

PROCEDURE FOR VISITING / EXTERNAL SPEAKERS (“PROCEDURE”)

This Procedure, which applies to University members, staff, Students’ Union staff, and students of the University, is a procedure under the University’s [Freedom of Speech Code of Practice \(Code\)](#). It relates to the organisation of Events involving Visiting / External speakers (including where members of the University community host and/or speak on behalf of an external organisation).

This Procedure is to be read in conjunction with the Code.

EVENTS COVERED BY THIS PROCEDURE

Any meeting or similar activity which involves a Visiting / External speaker (including where members of the University community host and/or speak on behalf of an external organisation) is covered by this Procedure. It applies whether the event is held:

- on University premises;
- away from University premises but is affiliated to the University or funded by the University or is branded as a University event; or
- online

and in each case where the event is held under the authority of the University or, where applicable, the Students’ Union or has an association or link to the University. Commercial events held on University premises fall within the scope of this Procedure where these involve, in whatever capacity, any University members, staff, students or Visiting / External speakers.

As set out in sections 31 and 32 of the Code, Events that do not involve a Visiting / External Speaker should still follow the escalation process set out in this Procedure if the Event:

- involves the booking of a public space; or
- raises or has the potential to raise freedom of speech issues (whether due to its subject matter, participants or otherwise).

OBJECTIVES OF THIS PROCEDURE

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 (**HE(FoS)A**) places duties on the University’s Board of Governors to take steps that, having particular regard to the importance of freedom of speech, are reasonably practicable for it to take in order for it to achieve the objective of securing freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law for its members, staff, students and visiting speakers (we refer to this as the **Secure Duty**). Reference in this Procedure to freedom of speech or free speech includes a reference to academic freedom.

The HE(FoS)A also requires the University to maintain a Code of Practice (**Code**) setting out how the University will fulfil the Secure Duty.

This Procedure, as a procedure under the Code, has been designed to discharge the Secure Duty for Events where a Visiting / External speaker is involved and provides an early escalation route for Event Organisers where there are concerns that the Event, its subject matter or those involved might risk going beyond freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law. It also establishes a centralised audit trail for the recording of Events and how the Procedure has been applied to these (including the decisions made under the Procedure), which are mandatory reporting requirements in the University's Prevent Duty data returns to the Office for Students (**Ofs**).

It is not anticipated that a significant number of Events will raise concerns or require escalation under this Procedure. Where potential concerns are identified, however, escalation enables the University to consider, in line with the three-step process in the Code and having regard to the University's other legal obligations:

- any reasonably practicable steps necessary to secure freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law; or
- in exceptional circumstances to refuse the Event or the Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS PROCEDURE

Where capitalised terms are used in this Procedure the meaning of the term is as shown in the table below:

Capitalised term	Meaning
Code	means the University's Freedom of Speech Code of Practice as amended from time to time.
Decision Maker	means the third point of escalation for a proposed Event to whom GLC may escalate the proposed Event for a decision. The Decision Maker under this Procedure is the Chief Operating Officer (COO).
Event	means an event matching the description under the heading "Events covered by this Procedure"

Capitalised term	Meaning
Event Organiser	means the person organising and responsible for the Event being either: • a member of University staff; • a member of Students' Union staff; or • a Student Where an Event involves an external organiser the University staff member responsible for liaising with the external organiser regarding the Event shall be regarded as the Event Organiser for the purpose of this Procedure.
Events Register	means the central register of all Events which is maintained by the University's Events Team which can be accessed via this link: Events Register
Visiting / External Speaker	includes visiting /external speakers (as further defined below) including where members of the University community host and/or speak on behalf of an external organisation. a visiting / external speaker means: a person who was invited to speak at an Event, or who would have been invited had there not been a restriction on this. It does not include a person who wanted or requested an invitation to speak but was not invited. It may include a person whose invitation has not been approved through this Procedure.
GLC	the second point of escalation for a proposed Event and the source of help and advice regarding this Procedure. This is to a member of professional services staff in the Governance Legal and Compliance Directorate who, acting on the authority of the University Secretary or the Director of Legal Services and DPO can approve a proposed Event or, where necessary, escalate the Event for a decision by the Decision Maker.
HE(FoS)A	Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023
Initial Assessor	The first point of escalation for a proposed Event. This is the Event Organiser's Head of Department (or equivalent). In the case of SU Events this will be a member of SU staff that oversees Events and their organisation. The Initial Assessor can approve a proposed Event, or where necessary, escalate the Event to GLC for further consideration.
Initial Screening Assessment	means the initial screening assessment completed by the Event Organiser and which is referred to in step 4 below. A copy of the Initial Screening Assessment is included at Appendix A at the end of this Procedure and can be accessed via this link: Initial Screening Assessment.
Speech	means speech in the widest sense including the spoken and written word both printed and electronic (including social media and other digital communications), as well as actions, gestures and the display of images which convey meaning.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED BY EVENT ORGANISERS

