

Briefing for External Speakers at Students' Union UCL Events

Thank you for agreeing to speak to our members at a Students' Union UCL event. The Union aims to be the heart of the student community at University College London, ensuring our university is a place in which a diverse group 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.'¹ 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, which allows speakers to attend events on campus, rests on the understanding that they act within the law and the regulations set by UCL (our parent institution) and the statutes that those regulations are drawn from. The use of UCL premises for events that involve external speakers is regulated by the UCL Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech², which rules are adopted by Students' Union UCL:

Under UCL's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, so far as is as reasonably practical:

- » The use of UCL premises will not be denied to any individual or body of persons on the grounds of the beliefs or views of that individual or any member of that body; or the policy or objectives of that body.
- » It is essential to the purposes of UCL that opportunities for free and open discussion within the law should be safeguarded.
- » Members of UCL and all other persons attending meetings held on the premises must behave in a lawful manner and avoid taking any action or using language which is offensive or provocative.

The Students' Union UCL Freedom of Speech Policy³ additionally 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 furthermore our responsibility to act within the legal framework set out in UK legislation to ensure the protection of freedom of speech within the law. 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.

¹ Students' Union UCL Memorandum & Articles of Association, Students' Union UCL Bye-Laws. Available from: <https://studentsunionucl.org/governing-documents> [Accessed September 2024]

² UCL Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. Available from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/compliance/prevent-ucl/external-speakers>, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/sites/srs/files/ucl_code_of_practice_on_freedom_of_speech.pdf [Accessed September 2024]

³ Students' Union UCL Freedom of Speech Policy. Available from: <https://studentsunionucl.org/> [Accessed September 2024]

- » 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.
- » Communication which could reasonably be perceived to encourage unlawful action or glorify the unlawful actions of a group or organisation.

It is imperative the Union and all external speakers invited to speak at Union events also comply with UK counter-terrorism law. This is regardless of any debate over terrorism legislation, the basis of proscription, or the basis of an organisation or individual being labelled as terrorist. This means you cannot:

- » Proceed with speaking at a Union event if you are a member of or profess to be a member of a 'proscribed organisation'⁴.
- » Make any statement at a Union event which may encourage terrorism or support a proscribed organisation (including expressing your own support for a proscribed organisation), or the furtherance of a proscribed organisation's activities.

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 UCL Code of Practice⁵ and the Union External Speaker Process⁶. Conditions may be made before the continuation or approval of the event including but not limited to:

- » Limitations on what attendees may bring to the event including food, drink or anything that could be used as a missile.
- » An agreed number of event stewards present for the duration of the event.
- » SIA security booked for the duration of the event.
- » Presence of Students' Union UCL staff observers.
- » Presence of University College London staff observers.
- » Limitation of the number of attendees.
- » Making the event 'private' or restricting attendance to UCL students only.
- » Postponement of the event until satisfactory measures are put in place.
- » An approved risk assessment with Students' Union UCL sign off.
- » Alteration of the format of the meeting.
- » Requesting a copy of the speakers' speech before approval is granted for its delivery.
- » Declaration of names of attendees in advance of the meeting.
- » Restriction on banners, placards, flags or other items around the venue.
- » Movement of venue at the advice of UCL Security.
- » Enactment of Union official chairing guidelines.
- » A Union approved and trained [Impartial Chair](#) employed to lead the event.

⁴ Home Office, (2013) Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations. Available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2> [Accessed September 2024]

⁵ UCL Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. Available from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/compliance/prevent-ucl/external-speakers>, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/sites/srs/files/ucl_code_of_practice_on_freedom_of_speech.pdf [Accessed September 2024]

⁶ Students' Union UCL External Speaker Process. Available from: <https://studentsunionucl.org/how-to/clubs-and-societies/organise-event-with-external-speaker> [Accessed September 2024]

- » An official and accurate audio recording of the event taken by Students' Union UCL to ensure an accurate and transparent reporting of the speaker event. The recording will be used for no other purpose.
- » A specific documented agreement between Students' Union UCL and any invited speaker(s) outlining the agreed topic, format and any specific conditions on the content of the event.

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; there would be a violation of health and safety requirements; or if the event would risk violating the UK legislation regarding hatred, discrimination or incitement. Students' Union UCL will continually assess the risk of any events after approval, and reserves the right to impose additional conditions on, postpone or cancel any event should there be concerns that cannot be addressed adequately. The Union may also require 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 Union or UCL 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 within which we operate when facilitating external speakers and the measures that may be required to support freedom of speech at our events. If you have questions regarding any of the information in this document, please contact us by emailing the Head of Intercultural Engagement, Talia Bijwe-Alexander (t.bijwe-alexander@ucl.ac.uk).