



## External Speaker Protocol

### Purpose

This document sets out a procedure which should be followed each time a College event is arranged which involves an external or guest speaker or presenter. The protocol is designed to ensure that the College complies with its obligation to support and promote free speech within the community (see the College's [Statement of Freedom of Speech](#)) as well as a range of relevant legislation<sup>1</sup> whilst ensuring that the platforms provided are not used to promote hate speech or extremist views. The protocol also enables the College to ensure that in arranging guest speakers, the College considers its duty under PREVENT *to have due regard to the need to prevent its members from being susceptible to radicalisation or being drawn into terrorism.*

The College is aware that certain views, while not extremist, may be viewed as controversial, divisive, or challenging. While in the context of the above commitment to free speech such speakers are supported in speaking at College events, the College must be mindful of the risks associated with providing a platform for speakers on potentially controversial subjects. Following this procedure and, where necessary, completing a risk assessment, will enable the College to consider and mitigate these risks.

### Scope

This protocol applies to any College event (whether the event is to be held on College grounds or elsewhere), or external event hosted on College grounds, at which it is proposed that a guest or external speaker or presenter should speak. This includes the following categories of events (though where a particular type of event involving a speaker is not listed below, event organisers should assume that this process should still be followed):-

- College hosted dinners or events with invited speakers
- Student run events with invited speakers
- Research salons (or similar research presentations or discussions) with invited speakers
- Presentations to College members by external consultants or advisors
- Third party events hosted on College grounds (i.e. events booked via the College's conferencing and events provision) involving external speakers.

For the purposes of this protocol, guests or external speakers are generally intended to mean speakers who are not College members, though a similar level of vigilance should be applied where the speaker is a College member, particularly where the proposed topic or content of the talk may be viewed as controversial or divisive.

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom of Speech – Education [No 2] Act 1986  
Academic Freedom – Higher Education Act 2004  
Equality Act 2010  
Anti-terrorism and anti- public order legislation  
Human Rights Act 1998

## Key Risks

When making arrangements for guest/external speakers, the College needs to consider carefully the associated risks. These may include:-

- The risk of providing a platform for hate speech or extremism;
- The risk of providing a platform for radicalisation or attempts to draw attendees into terrorism;
- The risk of providing a platform for any speaker whose agenda is not consistent with the College's charitable objectives;
- The risk of any speaker using the platform to make defamatory statements about a third party;
- The risk of an adverse reaction within the College population to a controversial or divisive group, speaker or speech topic;
- The risk of an external adverse reaction to a controversial or divisive group, speaker or speech topic (including negative press coverage and the risk of reputational harm);
- The risk of demonstration or protest against a controversial or divisive group, speaker or speech topic (either by College members or external groups) – and the associated risk that peaceful protest escalates into public disorder or violence.

It is important that these risks are considered in the context of the College's overarching commitment to free speech. The starting point for the College is that **no individual or group** should be barred from speaking at a College event on the basis of the subject area or content (or expected content) of the proposed talk / speech, even where there is a likelihood that the speaker, any group or institution the speaker is associated with, or the likely content of their speech are viewed as controversial or divisive.

There are **two** distinct exceptions to the College's default position above, which are consistent with legal requirements. These are where:

- 1) There is evidence that the speaker is likely to promote hate speech or an extremist view
- 2) There is evidence that the speaker is likely to attempt to radicalise or draw attendees into terrorism

In either of the above circumstances, the speaker should **not** be permitted to speak in College – but there must be clear and persuasive evidence that either of the above is likely before the College takes the decision to refuse to allow the speaker.

Otherwise, where the intended speaker, the group they represent or the likely subject matter or content of the speech are likely to be viewed as controversial or divisive, the College should take steps to mitigate and manage the associated risks. Below is a Step by Step Guide which is designed to help event organisers identify those risks and where appropriate, escalate any concerns regarding proposed speakers for a decision at a higher level within the College's governance structure.

## Things to Consider – Step by Step Guide

**Before finalising arrangements for any guest speaker to attend and give a talk or speech at a College event, event organisers should follow these steps:-**

- 1. Learn as much as we can about the speaker and the intended or likely content of the speech** (whether through background research or direct correspondence with the proposed speaker), including where possible:-
  - Does the proposed speaker have links to or represent a prescribed terror group or organisation or feature on HM Treasury's list of organisations subject to government sanctions?
  - What is the topic of the event/speech, and what is the likely specific content of the speech (will there be slides presented? If so, will the speaker provide these to the College for review in advance?)
  - Is the proposed speaker 'qualified' to speak on the topic they are seeking to present – is there evidence that they are an expert in the field / regularly speak on it?
  - Will the speaker provide any material for attendees at the event (e.g. leaflets, CDs/DVDs) – if so what will be included? Will the speaker provide these to the College for review in advance?
  
- 2. Consider the nature of the event itself:**
  - Who is attending the event? Is it restricted to College members only or will it be open to the public?
  - Is it likely that the presence of the speaker will prompt specific groups or individuals to attend the event?
  - Does the format of the event lend itself to discussion/debate or is there no opportunity in principle for any response to the speaker?
  - Who is chairing the event / introducing or facilitating the speaker? If the nature of the event is such that
  
- 3. Review previous events at which the speaker or the group they represent has appeared** (both within College and University and more widely):
  - Has an event been run on this topic or involving this speaker previously – if so how did it go? Were there any issues or concerns?
  
- 4. Use the information gathered above to consider the risk profile of the proposed speaker by referring to the Key Risks section above.**
  
- 5. If any of the Key Risks appear possible as far as can be anticipated, undertake a risk assessment and put in place mitigating actions** (see Mechanisms to Mitigate Risks below).

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## Mechanisms to Mitigate Risks

The following tools may be useful in mitigating any risks associated with inviting or hosting an external speaker:-

- As a minimum, ask the speaker for a summary of the proposed content of the speech and any presentation materials
- Where possible, obtain an advance copy of the proposed content of the speech and any presentation materials
- Where possible – and mindful always of the requirement to ensure free speech – try to agree topics and content with the speaker
- Where the format of the event permits discussing or interaction with attendees, ensure that there is the opportunity for appropriate discourse
- Where the subject matter of the speech is likely to be controversial or divisive, ensure that the event is advertised in a neutral / balanced way
- Consider who is chairing the meeting or event – ensure that the Chair is sufficiently qualified to provide balance and challenge during the event, and that the College is aware of the Chair's own stance on the topic under discussion and is this likely to impact the smooth running of the event?