Event Organisers must follow the steps in this Procedure at the start of the Event planning process before any firm plans have been made or invitations issued.

1. Event Organisers must log a proposed Event on the Events Register and complete the fields of the register which relate to the Code and this Procedure, including the Initial Screening Assessment (as described at step 4 below). Where a Student is the Event Organiser, they should ask their supervising academic or other relevant University or Students' Union staff member to log the Event on their behalf.
2. Event Organisers must:
 - (a) ensure they have read, understand and comply with the Code and this Procedure;
 - (b) in the case of University staff, have completed the University's mandatory training which includes training on: Equalities; Prevent; Data privacy (GDPR), Harassment and Sexual Misconduct, and Security. Information and links to relevant guidance is also included at Appendix D;
 - (c) ensure any proposed Visiting / External Speaker is made aware of the Code and this Procedure and agrees to comply with those parts which apply to them specifically including the code of conduct set out in the Code.
3. It is important Event Organisers do some initial background research, so they have a good understanding of the subject matter of the proposed Event, the relevant background of the proposed Visiting / External Speaker and any issues relating to these. Event Organisers will need this to decide whether an Event requires escalation under this Procedure and, where escalation to GLC is required, to assist GLC in determining whether:
 - (a) to escalate to the Decision Maker; or
 - (b) approve the Event without further escalation.
4. The Initial Screening Assessment, which should be completed by the Event Organiser and is available through the link in the Events Register, should be used as a guide when deciding whether a proposed Event should be escalated under this Procedure for review by an Initial Assessor.
5. If an Event Organiser is unsure how to answer any question in the Initial Screening Assessment and/or whether to escalate a proposed Event for further consideration under this Procedure, the Event Organiser should contact their Initial Assessor or GLC at SHULegal@shu.ac.uk for advice.
6. If the completed Initial Screening Assessment indicates the proposed Event:
 - (a) does not require escalation under this Procedure: the Event Organiser can proceed with the organisation of the Event including the proposed Visiting / External Speaker;

- (b) does require escalation and further consideration by the Initial Assessor under this Procedure: the Event Organiser should send the relevant details of the proposed Event to the Initial Assessor. The details provided to the Initial Assessor should include:
- (i) the Event Organiser's completed Initial Screening Assessment;
 - (ii) the background information and research regarding the proposed Event, its subject matter, Visiting / External Speaker, and any issues relating to these which the Event Organiser has compiled in line with step 3 above;
 - (iii) any other relevant information which the Event Organiser believes may assist the Initial Assessor and/or GLC and/or the Decision Maker to make a decision based on the three-step process in the Code.

FIRST POINT OF ESCALATION / APPROVAL: INITIAL ASSESSOR

The Initial Assessor will review the details provided by the Event Organiser including their completed Initial Screening Assessment and background information and make any further enquiries as may be necessary (or ask the Event Organiser to make these). Such further enquiries may include contacting colleagues within the University who can advise on:

