

## **Guest Speaker Policy & Procedure**

**Document Date:** October 2020

### **1. Overview**

- 1.1. This document sets out Royal Holloway Students' Union (RHSU) commitment to freedom of speech, whilst balancing a responsibility to ensure student safety and welfare.
- 1.2. It outlines the ways in which RHSU can support the events that groups wish to put on which involve an external guest speaker, in both a physical and virtual environment, and guides you through the necessary administration processes.
- 1.3. It applies to any student group affiliated to the Students' Union and/or Collective.
- 1.4. Free speech is an important feature of both democracy and higher education. The exchange of ideas helps to educate, inform and clarify people's opinions. However, free speech is not the same as unlimited speech.
- 1.5. In a referendum held in October 2019, a majority of students (54.42% vs 45.58%) voted to adopt a policy on 'No Platforming For Hate Speech', the principles of which are covered in this Policy & Procedure.

### **2. Principles**

- 2.1. RHSU recognises student support of a wide range of views and opinions on social, economic, political and religious issues however unorthodox, unpopular, uncomfortable, controversial or provocative. However, there are a number principles which underpin this policy:
  - 2.1.1. Any speech, action or publication must be lawful. For instance, a speaker who incites an audience to violence, breach of the peace or discriminatory hatred goes beyond the bounds of lawful speech.
  - 2.1.2. The health, safety and wellbeing of our members is our first priority at all times and we will take any necessary steps to safeguard this.
  - 2.1.3. Mutual respect is fundamental and no members should interfere in or seek to hamper or restrict the legitimate activities or affairs of other individuals or groups.
  - 2.1.4. The Union believes that the free exchange of ideas and facilitation of a healthy, civil, and safe debate amongst students is essential for the operation of the Students' Union.
  - 2.1.5. Collectively, as members, students have the right to determine the rules that govern the exchange of ideas in their Union, and to impose restrictions that safeguard the wellbeing of members.

2.1.6. Hate speech is harmful and creates a culture that perpetuates further harm to both the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals who are the subject of it.

2.1.7. Both guest speakers and members should be free from intimidation, harassment and fear.

### **3. Procedure**

3.1. Any student group or collective who organises external guest speakers in either a physical or virtual environment are asked to observe the following steps:

3.1.1. All speakers must come at the invitation of a committee member of an official student group or collective. They may not be invited by a student or students individually.

3.1.2. One person should be appointed as the principal organiser in order to simplify communication between the organisers and RHSU and to avoid possible confusion.

3.1.3. RHSU should be the first party to be informed of the guest speaker (over and above the University). The principal organiser should get in touch with RHSU via the Freshdesk Portal at least four weeks' in advance of the event, and have approval granted before the event is advertised in any form. Please let us know:

- the day, time and place of the meeting or method if the event is virtual (please make sure you give full consideration to the venue, ensuring it is fit for purpose for the event)
- the subject of the address
- the name of the speaker
- whether the meeting is to be for student group members only, open to all students, and/or open to the general public
- confirmation that you do not believe the speaker to have a sustained history of hate speech.

After you have made initial contact with us we will also need you to complete an Event Proposal and Risk Assessment.

3.1.4 Someone from the team will get back to you as soon as possible to confirm the proposal or, if required, to arrange a meeting to discuss your proposal in more detail.

3.1.5 Depending on the guest speaker and the event, it may be necessary for us to apply certain conditions to the event to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our members as well as that of the guest speaker. For example, we may ask that tickets are issued when a meeting is open to the public; or that an adequate number of security stewards must be provided by the organisers, or that members of the University's security staff must be present to help in keeping order. Where this is the case, the cost of this additional resource must be borne by the student group. Where RHSU deems a guest speaker to be high profile, an RHSU staff member will flag this to relevant University staff.

3.1.6 A background check will be carried out by RHSU staff members on the proposed speaker to ensure that the speaker does not have sustained history of hate speech. If the individual is agreed by the Officer Group to have a sustained history of hate speech under the definition outlined in the "No Platforming for Hate Speech" Policy then they will be prevented from entering Students' Union premises, speaking at Students' Union events or activities in any capacity, including affiliated groups to the Students' Union. This will be communicated back to you by the Sabbatical Officer

3.1.7 Further to this if the Union is not satisfied that adequate arrangements to ensure health, safety and wellbeing can be made, with the result that the guest speaker would not be able to enter

or leave University premises safely and/or to deliver their speech, we reserve the right to refuse permission for the event or later withdraw permission already given.

#### **4. Responsibilities**

4.1. During the event the Chair, or principal organiser, has a duty to keep order and, so far as is possible, to ensure that both the speaker and the audience act in accordance with the law. The Chair should issue warnings if unlawful conduct such as violence is threatened or takes place and, where such conduct continues, should require the offenders to withdraw or to be removed by the stewards.

4.2. Where the Chair has made all reasonable efforts to keep order but the meeting continues out of control, any RHSU or University representative present will take over responsibility. In the absence of RHSU or University representative, the Chair must send one or more of the stewards to seek help from the University's security staff.

4.3. College premises used for meetings must be left clean and tidy. The organisers may be charged for any additional cleaning and for any repairs, which are necessary.

#### **5. Breach of policy**

5.1. Any breach of this policy and procedure may result in the Union's statutory complaints or disciplinary procedures (Byelaw K and Byelaw L) being invoked.

5.2. Where any conduct constitutes a breach of the University's regulations, the University may decide to take appropriate action.