

EXTERNAL SPEAKER POLICY

Guidance and legal obligations relating to external speakers at the University of Reading

Introduction

The University of Reading has a long and rich history as an academic institution which 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, staff and visitors alike.

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

Policy statement

As an institution of higher education, providing an environment where intellectual and scholarly freedom can thrive is essential to our core mission; to our teaching, to our research and to the experience we offer our students. As a matter of law, all Universities in England and Wales, have a statutory duty to secure both freedom of speech (Education (No 2) Act 1986) and academic freedom (Education Reform Act 1988) on their campuses, enabling new ideas to be advanced and encouraging open and free debate.

Freedom of speech is fundamental to a University. The Council of the University therefore requires all employees and students of the University to tolerate and protect the expression of opinions within the law whether or not these opinions are repugnant to them. Accordingly, and in line with its statutory obligations the University has a Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech which the Council has approved and adopted. This Code is binding on all members of the Council and on all employees and students of the University. Nothing in this External Speaker Policy is intended to or should be interpreted as interfering with the rights and obligations set out in that Code of Practice.

The definition of academic freedom is set out in the Education Reform Act 1988 and states that UK academics 'shall have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom and put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs'. The University's commitment to protect the principle of academic freedom is set out in its Instruments of Governance.

External speakers play an important role at the University of Reading, not least as part of the regular academic experience, allowing students and staff to be exposed to a range of different ideas, beliefs and opinions. They also play a significant part in our public engagement programme of activity and within our students' own events and activities organised through individual clubs and societies as well as through the Students' Union.

Although most speakers are uncontroversial, some will express contentious, even inflammatory or offensive, views. In some cases, their presence on campus may be divisive.

However, whilst the law promotes and protects freedoms of speech and debate, the law also places limits on those freedoms. Crucially the protection of freedom of speech does not extend to allow a speaker to break the law or breach the lawful rights of others e.g. using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behavior, particularly with a view to incite hatred or draw others into terrorism. N.B. It should be noted that these provisions do not create a broad right not to be offended; the expression of views which some people may find objectionable or offensive is not prohibited generally by law.

Therefore, this External Speaker Policy exists in order to protect the rights and freedoms of our students, staff and visitors, and to ensure that the University of Reading balances this with its legal requirement to secure freedom of speech.

The policy covers all events hosted by the University, the Reading University Students' Union and events hosted by client organisations that take place on our premises. Also covered by this policy are events taking place off campus, where the University is hosting (or co-hosting) an event. This includes at venues in the UK or at institutions or establishments overseas. Whilst the legal framework will differ in other countries, all activities led or hosted/co-hosted by the University of Reading, irrespective of where in the world they take place, should uphold this policy unless to do so would breach that countries' law. Any breach of the policy may pose significant risk of reputational damage even if, within a particular country, the law is not broken

In order to ensure the effective management of the Policy across the University, an External Speaker Booking Process (see below) and External Speaker Code of Conduct (this should be a link to the document) are in place. This policy and associated process must be applied in all cases where a platform is being given to any external speaker or group of speakers, this might include, but is not limited to: public lectures, research seminars, student society events, meetings and debates and academic conferences.

Organising an event

Anyone (staff or student) organising an event that involves an external speaker or speakers to be hosted by the University of Reading (on campus or elsewhere) or to be hosted at the University of Reading on any campus or within any of its premises (inc. Students' Union and, Halls of Residence and external client hosted events managed by VenueReading) must ensure that the University of Reading's External Speaker Policy and Code of Conduct are followed.

An event includes any gathering that involves an external speaker addressing a group, including in a teaching, learning or research setting (class, conference, seminar) or in the context of extracurricular activity.

The person organising the event must:

Undertake a first assessment of the proposed external speaker (as set out below) and, if there are any concerns, escalate the decision about whether to invite that speaker as set out in the booking process.

Ensure that all speakers are made aware of, and given a copy of, the Code of Conduct.

Please note that failure by a member of staff or student to comply with this policy will be treated very seriously and may be subject to formal action under the University's normal disciplinary processes for staff and students.