Advice on:	Contact points
Safeguarding considerations and measures which can be put in place to address these;	See the further details and links to Designated Safeguarding Officers on the main Safeguarding page
Security arrangements;	Contact: Security Services
Event facilities and infrastructure , including marshalling, signage, access requirements	Contact: Head of Events Email: ! Sheffield Hallam Events
Marketing and Communications , including assistance with managing events subject to heightened media interest or scrutiny and the protection of the University's profile and reputation.	Email: ! Press Office (for events which might attract heightened media attention or scrutiny) Email: ! SHU Communications (for assistance with publicising an Event)
Recording Events , including arrangements for recording, data protection and performance rights.	Email: ! SHU Communications (for assistance with arranging recording and branding) See the following guidance on data protection: Photography and videography – GDPR Guidance

	Email contact: dpo@shu.ac.uk Email: SHULegal@shu.ac.uk for guidance relating to performance rights.
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7. Based on all the evidence gathered and all relevant issues, and applying the three-step process in the Code, the Initial Assessor may decide to:
 - (a) approve the Event including the Visiting / External Speaker;
 - (b) approve the Event including the Visiting / External Speaker subject to any specified reasonably practicable steps (mitigations or conditions) to address any potential legal risks or concerns identified and secure the speech. Such mitigations or conditions may include, but are not limited to those referred to in Appendix C; or
 - (c) refer the Event to GLC for further consideration. This will be in cases where:
 - (i) the Initial Assessor believes it may be necessary to refuse the Event, or the Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it, under the Code's three-step process as there are no reasonably practicable steps (mitigations or conditions) which can be taken to address the identified legal risks or concerns and secure the speech; or
 - (ii) the Initial Assessor believes the endorsement of GLC is appropriate before deciding to approve an Event or the Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it under (a) or (b) above.
8. The Initial Assessor will record the decision made and the reasons for it.

SECOND POINT OF ESCALATION / APPROVAL: GLC ASSESSMENT

9. GLC will review the details provided by the Initial Assessor and Event Organiser including the completed Initial Screening Assessment and background information and the details of any further enquires which have been made.
10. Based on all the evidence gathered and all relevant issues (including the outcome of any further enquiries as are deemed necessary), and applying the three-step process in the Code GLC may decide to:
 - (a) approve the Event including the Visiting / External Speaker;
 - (b) approve the Event including the Visiting / External Speaker subject to any specified reasonably practicable steps (mitigations or conditions) to address any potential legal risks or concerns identified and secure the speech. Such mitigations or conditions may include, but are not limited to those referred to in Appendix C; or
 - (c) refer the Event to the Decision Maker for a decision. This will be in cases where:

- (i) GLC believes it may be necessary to refuse the Event, or the Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it, under the Code's three-step process as there are no reasonably practicable steps (mitigations or conditions) which can be taken to address the identified legal risks or concerns and secure the speech; or
- (ii) GLC believes the endorsement of the Decision Maker is appropriate before deciding to approve an Event, or the Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it, under (a) or (b) above.

11. GLC will record the decision made and the reasons for it.

THIRD POINT OF ESCALATION: DECISION OF THE DECISION MAKER

- 12. An Event, or the Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it, will only be refused by the Decision Maker in exceptional circumstances when the Decision Maker considers the Event, or the Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it, should be refused based on the application of the three-step process in the Code and where no reasonably practicable steps (mitigations or conditions) can be taken to address the identified legal risks and concerns and secure the speech.
- 13. The Decision Maker will record their decision and the reasons for it.
- 14. If a Visiting / External Speaker's participation at an Event is refused or the Event is refused GLC will discuss this with the Event Organiser (and if appropriate Marketing and Communications) and agree how this will be communicated to the Visiting / External Speaker. The decision will also be reported to the next meeting of the Board of Governors and included in the University's data return to the OfS.

APPENDIX A

INITIAL SCREENING ASSESSMENT

This screening assessment should be completed by the Event Organiser and applies to the University's Procedure for Visiting / External Speakers (including where members of the University community host and/or speak on behalf of an external organisation (collectively "Visiting / External Speaker(s)") which is made under the University's [Freedom of Speech Code of Practice](#).

It should also be used for Events which do not involve a Visiting / External Speaker but which still require escalation under the Code.

