

Guest Speaker Policy

Approved by:	Finance Committee	Date:	26 March 2025
Implementation date:	26 March 2025		
Review date:	March 2027		
Staff member responsible:	Chief Executive		

Introduction

Falmouth & Exeter Students' Union (The Students' Union) has a long and rich history as an organisation that explores culture, debate and therefore has regularly welcomed visiting speakers from around the world to its campuses. Such speakers have brought and continue to bring great diversity of experience, insight and opinion, enriching our events and activities and sparking discussion and debate among our students.

The Students' Union is committed to facilitating debate and discussion to further the extra-curricular development of our students and to support student groups in inviting guest speakers to their events to contribute to the dialogue.

At the time of approval, this policy is up to date with the current legislation, as the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act 2023 has yet to be formally implemented. This policy will be reviewed in line with the changes introduced in this Act.

Definition

'Guest speaker' is used throughout this document to describe any individual or organisation who is not a student or staff member at Falmouth University, The University of Exeter or The Students' Union invited to provide a viewpoint, or speak, on campus or virtually.

This policy covers guest speakers at:

- Students' Union events
- Events organised by affiliated groups (e.g. societies and sports clubs) in any venue

Aims

The purpose of this policy is to set in place a governing framework for guest speakers to ensure that this proud heritage, where debate, challenge and dissent are not only permitted but expected, can continue.

It is Students' Union Policy:

- To provide an environment where freedom of expression and speech are protected and balanced with the need to ensure that our community is free from harm and that incitement to hatred is never acceptable.
- To provide a supportive, inclusive and safe space for students.
- To provide a clearly defined and effective procedure to ensure that the law is upheld.

- To collaborate with necessary agencies and advisors to reach sound, evidenced based judgements about proposed external speakers ensuring that The Students' Union, the Universities and FX Plus can meet their legal, social and moral obligations.
- To encourage and provide a balance of opinion at any academic discussion or debate.
- To communicate to all members, volunteers, staff and visitors, that it is our mutual responsibility to comply with anti-discrimination, anti-bullying or anti-harassment legislation and that both The Students' Union and the individual can be held liable if they contravene the law.
- To challenge behaviour and change practice that directly or indirectly results in discrimination.
- To ensure that external speakers cannot insist on gender segregation as a condition of participation at the event because gender segregation is unlawful, unless to observe religious worship.
- To report by exception, medium and high risk Guest Speakers to the regional Prevent Partnership Group, sharing intelligence and best practice.

Freedom of Speech

The Students' Union has policy and procedures regarding guest speakers in order to enshrine our commitment to Freedom of Speech while ensuring we act in the best interests of our students and in a socially responsible manner. We are committed to facilitating debate and discussion to further the extra-curricular development of our students. Constitutionally, The Students' Union is committed to Freedom of Speech and to support students in inviting guest speakers to their events to contribute to dialogue.

Sometimes a guest speaker or their topic of discussion has the potential to contravene our conditions for a safe event. We're committed to working together with event organisers to make sure that we reach a decision regarding the proposed event that is reasonable, informed and within the law.

Students' Union Event Considerations

When considering guest speaker requests, it is important that The Students' Union takes into consideration any risks associated with the event and/or speaker(s) - so that we can mitigate these to ensure the event can run safely. This may require additional support and resources, so the more time we have to prepare the event, the better.

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.

The Students' Union need to take into consideration the following points when approving a speaker:

- risk to student wellbeing, health and safety.
- history of the speaker, any media or police attention they have received previously and potential motivations of the speaker/event.
- laws regarding discrimination, incitement and intimidation are taken into account when reviewing the history of the speaker to ensure that we are not perceived to be providing a platform for illegal activity or potentially illegal activity.
- particular student groups that may take offence at the invitation of the speaker to an event.
- Potential for any decision to limit freedom of speech

- Potential of the event causing The Students' Union to be in breach of its equal opportunities policy
- Potential for the event to cause The Students' Union to fail in wider legal duties
- Potential for the event to cause reputational risk to The Students' Union
- Suitability of digital platforms for hosting an event

The Students' Union will work with the Universities and FX Plus to ensure that risks identified around particular speakers or events being held on campus will be properly managed.

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' Union, University or third party
- Use of a suitable virtual platform which has sufficient digital controls

Operation of The Students' Union Guest Speaker process

The Guest Speaker process is delegated to the Community Team. Staff will work with event leads to ensure 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' Union may be escalated to Medium or High by stakeholders in our partnership, if there is additional information that supports this change in risk. The reason for the change will always be explained by the Universities 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.

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 book speakers much further in advance, to allow time for logistics and planning to take place. Once an event has been approved via the Community Team, event leads may then confirm the attendance of the speakers and begin to advertise the event. At least 3 working days before the event, the risk rating will be reviewed by the Head of Community to ensure the risk rating has not changed. If the rating has changed, the Head of Community 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 Community Team 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.

We want our members to be able to discuss, debate, and engage with unfolding local, national and international events. We know that sometimes, the 21 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 per the process as well as sending

an email to activities@thesu.org.uk marked Priority: Extraordinary Guest Speaker Approval. The Community Team will then support them to facilitate the event and its approval. However, this cannot be guaranteed.

Falmouth & Exeter Students' Union Guest Speaker Approval Process

