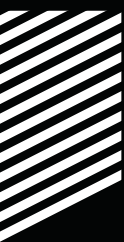# University of Exeter Students' Guild

External Speaker Framework

Freedom of Expression

The Students' Guild believes passionately that the right to express views and ideas freely, without fear of interference or persecution, is an essential party of democracy[1]. Everyone has the right to free speech within the law, and, alongside our members, we work towards widening debate and challenge. We know that Freedom of Expression is an important aspect of students' higher education experience, allowing them to think critically, challenge and engage with alternative perspectives.

Respectful debate and conversation allow us to challenge discrimination, eliminate intolerance and harmful perspectives and build strong and positive communities. Freedom of Expression includes the right to "offend, shock or disturb", however, we are committed to ensure that this is not misused for the purpose of unchallenged hatred or bigotry. [1]

At the Students' Guild, we want to foster an environment where our members can participate fully, feel able to question and challenge, express new ideas, discuss controversial and or unpopular opinions within the law, and all without fear of intolerance or discrimination. We are committed to the principle that both debate and deliberation should not be suppressed, and we encourage and support our members to engage, within the law, in both a constructive and responsible manner to contest any ideas they oppose openly and vigorously.

In exercising the right to freedom of expression, we expect our members to be tolerant of the differing opinions of others and to be tolerant of the diverse identities of others, in line with the core values of freedom from discrimination[1] and the Students' Guild core value of 'radical inclusivity'. Notably, Freedom of expression also includes the right to peaceful protest; however, it should not be used to shut down debate or infringe on the rights of others.

As an independent member-led organisation, we let our students set the tone for the events they want to organise and the speakers they want to invite. We collaborate with the University to work towards increasing the number and diversity of debates, discussion and conversation taking place, by creating networks, resources, and support for student leaders to enable them to invite diverse, knowledgeable, and experienced speakers to host at their events.

Our framework, developed by students for students, aims to empower members to run stimulating, challenging and diverse opportunities for debate, discussion, and dialogue, promoting and protecting the right to freedom of expression. It aims to manage and support these events in a way to ensure that they do not interfere with or deprive other people of their rights and to mitigate the risks posed by an event to allow for a balanced and respectful event, whilst considering the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation as prohibited by Equality Act 2010.

[1] free speech report ML design (wonkhe.com)

Risk Management

External speakers are defined as any individual or organisation who are not a current University of Exeter member of staff or current student invited to provide a viewpoint, or speak, on campus or virtually.

When considering external speaker requests, we must consider the potential risks associated with the event and/or speaker(s), so that we can mitigate these to ensure the event can run safely. To achieve this, we require all events involving an external speaker to be submitted **no less than 15 working days before the event date** to allow us to put these mitigations in place. A group may seek approval of an event before the external speaker is contacted.

We ask that the event is not advertised by the group until the event is approved. This is to ensure the necessary mitigations are in place beforehand.

Considerations may include:
- History of the speaker including previous media attention
- Potential for controversial subject matters
- Potential for the event/speaker to cause harassment, victimisation, or discrimination to members of the student body
- Potential impact on student wellbeing and safety
- Potential motivations of the speaker/ event
- Potential for any decision to limit freedom of speech
- Potential of the event causing the Students' Guild to be in breach of its equal opportunities policy
- Potential for the event to cause the Students' Guild to fail in wider legal duties
- Potential for the event to cause reputational risk to the Students' Guild as well as the associated potential for the event going ahead to cause reputational risk to the Students' Guild
- Potential for the speaker's presence to give rise to breach of peace
- Suitability of digital platforms for hosting an event

Many speaker events will be considered low risk, but some may require additional mitigations to ensure they enable balanced and respectful debate or discussion. These may include:
- Event promoting a particular view includes an opportunity to debate or challenge that view
- Event closed to group members only to be opened to all members of the union
- Experienced Chairperson required to chair the debate
- Event to be stewarded, subject to additional security measures, or held online instead of in-person
- Requiring that the event be filmed by an independent body
- Requiring that the event be observed by the Students' Guild, University or third party
- Screen sharing disabled on virtual events
- Moderation of online chat functions for virtual events
- Use of a suitable virtual platform which has sufficient digital controls

Operational Management of the Framework

Management of the External Speaker process is overseen by the Students' Guild, with the operational management of the framework delegated to the Student Activities Team. Staff will approach the framework with the aim of ensuring mitigations are in place to allow the event to run safely.