1	Event Organiser Name		
2	Event title and description of subject matter		
3	Does the Event involve a Visiting / External Speaker?	YES/NO	If NO move to Question 4. If YES move to Question 4.
4	Is the Event or a Visiting / External Speaker involved in the Event or any other participant in the Event representing or linked to a proscribed organisation ?	YES / NO / UNSURE	If YES or UNSURE , you should complete Questions 5 to 9 and escalate to the Initial Assessor. If NO move on to Question 5. Your answers to Question 5 will determine whether escalation is required.
5	Does the subject matter of the Event or a Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it, or any other circumstances or participants associated with the Event, relate to a matter which:		If YES to one or more of Questions 5(a) to 5(g) you should complete Questions 6 to 9 and escalate the Event to the Initial Assessor. If NO to all Questions 5 (a) to 5 (g) and the answer to Question 4 was NO , you can continue with your Event planning arrangements.
	a) is controversial, strongly contested or opposed	YES/NO	
	b) is of heightened media interest or scrutiny	YES/NO	

	c) risks protests, demonstrations, disruptions or public order issues, violence or fear of violence, terrorism or drawing people into terrorism.	YES/NO	
	d) may present a risk to the health, safety or welfare of those involved or who are otherwise exposed to the Event and its subject matter.	YES/NO	
	e) may impact on good relations between people who share a protected characteristic (under the Equalities legislation) and people who do not share it; or may involve discrimination or harassment or sexual misconduct.	YES/NO	
	f) has been the subject of a previous refusal by the University based on the Code or has been refused by another University under their own Freedom of Speech Code of Practice?	YES / NO / DON'T KNOW	
	g) may have the potential to raise freedom of speech issues?	YES / NO	
6	If you are escalating the Event or a Visiting / External Speaker's involvement in it to the Initial Assessor, please complete the following details:		
	a) Event Organiser's email		
	b) Event Organiser's phone number		
	c) College or Directorate or Students' Union		
	d) Name of Visiting / External Speaker		
	e) Name of external organisation(s) involved in the Event		
	f) Event location		
	g) Proposed date of the Event		
	h) Estimated audience size and audience make-up (e.g. members of the public, staff, students etc)		

	i) Name of Initial Assessor (Event Organiser's Head of Department or equivalent)		
	j) Email of Initial Assessor		
7	Please attach the background research you completed about the subject matter of the proposed Event and, where a Visiting / External Speaker is involved relevant background relating to them and their subject matter.	☐	Check box to show attached.
8	Please provide any other relevant information which explains why you have answered YES to Question 4 and/or YES (OR DON'T KNOW) to any one or more of Questions 5(a) to 5(g).	☐	Check box to show attached.
9	Please provide details of any risk mitigation measures which you were intending to implement in relation to the Event and/or the Visiting / External Speaker's participation in it.	☐	Check box to show attached.

APPENDIX B

FREEDOM OF SPEECH – CODE OF PRACTICE -THREE-STEP PROCESS

1. When carrying out its Secure Duty, and considering Events under this Procedure, the University will adopt a **three-step process**:

- 1.1 **Step 1: Is the speech lawful?** There is a presumption that speech is lawful unless the law prohibits it. Law in this context means primary and secondary legislation (i.e. Acts of Parliament and Statutory Instruments respectively), case law or precedent.

If the speech is lawful, we move on to step 2. If the speech is unlawful the Secure Duty will not apply (see Annex A of the Code which provides further detail of unlawful speech).

- 1.2 **Step 2: Are there reasonably practicable steps the University can take to secure the speech?** If yes, we will take those steps to secure the speech. In this context reasonably practicable steps include both (i) positive i.e. to do something which will secure lawful free speech and (ii) negative i.e. to not do something which would restrict lawful free speech.

- 1.3 In addition to the impact which taking or not taking the step will have on free speech, depending on the circumstances other factors which may be relevant include whether by taking or not taking the step this:

- 1.3.1 impacts on the University's compliance with its other legal or regulatory duties or obligations (such as the Equality Act 2010);

- 1.3.2 impacts on the University carrying out its essential functions of learning, teaching, or research, its administrative functions or its resources necessary to carry out such essential functions;

- 1.3.3 impacts on anyone's health, safety or security.

