

External Speakers Policy

Effective Date:	1 July 2025
Last Review:	24 June 2025
Next Review:	June 2028

1. Purpose

As a Students' Union, our Officers, Associations and Student Groups host several hundred events with external speakers every year and they make an important contribution to the liveliness of student life at Kingston University.

As a students' union at a registered higher education provider, Kingston Students' Union (hereafter 'KSU') is bound by legal duties under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, including responsibilities to secure lawful free speech, maintain a code of practice, and permit redress where duties are breached.

This policy is paired with its [equivalent within Kingston University](#), and the stipulations of both must be fulfilled for an event to proceed. All external speakers at KSU events on or off campus must be approved by KSU before they can take place or be advertised.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- i. An external speaker means anyone who is not a current student or staff member of KSU, or Kingston University.
- ii. All events that use the name of KSU or name of any KSU group i.e. sports clubs, societies, council, academic reps etc.
- iii. Any event led by the above groups, regardless of location (on or off campus).

3. Principles

The following principles guide how KSU manages external speaker events, ensuring a balance between freedom of expression, student welfare, and legal compliance:

- i. Student leadership is fundamental to KSU. We are committed to empowering event organisers to make the most of their educational opportunities and skills to

explore, debate and challenge issues, including those that may be considered controversial, whilst supporting them in fulfilling their legal responsibilities.

- ii. Freedom of expression applies to everyone and means that people are generally free to talk about, or write about, or otherwise express their ideas and opinions, without any censorship or interference from the state or public authorities, subject only to some narrow exceptions. The right to express views and ideas freely is a fundamental right protected under Article 10 of European Convention on Human Rights and an essential part of democracy.
- iii. Open debates are central to the culture of academic freedom, the development of student ideas and understanding, and are protected by UK law.
- iv. Student safety and welfare is at the heart of KSU's values, policies and practices.
- v. Just as freedom of expression is enshrined in law, it is recognised that it is not an absolute but a qualified right, which means that the rights of the individual must be balanced against the interests of society. This means that freedom of expression may be limited in some circumstances.
- vi. KSU will work with event organisers to ensure we can balance our responsibilities in upholding the freedom to express views with the need to secure freedom from harm for students and communities.
- vii. Speakers will not be denied a platform solely because their views may be deemed controversial, offensive, or unpopular, provided their expression remains within the bounds of the law.

4. Procedure

There must be an appointed Event Organiser for the event who will lead all aspects of the event's planning. The following steps must be followed:

1. All external speaker events must be submitted to KSU with 3 weeks' notice. Although, it is recommended that for high profile speakers, event organisers should submit their event request where possible with more notice and ideally at the point of invitation to the speaker or prior when planning the event, rather than when the date is agreed.
2. The event organiser must state on the form whether the speaker or topic has attracted controversy in the past and whether the event or speaker is likely to attract media attention.
3. When the event request is submitted, an impact assessment will be completed (Section 4a)
4. If the event is considered low profile, the relevant staff member may approve it. If deemed high profile, the request must be escalated to the senior management team and referred to the University's Responsible Officer, with no less than 10 working days' notice (as per Section 4b).

5. The outcome of being referred to the University should be communicated to the event organiser with no less than 5 working days' notice of the event but with the aim of providing an update as soon as possible.
6. The relevant staff member must add all speaker requests to the KSU external speaker tracker to ensure a log of all requested and approved events is kept.
7. The event organiser must ensure the speaker signs the University's External Speaker Agreement (outlined in the [University's policy](#)) and shares this with KSU in advance of the event taking place. The relevant staff member should ensure all high-profile speaker agreements are kept alongside the external speaker log.

4a. Impact Assessment

The staff member completing the Impact Assessment (Appendix A) should review the information on the booking form and conduct an internet search to determine whether the speaker is low profile to our legal obligation, our Safe Space Policy and Health and Safety Responsibilities.

If the Speaker meets one or more of the below criteria, the speaker is deemed high profile and should be flagged with the senior management team and the University's Responsible Officer should be notified:

- The internet search returns report of mainstream media coverage within the last three years
- The speaker has 10,000+ followers on at least one social media platform
- If restrictions on freedom of speech need to be imposed (if it is lawful, necessary and practicable) because it can be reasonably believed that the event:
 - Is likely to incite a breach of the law
 - Is likely to lead to an expression of views which are contrary to the law
 - Is likely to promote or support an illegal organisation including any Proscribed Organisation; or
 - It is in the interests of public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime, or the protection of those lawfully on University premises or a University branded external event, that the event does not take place; or
 - The views being expressed, or likely to be expressed, constitute extremist views that risk drawing people into terrorism or are shared by terrorist groups SAVE where such risk can be effectively mitigated without cancellation of the event.