External Speaker Booking Process

Anyone organising an event as described above must follow the External Speaker Booking Process.

The majority of external speaker requests will be straightforward and can be handled entirely at a local (departmental) level see below. However, some may be complex and may require referral for further consideration. The referral process, see below, will only apply in a minority of circumstances – to events or speakers deemed to be higher-risk.

Local assessment of proposed external speaker(s)

Prior to the confirmation of any external speaker, the event organiser will be responsible for assessing the speaker against the following set of questions:

Question 1: Has the speaker previously been prevented from speaking at Reading or another University or similar establishment or previously been known to express views that may be in breach of the External Speaker Code of Conduct?

Question 2: Does the proposed title or theme of the event present a potential risk that views/opinions expressed by speakers may be in breach of the External Speaker Code of Conduct?

Question 3: Is the proposed speaker/theme likely to attract attendance from individuals/groups that have previously been known to express views that may be in breach of the External Speaker Code of Conduct?

If the answer to all three questions is NO:

The event organiser can confirm the external speaker and 'book' them to speak at their event or activity in the normal way. (It is required that the external speaker be sent a copy of the External Speaker Code of Conduct).

If the answer to any of the questions is unclear:

The event organiser must seek guidance from their line manager or head of function, whose responsibility it will be to further review the speaker(s) against the questions above.

Ultimately, if the answer to any of the questions is YES:

It is the responsibility of the event organiser to submit a referral to the Vice-Chancellor's Office.

- To make a speaker referral submission: please use the External Speaker Referral Form (the Speaker Policy Review Process provides a detailed overview of the referral submission process and subsequent steps).

Please note

- RUSU and VenueReading will be responsible for enacting the external speaker booking process and ensuring compliance with the External Speaker Policy for all events managed by them.
 - In the case of RUSU, they will be responsible for implementing a system to support all student events with proposed external speakers. They will undertake the local assessment with/on behalf of individual students, clubs or societies. In the event that a referral is required, RUSU will be responsible for making the submission with/on behalf of the student co-ordinator.
 - In the case of VenueReading, they will be responsible for implementing a system to support all client events with proposed external speakers on our campus/in our venues. They will undertake the local assessment with/on behalf of individual clients/organisations. In the event that a referral is required, VenueReading will be responsible for making the submission with/on behalf of the client.

- The External Speaker Policy and approval process will be continually reviewed and updated in response to legislative changes and other factors. It is the responsibility of those organising events to ensure that they are acting in accordance with the most recent version of the Policy, which will be published by the University on its website.
- Also that the External Speaker Policy and approval process sits alongside, but is currently separate from the University's Event Notification/Approval process, which event organisers will need to comply with separately and as required.

Managing external speakers

Any external speaker hosted by the University or Reading (on campus or elsewhere) or to be hosted at the University of Reading on any campus or within any of its premises (inc. Students' Union and, Halls of Residence and external client hosted events managed by VenueReading) must be aware of, and comply with, the External Speaker Code of Conduct.

It is the responsibility of the person who is organising the event to ensure that the speaker receives the Code of Conduct and has their attention drawn to its contents.

Complaints procedure

In the event that an individual (staff, student or external visitor) considers there to have been a breach of this Policy, they have the right to make a formal complaint, in writing, to:

The University Secretary
 Whiteknights House
 University of Reading
 Reading
 Berkshire
 RG6 6AH

A complaint may include:

- Being prevented from arranging, speaking at or attending an event of the type envisaged by this policy;
- Alleged infringements of freedom of speech (please refer to the Code of Practice); and
- Allegations that an external speaker at an event of the type envisaged by this policy breached or is likely to breach the external speaker code of conduct.

Version control

VERSION	KEEPER	REVIEWED	APPROVING AUTHORITY	APPROVAL	START DATE	NEXT REVIEW
1.0	Fiona Blair	Annually	UEB/Council	July 15	Sept 15	
1.1	Fiona Blair/ Vicky Baldwin	Annually	UEB/Council	Sept 17	Jan 18	July 18