

# External Speaker Approval Procedure

November 2024

Any Union sports club or society must adhere to the following procedure when requesting an external speaker. Until you have received approval through following the steps in this procedure you are not permitted to promote or publicise your event. Failure to follow any of the steps or guidance in this procedure may result in referral to Union disciplinary processes.

## Our Commitment to Freedom of Speech

Surrey Students' Union and the University of Surrey have a shared commitment to the importance of enabling and protecting Freedom of Speech across campus. Furthermore, The Education Act 1986, section 43, places an obligation of universities to *"take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students and employees of the establishment and for visiting speakers"*.

As a Union, our Charitable Objects are, are the advancement of education of students at the University of Surrey for the public benefit by:

- Promoting the interests and welfare of students at the university of surrey during their course of study and representing, supporting and advising students.
- Being the recognised representative channel between students and university of surrey and any other external bodies.
- Providing social, cultural, sporting and recreational activities and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of its students.

It is within this framework that the Union is committed to empower and support our clubs and societies to organise invitations for a variety of speakers that stimulate debate and further the non-academic development of our members. We will facilitate events where speakers are allowed the right to express their views and experiences, while differing, challenging and antithetical views are also heard and debated in a safe space.

There are limitations on this commitment set by UK Law that protects individuals and groups from intimidation, discrimination and the incitement of a crime. The Union is bound by a

number of different statutes and regulations and must always ensure that freedom of speech is maintained within this legal framework. In order to maintain our duty of care for the health and safety of all staff, students and visitors in particular we will:

- Do all that is reasonably practicable to protect our members from unlawful direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Not allow communication which is threatening, abusive or intended to harass, alarm or distress.
- Not allow communication which targets a person, or group of people based on their skin colour, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender (sexual or identified), age, disability, marriage and civil partnership.
- Reaffirm that it is a criminal offence to incite or encourage others commit a crime, including acts of terrorism.

## What are External Speakers

External speakers are defined as any non-University of Surrey students or staff members who are invited to speak, or participate in an event, on campus or online. If you are planning on inviting multiple external speakers to an event, they must all must be approved through this procedure.

## What the Union has to into account when approving External Speakers

### The Union as a Charity

As a Charity, Surrey Students' Union has certain duties and responsibilities which must be considered when facilitating external speaker events. As well as ensuring the University of Surrey's [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#) is followed, the Trustees of the Union must ensure all events carried out by any affiliated student group do not place the Charity's endowments, funds, assets or reputation at risk. All activities must be carried out in line with our charitable objects and meet the '[public benefit requirement](#).' Equally, the Union must ensure that the right to freedom of speech is applied fairly and constantly to all groups with due regard for the legal framework as set out in various UK statutes.

### Risk Management Considerations

When considering external speaker requests, we must take into consideration any potential risks associated with the speaker attending the event, so that we can work together to mitigate them. We will do all that is reasonably practicable to allow any external speaker to attend events on campus, and to support students in making this a reality. In order to do this,

we require that all external speaker requests are submitted no less than 10 working days before the event to give us time to consider how best to support the event and mitigate any associated risk.

## **Risks we take into consideration when approving a speaker include:**

- Anything that might affect student wellbeing, health and safety.
- Reputational risk (for you, University of Surrey, Surrey Students' Union and our clubs or societies).
- The history of the speaker and any media attention they have received previously.
- Potentially controversial subject matter.
- The reputation and potential motivations of any sponsor or partner agency.
- UK law including those regarding discrimination, incitement and intimidation.
- Ensuring that we are not perceived to be, or are actually, providing a platform for illegal activity.
- Ensuring that the event can be carried out in a way which is in line with our charitable objectives and benefits 'students as students'.
- The potential for the speaker's presence on campus to give rise to a breach of the peace.
- The potential to breach the University of Surrey's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech or limit any students, staff or public's right to legal free speech on campus.

## **Requesting an External Speaker**

*Our External Speaker Request process is designed to ensure that the Union and the University do all we can to ensure speakers can attend campus and speak. Any steps listed below are to ensure we comply with our legal obligations, whilst allowing events with external speakers to happen safely for all attendees and non-attendees.*

### **Step 1**

The first thing you need to do is ensure your external speaker(s) have agreed to the Union's approach to External Speakers summarised in our External Speakers Briefing. You are required to send them the document and ensure you have received in writing their agreement to comply with our approach and policies.

### **Step 2**

You will then need to complete and submit an Event Speaker Request form at least 10 days before the event is due to take place. It is highly recommended you submit well before this deadline to avoid any issues.

Please ensure you have taken the time to complete the form thoroughly, with an appropriate amount of information. Failure to do so will result in the form being returned to you for revision. This may delay your request and/or result in the completed form not being accepted in time for your event to go ahead potentially causing you to have to postpone or cancel your event.