Depending on the facts and circumstances, there may be cases such as, without limitation, those involving the factors above where a reasonably practicable step to secure speech may involve the University regulating the time, place or manner of the speech whilst remaining neutral on the viewpoint expressed.

If there are no reasonably practicable steps which can be taken to secure the speech, we move to step 3.

- 1.4 **Step 3: Are any restrictions of the speech prescribed by law and proportionate under the Convention?** As set out in the Convention, speech may be restricted where this is *"prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the*

protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary”.

2. An [illustration of the three-step approach](#) can be found in the [Office for Students guidance related to freedom of speech](#).
3. In reaching a decision based on this three-step approach, the University will carefully consider available evidence and all the relevant issues.
4. It will balance the right to freedom of speech within the law, and its Secure Duty, with any relevant legal limitations and duties. It will also take account of relevant guidance that may be issued by relevant bodies including the [Office for Students guidance related to freedom of speech](#), other government departments and UUK. In making any decision it will act proportionately. Any restrictions placed on speech will not go beyond those required by law and/or to protect the rights, safety and security of others.
5. Please also refer to the Code and in particular the sections headed:
 - 5.1 The Code of Conduct;
 - 5.2 Approach the University will take to managing free speech issues for Events (which includes further details relating to security costs for Events); and
 - 5.3 University terms relating to Events.

APPENDIX C

POSSIBLE RISK MITIGATIONS AND/OR CONDITIONS (REASONABLY PRACTICABLE STEPS)

There are a range of steps, mitigations or measures which could be taken to address any identified risks, secure freedom of speech and/or be a condition of allowing an Event to proceed. Steps may include taking a particular course of action or not taking a course of action where, in either case, this serves to secure the speech. These include but are not limited:

- Promoting balanced debate and challenge;
- Using an independent chairperson to ensure that a range of views are heard;
- Putting additional security or marshalling in place;
- Controlling entry to the Event: For example, requiring attendees to pre-register and/or ticketing an Event;
- Filming or recording an Event to deter use of unlawful speech;
- Ensuring support is available for anyone affected by the issues raised at an Event;
- Ensuring a risk assessment is undertaken and implementing measures arising from this which would secure the speech;
- Providing guidance / briefings to Event organisers, stewards etc. on preparing for and manage demonstrations or protests should they arise;
- Regulating the time, place or manner of the Event where this would secure freedom of speech.

APPENDIX D

FURTHER GUIDANCE

A range of further guidance, training and information is available for users of this Procedure. In addition to ensuring you have read and understand the University's [Freedom of Speech Code of Practice](#) and this Procedure, further information is also available through the links below. You can also contact GLC at SHULegal@shu.ac.uk for advice.

- OfS advice to providers:
 - [Office for Students regulatory guidance 24 related to freedom of speech](#)
 - [Prevent duty guidance](#)
- [University guidance on Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [University Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [University Prevent briefing note](#) and [access to the Prevent Course](#)

TITLE:	PROCEDURE FOR VISITING / EXTERNAL SPEAKERS		
POLICY OWNER:	University Secretary		
APPROVED BY:	Committee / Individual: Libby Wilson, as Chair of University Safeguarding Board Date: 23 September 2025		
DIRECTORATE:	Governance, Legal and Compliance		
VERSION:	Version 2		
AMENDMENTS SINCE APPROVAL:	DETAILS OF REVISION:	DATE OF REVISION:	REVISION APPROVED BY:
	Revised procedure for external speakers, exhibitors or event sponsors created including an initial screening assessment tool (Version 1)	10/10/2022	Richard Calvert, DVC (Strategy & Operations) through Chair's action of the USB
	Amendment to procedure for consistency with Prevent guidance (reference to external speakers including a member of the University community speaking on behalf of an external organisation) (Version 1.1)	16/01/2023	Richard Calvert, DVC (Strategy and Operations) through Chair's action of the USB
	Revised procedure for visiting / external speakers to align with the revised Freedom of Speech Code of Practice (approved July 2025) and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 requirements (Version 2)	23/09/2025	Libby Wilson, Chief Operating Officer through Chair's action of the USB