UCQ UNIVERSITY CENTRE QUAYSIDE

External Speaker and Events Policy

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1. Purpose

1.1 This policy sets out a governing framework relating to external speakers and events at University Centre Quayside (UCQ).

1.2 This guidance should be read alongside policies governing health and safety, safeguarding and Prevent, the use of the UCQ name and brand, equality and diversity, academic freedom and freedom of speech, data protection and UCQ's strategic plan and core values.

1.3 This policy aims to provide an environment where freedom of speech and academic freedom are promoted, balanced with the legal requirement to protect individuals from unlawful harm, while ensuring that lawful speech is not restricted solely because it is controversial, unpopular, or offensive.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all staff, students and visitors of UCQ and covers all events hosted by UCQ (on site or elsewhere) and events hosted by external organisations that take place on UCQ premises.

3. Related legislation

3.1 UCQ must act in accordance with the duties imposed upon it by Section 43 of the Education (No 2) Act 1986, as updated by the Higher Education Research Act 2017 and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. The updated legislation creates a new duty on universities to promote freedom of speech and academic freedom. UCQ's commitment to protect the principle of academic freedom and freedom of speech is set out in GP-009 Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice.

3.2 UCQ have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 as an education provider, employer and service provider. UCQ must not unlawfully discriminate against students, employees and other individuals to whom services are provided.

3.3 UCQ is also subject to the Prevent duty under section 26 (1) of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. As such, UCQ must balance its legal duties whilst protecting the welfare of the UCQ community.

4. Organising an event

4.1 UCQ may, where reasonably practicable and necessary to ensure safety or legal compliance, impose viewpoint-neutral conditions relating only to the time, place, or manner of an event. UCQ will bear the reasonable cost of appropriate security for approved events to uphold freedom of speech within the law. Unanticipated and avoidable costs arising from breach of agreed event arrangements are the responsibility of the organiser, including those related to security and Health and Safety. Unanticipated costs refer to expenses that were not originally foreseen or budgeted for within the initial event booking application.

4.2 Anyone organising an event that involves an external speaker or speakers to be hosted by UCQ (on site or elsewhere) must ensure that this Policy is followed and an External Speaker Risk Assessment is carried out. An event includes any gathering that involves an external speaker addressing a group, including in a teaching, learning or research setting or in the context of co-curricular or extra-curricular activity.

4.3 Students cannot independently book UCQ space for the purpose of an event or make use of the UCQ name for an event without prior approval from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

4.4 The Principal Organiser (the person leading the organisation of the event) must adhere to the UCQ Brand Guidelines (BG-001 and BG-002) for marketing, documents and communication material. All communication and marketing material related to the event must be approved by the SLT prior to circulation.

4.5 The Principal Organiser must ensure that all speakers are provided with this External Speaker and Events Policy and the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice before approval is granted by the SLT.

5. External speaker and events booking process

5.1 The Principal Organiser must undertake a risk assessment of the proposed external speaker using form QD OPS 006 and ensure that this risk assessment and appropriate escalation take place in a timely fashion.

5.2 For events involving a single speaker, this will normally be a minimum of 15 working days before the date of the event. For larger events involving multiple speakers and/or taking place over multiple days (for example an academic conference or major exhibition), this will normally be a minimum of 2 months before the date of the event.

5.3 The Principal Organiser should in the first instance discuss the event with the appropriate line manager or head of service. It is the responsibility of the Principal Organiser to submit a risk assessment, counter-signed by the appropriate line manager, to the SLT for decision. If required, approval may also be sought from the Designated Safeguarding Lead prior to decision by the SLT. The SLT may:

a) Approve the request, or

b) Decline the request, or

c) Return the request to the Principal Organiser seeking further information, or

d) Approve the request with conditions or modifications, including (but not limited to):

- Restrictions on hospitality provision, including the consumption of alcohol
- The appointment of an independent Chair to oversee the event
- Specified arrangements governing health, safety and security for the event

5.4 Where an independent Chair is appointed (normally where the event takes the form of a meeting, debate, lecture, conference or similar event), the Chair will as far as possible be responsible for ensuring that both the audience and the speaker(s) act in accordance with the

law and with the provisions of this policy and those set out in the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice. The audience and speaker(s) will be under a duty to comply with the Chair's rulings relating to the conduct of the event, to the agreed arrangements for the event and to the policies of UCQ. The Chair has the discretion to request the removal of individuals acting in a disorderly manner or persistently disrupting the event. The Chair may suspend or close the event if in his/her opinion it can no longer be conducted in an orderly manner or the safety and security of those in attendance is under threat.