4b. High Profile Speakers

Once a speaker has been flagged as high profile, a member of the senior management team and a selected Sabbatical Officer should review the impact assessment and event request form. They should then complete Part Two of the impact assessment, reviewing the level of risk against the following categories:

- The potential for the speaker's presence on campus to cause harassment, alarm, or distress to members of the student body or staff.
- The potential for the event going ahead to cause the Students' Union or University to fail in its legal duties (i.e. health and safety and/or unlawful discrimination).
- The potential for the speaker's presence to give rise to a breach of peace.

The selected senior manager should liaise with the University's Responsible Officer on next steps and what conditions may need to be put on the event. All decisions must be based on an objective evidence-based assessment of the risks, and whether legal, safety, or welfare concerns can be reasonably mitigated. Any restrictions, conditions or refusals must be lawful, necessary, proportionate and compatible with the duty to protect freedom of speech.

Any conditions should be notified to the organiser no less than 5 working days before the event and recorded on the external speaker log. In all high-profile cases, KSU and the University will consult closely. While the University holds overarching legal accountability, KSU retains its own statutory duty under the Freedom of Speech Act. Example conditions may include asking; provision of a stewarding plan, advance guest list, or restrictions on public attendance.

4c. Appeals

The event organiser has the right to appeal a decision made regarding an external speaker request, including any restrictions or conditions imposed. Appeals must be submitted within 5 working days of receiving the original decision and sent to the individual communicating that decision.

Appeals will then be reviewed by a KSU senior manager and a Sabbatical Officer not previously involved in the case. Where appropriate, the review panel may seek guidance from Kingston University, which remains the legally accountable body under the Freedom of Speech (Higher Education) Act 2023.

The panel will assess whether:

- The risk assessment was reasonable and based on available evidence
- Any restrictions imposed are proportionate and necessary

- The decision adequately balances the principles of free speech with student welfare and legal obligations

The outcome of the appeal will be communicated in writing within 10 working days. Where relevant, Kingston University may assume final decision-making responsibility to ensure institutional compliance with its legal duties.

Speakers or organisers who believe their free speech rights have been breached may pursue further recourse through Kingston University's complaints procedures or the Office for Students, as permitted under the Act.

5. Monitoring and Reporting

All external speaker requests and outcomes will be recorded on a centralised log for KSU. These records will be made available to the University on request. High profile speakers will be reported quarterly to the Trustee Board.

Appendix A

External Speaker Impact Assessment

Date of Event:		Title of Event:	
Student Group:		Speaker Name:	

Section One

Does the speaker, or their associated organisation, meet any of the following criteria:

- The internet search returns report of mainstream media coverage within the last three years
- The speaker has 10,000+ followers on at least one social media platform
- If restrictions on freedom of speech need to be imposed (if it is lawful, necessary and practicable) because it can be reasonably believed that the event:
 - Is likely to incite a breach of the law
 - Is likely to lead to an expression of views which are contrary to the law
 - Is likely to promote or support an illegal organisation including any Proscribed Organisation; or
 - It is in the interests of public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime, or the protection of those lawfully on University premises or a University branded external event, that the event does not take place; or
 - The views being expressed, or likely to be expressed, constitute extremist views that risk drawing people into terrorism or are shared by terrorist groups SAVE where such risk can be effectively mitigated without cancellation of the event.

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, please provide details below and refer to SMT & the University:

Section Two

Risk Matrix	Low	Medium	High
The potential for the speaker's presence on campus to cause harassment, alarm, or distress to members of the student body or staff.			
The potential for the event going ahead to cause the Students' Union or University to fail in its legal duties (i.e. health and safety and/or unlawful discrimination).			
The potential for the speaker's presence to give rise to a breach of peace.			

If medium to high risk, please detail potential mitigation options:

Decision

Is permission granted for the event to proceed on University premises? Yes ☐ No ☐

Are any conditions attached to the event? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please detail:

Authorising Officer Name:	
Role:	
Date:	