A rating of low, medium, or high risk will be determined based on the completed speaker form. Each risk rating will require a different level of consultation with a combination of stakeholders. The process of mitigating risk can be dynamic, and therefore, may require additional mitigation in the lead up to the event, if the risk level changes.

Events deemed low or medium risk by the Students' Guild may be escalated to Medium or High by the University, if there is additional information that supports this change in risk. The reason for the change will always be explained by the University to provide clarity, and the group will be informed of this change and any additional mitigations that would be required.

All speaker events submitted will be listed in a [live document](#) to provide a record of all events that have been reviewed. This document will be accessible to both the Students' Guild and University Staff.

Process and Procedure

Approval must be sought for all external speakers from the Students' Guild. A four-stage process is in place to facilitate this framework and ensure the risks are mitigated appropriately, these stages look as follows:
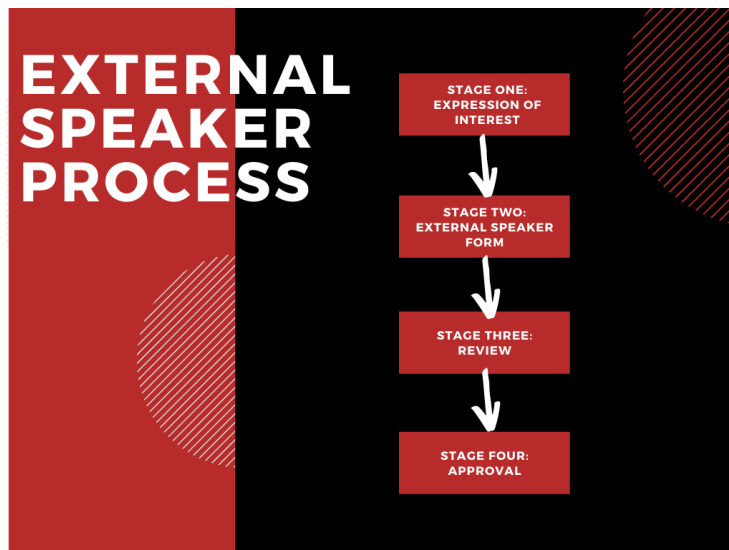
Pre-Stage One: External Speaker Discussion Forum

A Monthly External Speaker Discussion Forum will take place to provide an opportunity for groups or individuals to bring any speakers or topics they are considering for discussion with a diverse perspective across our University Community, as well as the opportunity to gather suggestions from the forum of speakers who may help widen or balance their event to ensure a variety of perspective and knowledge. The aim of this panel is not to approve or reject speakers, but instead to open discussion from different perspectives.

The forum will be made up of a combination of stakeholders, including VP (Vice President) Liberation and Equality, elected student leaders representing students with protected characteristics, and a University representative from the EDI (Equality Diversity Inclusivity) team. A member of the Student Activities Team will also be present to provide guidance.

Stage One:

Once a group or individual has decided who they would like to invite they will need to send any speaker(s) an Expression of Interest. This email is non-committal at this stage, but includes details of the intended event to determine the speakers availability.

Stage Two:

Affiliated society or groups will be required to submit an External Speaker Request form via the Activity System at least 15 working days before their event is due to take place.

An individual member of the Students' Guild will also be required to submit an External Speaker Request using the form [here](#), this must be completed at least 15 working days before their event is due to take place.

If any parts of the form/questions are incomplete or require more detail, the form will be returned to be updated which may lead to the postponement of an event to allow time for it to be completed, processed and reviewed.

Stage Three:

The Student Activities Team will review the submitted Speaker form. As standard practice, the first four pages of a Google search for each speaker will be conducted as part of the review. The staff member will then determine the overall risk of the event into one of the following categories: Low, Medium, or High.

Low Risk

➢ Event can be approved by the Student Activities Manager, with no further mitigations or conditions required. Approval will be confirmed via the Guild Activity system for societies and groups, with the event's status changed to Approved. For individual members they will receive an email from the Student Activities Manager confirming approval of their event.

Medium Risk

➢ Student Activities Manager will contact the event lead to confirm further mitigations that may be required. Once agreed, a copy of the risk assessment will be circulated to University Stakeholders and Students' Guild Senior Management for consultation, within five working days of receipt. Approval will be confirmed via the Guild Activity system for societies and groups, with the event's status changed to Approved. For individual members they will receive an email from the Student Activities Manager confirming approval of their event.