5.5 Aligning with the Office for Students, UCQ will at all times stand for the widest possible definition of freedom of speech: anything within the law. Free 'speech' includes written materials and other forms of expression. It is not limited to the spoken word. Speech that amounts to unlawful harassment or unlawful discrimination does not constitute free speech within the law and is not protected. However, lawful speech, including that which may be offensive, controversial, or provocative, must be enabled and protected.

5.6 UCQ will assess any proposed restrictions on speech using the following framework:

1) Is the speech within the law?
2) Are there reasonably practicable steps UCQ can take to secure the speech?
3) Are any restrictions prescribed by law, and proportionate under the European Convention on Human Rights?

5.7 UCQ will only decline or withdraw permission for an event in exceptional circumstances where, having followed the OfS' three-step framework, it concludes that the event cannot proceed lawfully or safely. Decisions will be based on lawfulness, proportionality, and whether reasonably practicable steps could mitigate the risks. The following are examples of circumstances where this may apply, but each case will be assessed individually:

a) Failure to submit the risk assessment within the specified timeframe, where this prevents UCQ from undertaking appropriate assessment of risk, or
b) A significant and unmitigable risk of public disorder threatening the safety of attendees or staff, or
c) A substantial risk of damage to UCQ property, or
d) Credible concerns that the law will be broken by those attending or speaking, and such risk cannot be prevented through proportionate measures, or
e) A major disruption to UCQ's core operations that cannot be mitigated, or
f) Unreasonable or unforeseeable costs required to ensure event safety, which cannot be resolved through modifications (e.g. holding the event online), or
g) Views expressed or likely to be expressed that fall under the legal definition of extremism and pose a legitimate risk of drawing individuals into terrorism.

5.8 Decisions will be documented and must not be based on the content of views expressed unless unlawful. The SLT will notify the Principal Organiser in writing of a decision within 10 working days.

6. Advice and support

6.1 Advice and support regarding the risk assessment and booking process is available from the following individuals:

a) Principal, or
b) Vice Principal (Strategic Safeguarding Lead), or
c) Head of Policy and Governance, or
d) Professional and Administration Services Manager (for booking queries only).

6.2 Where after the risk assessment has been completed, there are concerns that one or more of the proposed speakers for the event might express views that are prohibited by law, including those that can be constituted as hate speech or extremist views that risk drawing people into terrorism, then advice should be sought from the Strategic Safeguarding Lead as the designated "single point of contact" for the Prevent duty.

7. Complaints procedure

7.1 In the event that an individual (staff, student or external visitor) considers there to have been a breach of this policy or the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice, they have the right to make a formal complaint. This should be done using the UCQ Complaints Procedure (AC-002) available on the UCQ website.

7.2 A complaint may include:

a) Being prevented from arranging, speaking at or attending an event of the type envisaged by this policy, or
b) Alleged infringements of freedom of speech or academic freedom, or
c) Allegations that an external speaker at an event of the type envisaged by this policy breached or is likely to breach UCQ's Prevent duty obligations.

7.3 The complaint should include the original risk assessment documentation, copies of any relevant correspondence regarding the event and any other evidence that the complainant wishes to have considered.

8. Guidance for external speakers

8.1 This guidance exists to ensure that all speakers taking part in a UCQ hosted or run event or activity, on UCQ premises or elsewhere, act in accordance with this policy.

8.2 It is the responsibility of the Principal Organiser to ensure that:

a) this guidance and the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice is communicated to all external speakers prior to approval of speaking
b) all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that the requirements within it are upheld during the running of the event or activity.

