

# FREEDOM OF SPEECH & EVENTS

## FAQ



The University is **committed** to the principle, promotion, and protection of freedom of speech within the law. In applying this in practice, in accordance with our [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#), the University must **uphold the law** by balancing various legal duties, including securing freedom of speech and keeping people safe, whilst also ensuring the **proper functioning** of the University.

### Key definitions:

- **Freedom of speech** - the right to receive and impart ideas, opinions or information (including controversial or unpopular opinions) that is within the law, without interference.
- **Academic freedom** - in relation to **academic staff** at the University, freedom (within the law) to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas (including controversial or unpopular opinions), without placing themselves at risk of being adversely affected.
- **Events** - meetings, events, activities and protests (including demonstrations and marches).
- A **speaker** (who can be an internal staff member or student) is someone invited to speak in order to communicate their views, ideas or opinions on a topic.
- An **external speaker** is defined as someone who is not a member of the University community (i.e. not staff or students) and has been invited to speak. The University is required to report on external speakers to the Office for Students.

### Our core values:

- **Promote** and **protect** lawful freedom of speech.
- Promote a culture of **tolerance and respect**.
- Create an environment **free from discrimination, intimidation and harassment** and **challenge** views that promote violence or otherwise infringe human rights **without restricting lawful free speech**.
- Encourage **dialogue** through a **supportive** environment and infrastructure that promotes **expression**.
- Provide opportunities to **enhance relationships** by learning about **differences** and identifying **common ground**.

### In scope:

- ✓ The Code applies to all **staff** and registered **students** at the University; **speakers**, and **external visitors** invited or otherwise lawfully participating in **University activities and events**.

### Events out of scope:

Formal event requests are not needed for the following:

- ✗ individuals invited to **perform music, compere events or deliver training**; general **day to day business activity** of staff (e.g., staff development activity); meetings or events that form part of the **academic curriculum**; individuals or companies undertaking **marketing activity** with the agreement of the University or the Students' Union; purely **commercial** meetings; and **lawful picketing on days of strike action** by University staff that has been arranged in support of official industrial action by the recognised trade unions.
- ✗ **Leeds Beckett Students' Union**, including all associated societies and clubs, has its own Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

### Conduct:

The University sets out expectations of **conduct** for students in our [Student Code of Conduct](#) and for staff in our [HR Policies and Procedures](#). Expectations of conduct at events is set out in the [Events Code of Conduct](#). In exercising their right to freedom of speech, the University expects its staff, students and visitors to be tolerant of differing opinions and identities and engage with intellectual and ideological discussions in a constructive, questioning and peaceable way. All speakers have a right to be heard when exercising their right to free speech within the law.

The **Responsible Officer** (the event organiser) or a suitable staff nominee must be **in attendance at an event**. **Concerns over conduct or content** at an event should be raised immediately to the **Responsible Officer** or **Chair** of the meeting. The event may need to be halted if there is reason to believe that safety cannot be guaranteed, a breach of the law (including freedom of speech) may occur, or the event disrupts the continued operations of the University.

# EVENT APPROVAL

Approving events ensures that safety, ethical, and legal considerations are addressed, while protecting freedom of speech within the law. This process enables the University to meet its legal and regulatory obligations and safeguard all.

### In scope:

The [Approval of Events Procedure](#) applies to all events which will be held on:

- ✓ **University premises** (all premises over which the University exercises control, whether indoor or outdoor); or
- ✓ in the **name of the University** (this includes events affiliated with, organised by, funded by or branded in, the University's name). This applies whether taking place on or off campus, or virtually.

### Responsibilities:

Designated roles within the University (see *table 1* in the [Approval of Events Procedure](#)), including the **Responsible Officer** and **Approving Officer**, have responsibility for organising and approving events.

### Event Approval Process:

Arrangements for all events in scope of the formal approval process follow a common process (detailed fully in the [Approval of Events Procedure](#)). An event organiser (the **Responsible Officer**) should first perform due diligence checks on any speakers, then seek formal permission from the **Approving Officer**; this is usually the Dean or Director. All events (whether or not approved) must be recorded as follows:

#### ***Event proposal - the Responsible Officer (the event organiser)***

1. The Responsible Officer must **conduct due diligence in advance on all proposed speakers**, reviewing their background and public record to ensure the law is upheld and identify any potential concerns. At least 10 working days before an event, an [Events Form](#) must be completed by the **Responsible Officer** (the event organiser) which will populate the [Events Log](#). A request for approval will be automated to the relevant **First Level Approving Officer** for consideration. The [Events Form](#) questions will help colleagues to consider any sensitivities and identify potential risks or breaches of the law.

! The University may consider later submissions, but where a request is submitted less than 10 working days in advance, there may not be sufficient time for an informed decision to be made and the request may therefore be refused on procedural grounds.

#### ***Decision - First Level Approving Officer***

The starting presumption is that an event should be **approved**.

2. Where an event is (a) approved, the [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#) and [Events Code of Conduct](#) should be provided by the **Responsible Officer** to all **speakers** (both internal and external) in advance of the event. Speakers must confirm prior to the event that they will comply with the requirements of these documents.
3. Where it is proposed that an event may require (b) conditions/mitigations (*examples of conditions/mitigations* are detailed in the [Approval of Events Procedure](#)) or (c) is not approved, this should be referred to the **Registrar & Secretary** for consideration and final decision. An **appeal** against this decision (to apply conditions, or, refuse an event) can then ultimately be made to the Vice Chancellor.

! Any **conditions/mitigations** shall be **proportionate** and kept to a **minimum**, as considered necessary to mitigate any risks or ensure we meet legal obligations. Where conditions/mitigations are approved in order for an event to go ahead, (where applicable) speakers must agree to comply with these, and, any conditions/mitigations must be in place in advance, for the event to go ahead.

### Key contacts:

Advice, guidance or concerns can be referred, as follows:

- Speaker / event approval process - [Governance Services](#)
- Breaches of freedom of speech should be brought to the attention of the [Registrar & Secretary](#)
- Events support and organisation, form errors, or logical arrangements - [Events Team](#)