate steps that would enable the event to go ahead should be put in place.

5.4. Authorisation

Authorisation must be sought from the DoCO in advance of booking any external speaker. Where relevant, these risk assessments should be agreed by the DSL, or local Prevent Lead if different. Any request for authorisation should include a resume for the external speaker, a copy of all research checks made, and a copy of the completed risk assessment.

5.5. Escalation

If a risk assessment identifies the need for significant mitigations attached to an external speaker with known extremist views or links to extremist organisations, the DoCO must escalate to the Study Group Prevent Lead (Deputy Provost Education) for final decision. Where a speaker is not approved, it will be recorded and reported on the Annual Safeguarding Review and submitted on the Prevent Return Form for the Office for Students (OfS).

6. External Speaker Conduct

Study Group recognises that external speakers can contribute positively to student learning and academic freedom. Study Group expects external speakers to:

- Show mutual respect and tolerance of those with different cultures, faiths and beliefs;
- Use lawful speech;
- Respect the protected characteristics of others;
- Understand the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination and harassment;
- Not incite students to participate in unlawful acts, violence or extremism.

All events, including those with external speakers, must follow these core principles and any event that fails to do this will result in either cancellation or cessation of the event.

Please refer to the *Safeguarding Policy* for further information.

6.1. On Arrival and During the Event

Where external speakers are visitors to the Centre, this must be managed in accordance with the *Study Group H&S Policy*. They must be supervised at all times.

External visitors who are delivering exclusively online must be managed as per the *Safeguarding Policy* and attended and monitored by staff.

6.2. Record Keeping

Records must be kept for all events where external speakers have been invited including instances where external speakers have been refused, and why this decision was made.

Please refer to the *Safeguarding Policy* and the *Study Group Data Protection Policy* for further information.

6.3. Cancellations and Replacements

If an External Speaker fails to attend as scheduled and sends a replacement instead then the event should be cancelled unless there is at least 3 working days' notice.

During this time, all checks and approvals need to be completed for the replacement speaker as per this policy.

7. Raising Concerns

In the event a concern is identified with an external speaker, this should be raised with the DSL as soon as possible.

Please refer to the *Safeguarding Policy* for further information.

8. Complaints

Students, staff and visiting speakers may use the *Study Group Complaints & Appeals Policy and Procedure* if they believe they have been restricted from expressing lawful free speech.



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Owner	Ali Baines, Deputy Provost Education

Student Experience Directorate