8.3 Freedom of speech

8.3.1 The Education Act (No 2) 1986, as updated by the Higher Education Research Act 2017 and Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, requires UCQ to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for its employees, students and visiting speakers. As such, UCQ requires all employees and students to tolerate and protect the expression of opinions within the law, including those which may be unpopular, controversial, or offensive.

8.3.2 However, whilst the law promotes and protects freedom of speech, it also places limits on those freedoms in order to maintain public order and safety and to ensure that there is no breach of the law. UCQ recognises that it must carefully balance its duties to protect freedom of speech within the law with its other legal responsibilities, including safeguarding, equality, public order and the Prevent duty.

8.4 Legal Context

8.4.1 Higher education institutions operate in a complex legal environment and so it is vital that all individuals involved in the external speaker process, including the speakers themselves, understand the legal framework and context that governs this area. Examples of some of the relevant areas of law are:

a) People are entitled to protection from harassment, defamation and unlawful breach of their human rights, as well as from unfair treatment under equality law
b) Hate crimes, harassment, breach of the peace and terrorism all come under criminal law.
c) Civil legislation and local Council bylaws governing public meetings, public processions/assemblies and public order may be of relevance, including legislation governing health and safety.

8.5 Conduct

8.5.1 UCQ expects external speakers to act in accordance with the law and not to breach the lawful rights of others. UCQ reserves the right to restrict or halt an event only where there is a lawful and proportionate reason to do so, in line with this policy and the three-step framework set out in OfS guidance.

8.5.2 During the course of the event at which he/she/they participate, no speaker shall:

Act in breach of the law, including but not limited to:

a) Committing a racially or religiously aggravated offence
b) threats to kill
c) endeavours to break up a public meeting
d) threatening behaviour, fear, or provocation of violence
e) intentional harassment, alarm or distress
f) acts intended or likely to stir up hatred on the grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation
g) encouraging or assisting the commission of an offence

h) incitement to commit acts of terrorism overseas
i) inviting or encouraging support for proscribed organisation/s
j) encouragement of terrorism including the glorification of the commission or preparation of terrorism
k) dissemination of terrorist publications
l) encouragement of terrorism and dissemination of terrorist publications through the internet

8.5.3 During the course of the event, all speakers shall:

a) Comply with this External Speaker and Events Policy and the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice.
b) Present ideas and opinions, in particular those that may be contentious or potentially offensive, in the spirit of academic debate, being open to challenge and question.
c) Follow UCQ's instructions relating to security, health and safety and safeguarding.

8.6 Enforced Segregation

8.6.1 UCQ have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 as an education provider, employer and service provider and thus must not unlawfully discriminate against students, employees and other individuals to whom services are provided.

8.6.2 Enforced segregation is not permitted in any academic meetings or at events, lectures or meetings provided for students, or at events attended by members of the public or employees of UCQ. Enforced segregation is therefore not permissible for any event covered by this policy.

8.7 Arrangements for sharing information about external speakers

8.7.1 Where it deems there is a legitimate reason to do so, UCQ reserves the right to share information on the external speakers it has hosted, and/or those it deemed to be a risk, with other relevant agencies, where lawful, necessary and proportionate to do so.

8.7.2 In accordance with its obligations as detailed in the Prevent Duty Guidance, UCQ will report any major incidences of concern involving external speakers to the Office for Students (OfS).

8.7.3 UCQ's Information Sharing Agreement can be viewed here.

9. Compliance and enforcement

9.1 The Strategic Safeguarding Lead takes overall responsibility for ensuring compliance and enforcement of this policy across the organisation. Where event organisers, speakers or attendees feel there has been non-compliance under this Policy or the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Conduct, they can make a complaint under AC-002 Complaints Procedure.