High Risk

➢ An event consultation panel will be called involving stakeholders from the University, Students' Guild, and the group or individual This will take place within 5 working days of the initial request form review. The panel will collectively decide the necessary mitigations required for the event to proceed. Approval will be confirmed via the Guild Activity system for societies and groups, with the event's status changed to Approved. For individual members they will receive an email from the Student Activities Manager confirming approval of their event.

➢ Following the panel, the Student Activities Manager will support the group or individual members to run their event safely following the agreed mitigations.

We aim to confirm approval of events at least 5 working days before they are due to take place. The earlier requests are submitted, the sooner event approval can be confirmed. It is perfectly acceptable to "block book" speakers much further in advance, to allow time for logistics and planning to take place.

Stage Four:

Once an event has been approved via the Guild Activity System for groups or via email for individual members, they may then confirm the attendance of the speakers and begin to advertise their event. At least 3 working days before the event, the risk rating will be reviewed by the Student Activities Manager to ensure the risk rating has not changed. If the rating has changed, the Student Activities Manager will work with the event lead to put mitigations in place, and stakeholders will be informed.

If a circumstance arises where a speaker has dropped out after the event has been approved, the event lead will need to contact the Student Activities Team via activities@Exeterguild.com as soon as possible. A member of the team will then work with the event lead to find a new speaker or help them adapt their event whilst maintaining balance. The risk assessment will be updated accordingly.

Extraordinary External Speaker Approval Procedure

We want our members to be able to discuss, debate, and engage with unfolding local, national and international events. We know that sometimes, the 15 working day timeframe can hinder these events going ahead. For an event in response to a proven local, national or international event/crisis groups and individual members will need to submit their event as above followed by sending an email to activities@exeterguild.com marked Priority: Extraordinary External Speaker Approval. The Activities Team will then support them to facilitate the event and its approval. However, this cannot be certain in all circumstances.

Supporting the Framework

To empower our student leaders to be facilitators of freedom of expression on campus as well as broadening the opportunities for active engagement in discussion or debate, we commit to providing the following:

➢ **Comprehensive training for groups, around Freedom of Expression, the External Speaker Framework, and speaker discussion Forum to empower and support students in running these types of events**

➢ **Annual review of the External Speaker Framework with consultation from key stakeholders, including the University, Students' Guild and Student Leaders to ensure it is fit for purpose and effective.**

➢ **Collaborating with the University to work towards increasing the number and diversity of debates, discussion and conversation taking place, by creating:**
  ➢ Creation of Speaker Networks through the speaker discussion Forum and University networks to provide our groups with access to a diverse and experienced range of speakers
  ➢ Creation of a Speaker Database accessible to all Guild Members, to record speakers that have been invited to attend events, detailing their knowledge and expertise, and the risk rating the event received.

➢ **Staff support for events considered to be high or medium risk to ensure student leaders have access to the support they need to run events successfully and safely**
  ➢ Guidance towards access to funding to support extra costs that may be required to meet extra mitigations such as security

➢ University and Students' Guild communication teams will be notified and will prepare written statements to be released if required in addition to support for any external media involvement.
➢ Student Activities Team will be available via the usual contact methods to answer questions from student leaders and talk through concerns.

➢ **Accessible online resources for Speaker Events to support students when running their events**
  ➢ External Speaker Framework to be published on the Students' Guild website so any member can access the approval and review process for external speakers
  ➢ [Exeter Speak Out](#) will be shared at all events, to signpost attendees to where they can report intolerance/abuse based on the topic/speakers selected
  ➢ Standard Text templates available as a downloadable resource for students to use at their events

➢ **Clear Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures**
  ➢ If a member of the Students' Guild has a complaint regarding an event they will need to follow the steps outlined in the Students' Guild Complaints Procedure to register their complaint. This procedure clearly outlines the steps the Students' Guild will take when reviewing a complaint.
  ➢ This is supported by the Students' Guild's Disciplinary Procedure which outlines the Students' Guild approach to ensuring issues concerning the conduct of individual member(s) or groups are resolved in a fair, consistent and timely manner, if a complaint results in disciplinary action. This procedure also outlines when the University will be informed of any disciplinary action.