### Step 3

The Union Activities Zone staff team will review and assess your request form. Requests will be rated low, medium or high risk, by considering the information provided on the form, balanced against our commitment to Freedom of Speech on campus and our legal obligations.

***If rated a low-risk event***, the request will be approved with no conditions.

***If rated a medium-risk event***, then a member of the Activities Zone staff team will contact you to provide support to ensure the event can go ahead safely. There may be some conditions attached to the event.

***If rated a high-risk event***, the Union will need to consult with senior Union and University staff who will work to see if/how the event can proceed. There will be conditions placed upon the event.

### Step 4

You will receive email confirmation from the Student Activities staff team saying your event can proceed with or without conditions. Once you have agreed to any conditions you can proceed to plan, promote and advertise your event.

Please note, you must include our Freedom of Speech Notice on your event descriptions where possible, including online descriptions of the event on What's On listings and Social Media descriptions.

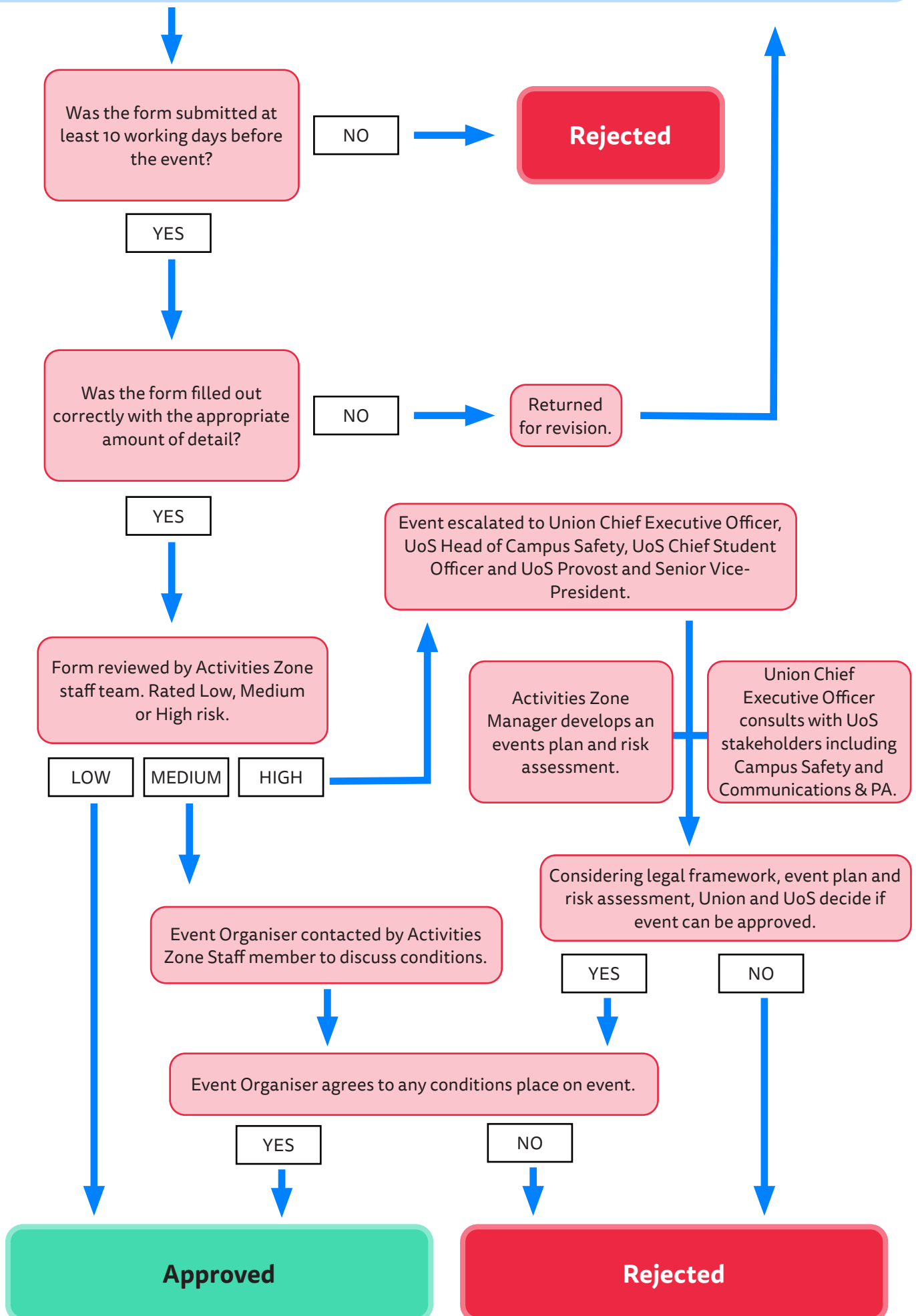
*"Surrey Students' Union is committed to providing a forum that facilitates Freedom of Speech while providing a safe space for our members and the public. We support events that contribute to the non-academic development of students while requesting that all speakers and attendees are respectful of the beliefs and opinions of others, as well as the law that protect individuals and groups from intimidation, discrimination and harassment. By attending a Union event you are agreeing to uphold our policies regarding Freedom of Speech. Any breach of the Union Policies and procedures may result in your event and speech being curtailed and referred as appropriate for further action to be taken."*

## Potential Conditions

The following are examples of the types of conditions we may put in place for events to go ahead safely based on our perception of risks to you as an organiser, the Union and the University in respect to our responsibility to balance our commitment to Freedom of Speech on campus against our legal obligations.