10. Training and communication

10.1 All staff will receive annual safeguarding training. Staff with responsibility for organising, approving or scheduling events will receive support from the Senior Leadership Team to ensure adherence to this policy and the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Code of Practice. Staff and students are invited to review the wealth of resources available on UCQ's safeguarding, Prevent and wellbeing page, available at https://ucq.ac.uk/safeguarding-and-prevent/

10.2 This policy will be made available on the UCQ website for all stakeholders to access.

11. Review and revision

11.1 This policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier as required to ensure best practice.

12. Document history

ISSUE NO.	DATE	PAGE	REVIEWER	DETAIL OF AMENDMENT
5	28/03/2024	All	Tara Henderson	The External Speaker and Events Policy has been revised following the enactment of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. This document has been updated to align to best practice guidance. Paragraph numbers updated accordingly
6	25/07/2025	3, 5, 7	Tara Henderson	Sections 1.3, 4.1, 5.5-8, 8.3.1, 8.5.1 & Appendix A updated following publication of OfS Regulatory Advice 24 (https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1mvnscrl/regulatory-advice-24-freedom-of-speech-guidance.pdf)
7	17/07/2026	All	Michelle Elliott	General update. Sections: 1,4,5,6,8 and 10 updated. Information Sharing Agree updated (https://ucq.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/SGP-Information-Sharing-Agreement-v1.pdf)

13. Initial equalities impact assessment

Department: All	**Completed by:** Michelle Elliott, Vice Principal, SSL	**Date of initial assessment:** 22/04/2022
Area to be assessed:	SA-015 – External Speaker and Events Policy	
Existing or new policy/procedure:	Existing	
What evidence has been used to inform the assessment and policy? (please list only)		
External guidance and requirements: ➢ All legislation and publications identified in SA002 - Safeguarding Policy ➢ Internal guidance and requirements ➢ Consultation with Strategic Safeguarding Lead		

1. Describe the aims, objectives or purpose of the policy/procedure	University Centre Quayside (UCQ) fully recognise their responsibilities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults, including the responsibilities their Academic Council, staff and volunteers have in regard to the protection of children and vulnerable adults from abuse; and to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. This policy sets out a governing framework relating to external speakers and events at University Centre Quayside (UCQ).		
2. Which stakeholders/groups are intended to benefit from this policy/procedure?	All stakeholders		
The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to have 'due regard' to the need to:- (1) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization (2) Advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and (3) Foster good relations between different groups	**3. Could the policy/procedure have a disproportionately negative effect impact in terms of the aims set out in (1) to (3) of the Act on any of the protected characteristics?:-** **High** **Medium** **Low** **No effect**	**4. Briefly explain how the policy/procedure furthers or prevents the aims set out in (1) to (3).**	**5. If there is a disproportionately negative impact on any protected characteristics, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality or any other reason? If yes, please explain.**

Protected characteristics	**Age**	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Disability	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Gender	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Gender reassignment	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Marriage and Civil Partnership	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Pregnancy and Maternity	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Race	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable

	Religion or Belief	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Sexual Orientation	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable

6. Has there been any consultation/engagement with the appropriate protected characteristics?		Not applicable as no negative PC impact identified
7. What action(s) will you take to reduce any disproportionately negative impact, if any?		None required
8. Based on the information in sections 1 to 7, should this policy/procedure proceed to Full Impact Assessment? (recommended if one or more 'High' under section 2)		No
Assessor signature:	**Approved by:** **Michelle Elliott**	**Date approved:** 22/04/2022 Reviewed: 17/07/2026

Commented [ME1]: Tara - should we be doing this on the original forms?? Always feel they need something even if no changes???

Appendix A: Mitigation

The following must be considered to mitigate risks under conditional acceptance (this list is not exhaustive):

- The speaker must comply with all relevant UCQ policies, including the Code of Practice on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech.
- If a serious and credible risk is identified, UCQ may request advance access to the speaker's content or materials to assess legal compliance and determine necessary safeguards.
- An experienced and suitably qualified Chair will be appointed to oversee the event.
- Where a scripted speech is not provided (e.g. in a debate format), arrangements may be made to include a counter-perspective.
- Audience questions may need to be submitted in advance or may only be taken at the Chair's discretion.
- Attendance may be controlled through ticketing and, where necessary, limits on audience size and planned seating arrangements.
- UCQ will make a recording of the event.
- Certain venues may be restricted or deemed unsuitable for specific events.
- Access to the event may be denied to the media
- No event publicity is permitted prior to formal approval.
- For virtual events, controls such as muting attendees or disabling the chat function may be implemented.
- The involvement of impartial observers may be considered where appropriate.