

External Speaker Policy

Document Summary

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1: Background

The City College is committed to creating an environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and where diversity is valued. This policy outlines the procedures relating to the use of external speakers and visitors in activities, regardless of who is organising them. This policy is primarily governed by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which places a strengthened legal duty on the College to take all reasonably practicable steps to secure freedom of speech within the law for all students, staff, and visiting speakers.

We will also continue to meet our duties under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, (Risk of Being Drawn into Terrorism) (Revised Guidance) Regulations 2023, which requires us to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" (the Prevent duty). Our approach is to actively facilitate freedom of speech and academic freedom while taking proportionate and legally justifiable steps to manage identified risks.

2: Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that the student and staff experience is enriched by input from external speakers and organisations. We will foster a culture of open debate and intellectual curiosity by actively enabling a wide range of speakers, while ensuring that any benefits and risks are considered and managed appropriately in advance of an event.

3: Scope

This policy is applicable to all circumstances in which an external speaker or visitor has been invited to speak to students and/or staff. The person may be an individual or a representative of an organisation.

This policy refers to any activity that would be categorised as promoting radicalisation or extremism. Radicalisation is defined as the process by which people come to support terrorism and extremism and, in some cases, to participate in terrorist groups. Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.

4: Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Actively promote and secure freedom of speech within the law for our community and invited speakers, in line with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.
- Balance this duty with our obligations to manage health and safety, prevent discrimination, and protect our community from harm.
- Recognise the value that external speakers may bring to the College and encourage the provision of enrichment to students and staff through exposure to high-quality visiting speakers and organisations.
- Provide clearly defined and effective procedures to ensure that all relevant laws are upheld.
- Collaborate with others to reach sound, evidence-based judgments about proposed external speakers, ensuring that The City College can meet its legal obligations.

- Provide clear instruction for organising an event with external contributions.

5: External Speakers and their Responsibilities

The term 'external speaker' or 'visitor' is used to describe any individual or organisation who is not a student or staff member at The City College and who has been invited to speak to students and/or staff. This includes the main contact from any external venue hire client who is paying to use College facilities.

An 'event' includes but is not limited to any event, presentation, visit, activity or initiative, organised by a student or staff member that is being held on the College premises/online platform. It also includes activities held on College premises but organised by external venue hire clients.

All visiting speakers and visitors must be made aware by the person or group arranging the event that they have a responsibility to abide by the law and the College's policies.

By accepting an invitation to speak, they agree to ensure that they:

- Must not advocate or incite hatred, violence or call for the breaking of the law.
- Are not permitted to encourage, glorify or promote any acts of terrorism including individuals, groups or organisations that support such acts.
- Must not spread hatred and intolerance in the community and thus aid in undermining social and community harmony.
- Must be mindful of the risk of causing offence to or seek to avoid insulting other faiths or groups, within a framework of positive debate and challenge.
- Are not permitted to raise or gather funds for any external organisation or cause without the express written permission of the College.

6: Guidance for Students and Staff of The City College

In accordance with our duties under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, the College will not prohibit an event based on the views or beliefs of a speaker, provided those views are lawful.

No event involving any external speakers may be publicised or considered confirmed until the speaker has been cleared through the procedure detailed in this policy. This includes advertisement through any social media platform.

The College reserves the right to impose conditions on, or, as a last resort, to cancel or prohibit an event with an external speaker if the policy is not followed or if there are insurmountable health, safety, and security risks.

To allow for adequate checks and risk mitigation, any request made for an event with an external speaker must be submitted no later than 14 days before the date of the event. Requests made with a shorter notice period may be considered on a case-by-case basis if the event is deemed low-risk.

The individual organising an external speaker should conduct research into the proposed speaker.

The External Speaker Check and Review Form must be used. Head of Department approval must be sought before a speaker/visitor is booked/confirmed. If in doubt as to the suitability of a speaker, the decision should be referred to the Managing Director or Director of Student Records.

Reasons for a potential referral for further review include but are not restricted to the following:

- Any person or group linked to the UK Government list of proscribed terror organisations.
- A speaker who is known to have previously expressed views that incite violence, hatred, or discrimination.
- A speaker whose presence on campus could reasonably be expected to cause fear or alarm due to specific, evidenced threats of public disorder or violence.
- A speaker who has a significant profile and attracts a following that could create verifiable crowd control and health and safety issues.

In the event of a referral, the College will, in line with its duty to secure free speech, seek to implement reasonably practicable steps to facilitate the event. These may include but are not limited to:

- Increasing security or other on-site support.
- Changing the venue to a more suitable location.
- Requiring the event to be chaired by a neutral party.
- The inclusion of additional speakers to provide an opposing or balancing view.
- Requiring the event to be ticketed or for attendees to show valid ID.
- If, after all reasonably practicable steps have been explored, it is not possible to secure the event within the law, one of the following decisions will be made:
 - To not permit the external speaker to attend the event.
 - To not permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead.

If consent is given for the visiting speaker or visitor, it will be confirmed in writing by the Managing Director or Director of Student Records.

7: Process

The following identifies the process that must be followed when arranging a visiting speaker or visitor:

- Identify the speaker/visitor who will be speaking to students or staff.
- Complete the External Speaker Check and Review Form.
- Conduct relevant checks and seek further information where required.
- All forms to be sent to the Head of Department for review.
- All forms with Green outcomes can be approved by the Head of Department and the booking/invitation may proceed.
- All forms with any Amber or Red outcomes must be sent to the Managing Director or Director of Student Records for further review.

- The Managing Director or Director of Student Records will provide written feedback to the Head of Department regarding approval.
- Outcome a) Speaker/Visitor approved, possibly with additional safeguards, and the booking/invitation may proceed.
- Outcome b) Speaker/Visitor not approved, with a written explanation of the decision based on the legal framework, and feedback provided to the Head of Department.

8: Complaints Scheme

Students, staff, and visiting speakers who believe that their right to freedom of speech has been breached by a decision made under this policy can submit a formal complaint directly to the College under the Complaints Procedure. In addition, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and the Office for Students (OfS) have a complaints scheme for matters relating to freedom of speech. Although any such complaint should initially be raised internally with the institution, if the complainant is unhappy about the outcome, they can complain externally once they have undergone the internal process.

9: Useful Links

- Office for Students (OfS) Guidance: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/student-rights/free-speech-a-guide-for-students/>
- Legislation.gov.uk - Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/16/contents>
- GOV.UK - Proscribed Terrorist Organisations: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn00815/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-if-youre-worried-about-someone-being-radicalised>
- Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>