- An agreed number of event stewards present for the duration of the event.
- SIA Security booked for the duration of the event.
- Limitations on what attendees may bring to the event including food, drink or anything that could be used as a missile.
- Presence of Surrey Students' Union staff observers.
- Presence of University of Surrey staff observers.
- Limitation of number of attendees.
- Making the event 'private' or restricting attendance to University of Surrey students only.
- Postponement of event until satisfactory measures are put in place.
- An advanced Risk Assessment with Surrey Students' Union sign off.
- Alteration of the format of the meeting.
- Requesting a copy of the speakers' speech before approval granted to deliver it.
- Declaration of names of attendance in advance of the meeting.
- Restriction on banners, placards, flags or other items around the venue.
- Movement of venue/platform at the advice of University of Surrey Security.
- Requirement for organisers of the event to record and preserve a video or audio version of the event for future reference to ensure accurate reporting of the event.

# EVENT SPEAKER REQUEST SUBMITTED





# External Speaker Briefing

**We ask all External Speakers at our events understand and agree in writing to the following.**

Thank you for agreeing to speak to our members at a Surrey Students' Union event. The Union aims to be the heart of our students' life at the University of Surrey, ensuring our campus is a place in which a diversity of people and opinions are not only accepted but celebrated. We exist to 'provide for the intellectual, cultural, social and physical recreation of our members' as well as to 'foster and encourage the freedom of speech, expression, assembly and association.' We therefore actively seek to facilitate student-led events where speakers are invited to broaden the scope of discussion and debate and we are grateful to those who volunteer their time to contribute to the academic and non-academic development of our members.

Our agreement allows speakers to attend events on campus rests on the understanding that they act within the law and the regulations set by the University of Surrey (our parent institution) and the statutes that those regulations are drawn from. The use of University of Surrey premises for events that involve external speakers is regulated by the 'University of Surrey Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech' which is adopted by Surrey Students' Union and can be found [here](https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/code-of-practice-on-freedom-of-speech.pdf). [surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/code-of-practice-on-freedom-of-speech.pdf](https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/code-of-practice-on-freedom-of-speech.pdf)

In addition we have a Surrey Students' Union Freedom of Speech Policy which can be found on [our website](https://www.surreyunion.org/your-union/policies). [surreyunion.org/your-union/policies](https://www.surreyunion.org/your-union/policies) It highlights our commitment to Freedom of Speech and the non-academic development of our members through dialogue and debate, to which external speakers make significant contributions.

It is also our responsibility to act within the legal framework set out in various pieces of UK Legislation to ensure protection of Freedom of Speech within the law. In order to maintain our duty of care for the health and safety of all staff, students and visitors in particular we will not allow:

- Unlawful direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Communication which is threatening, abusive or insulting, or intended to harass, alarm or distress.
- Communication which targets a person or group of people based on their skin colour, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender (sexual or defined), age, disability, marriage and civil partnership.
- We also reaffirm that it is a criminal offence to incite or encourage others to commit a crime, including acts of terrorism.

We ask that all speakers and event attendees are respectful of the beliefs and opinions of others.

If there are concerns raised at any point in the lead up to the event regarding the safety of attendees or potential legal issues the union will liaise with relevant stakeholders. In line with the University of Surrey Code of Practice and the Unions External Speakers Approval Process, conditions may be made before the continuation of the event/event approval.

Organisers are consulted on these conditions in advance of the event and all speakers notified of the outcome. An event may also be cancelled if there are safety concerns that the event would risk member safety, violation of health and safety requirements or if the event risked violating the aforementioned laws regarding hatred, discrimination or incitement. Surrey Students' Union reserves the right to put additional conditions on an event after initial approval as the 'risk' of an event is continually assessed and can cancel or postpone any event should they have concerns that cannot be addressed adequately. The Union may also require for additional clauses to be added to the speaker agreement where concerns are highlighted. We also reserve the right to perform spot checks on events being hosted by our members. If there are breaches of the Union or University Policies at our events, the matter will be referred for disciplinary or legal action.

This briefing document has been provided to ensure all speakers are aware of the framework we operate within when facilitating external speakers and the measures that may be required to support Freedom of Speech at our events. Thank you for agreeing to speak at one of our events and if you have any questions regarding any of the information in this document please contact us by emailing the Chief Executive Officer, Alex McKee [a.mckee@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:a.mckee@surrey.ac.uk).