University of Sunderland Students’ Union have a commitment to Freedom of Speech, to act in the best interests of our members and in a socially responsible manner.

We aim to manage external speakers and mitigate the risks which may be associated with them appropriately as required by the Charity Commission.

We aim to provide a clear process to support freedom of speech and freedom of harm to co-exist. Where there is potential for these two rights to come into conflict in relation to controversial speakers we are committed to collaboration that will allow the Union to reach sound, evidenced judgements about the organisation or person in question and that allows the Union to meet its various legal obligations.

Who is an external speaker?

An external speaker is someone who is not a student, staff, or trustee at the Students’ Union or University who is invited to talk to students and or attend student-led events. This includes all Students’ Union events and student-led activities that take place both on and off campus. No event involving external speakers may be publicised until the speaker has been agreed through an appropriate risk assessment. We reserve the right to cancel or prohibit any event with an external speaker if the relevant health, safety and security criteria cannot be met.

It will be for the Trustee Board to determine processes that reasonably identify racist and fascist individuals and groups and where this judgement is made the event will not be approved.

All speakers will be made aware of their responsibility to abide by law, the university and the union’s various policies, including that:

- They must not incite hatred, violence, or call for the breaking of the law.
- They are not permitted to encourage, glorify or promote any acts of terrorism including individuals, groups or organisations that support such acts.
- They must not spread hatred and intolerance in the community and this aid in disrupting social and community harmony.
- Within a framework of positive debate and challenge seek to avoid insulting other faiths or groups.
- They are not permitted to raise or gather funds for any external organisation or cause without express permission of the trustees or through prior arrangement with the Finance Manager and Student Activities Development, Senior Officer.
The decision making process

SU Communities groups will provide relevant information to the Student Activities Development, Senior Officer using the External Speaker Notification Form.

Where it is not possible to give immediate approval the speaker request is referred to the Students’ Union Senior Leadership Team, the Executive and trustees.

At this stage the speaker will be investigated and further information will be collected from concerned student groups, university officials and external bodies such as NUS.

The risk of the event will be assessed on the following basis:

- The potential for any decisions to limit freedom of speech as per the university’s code of practice in pursuance of the 1986 Education Act.
- The potential for the event going ahead to cause the union to be in breach of its equal opportunities policy.
- The potential for the event going ahead to cause the union to fail in its wider legal duties.
- The potential for the event going ahead to cause reputational risk to the Union.
- The potential for the speaker’s presence to cause fear or alarm to members of the student body.
- The potential for the speaker’s presence to give rise to breach of the peace.

One of the following recommendations will be made:

- On the basis of the risks presented to not permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead.
- On the basis of the risks presented to fully permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead unrestricted.
- On the basis of the risks presented to permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead on the basis of regulatory steps designed to reduce the risk. Regulatory steps to reduce the risk may include:
  
  - Requiring that the event be filmed by an independent body
  - Requiring that the event be observed by union, university or third party officials
  - Requiring that the event be stewarded or subject to security on the door
  - Requiring that an event promoting a particular view includes an opportunity to debate or challenge that view
  - Requiring that an event closed to SU Communities group members only to be opened to all members of the union
  - Requiring that a copy of any speech to be delivered by the speaker be submitted to the union

When considering any regulatory steps designed to reduce risk, their potential to in and of themselves cause risk (for example, the sense of oppression felt by the imposition of security on the door) should also be taken into account.

info: sunderlandsu.co.uk/sucommunities
The Prevent Agenda

What is the ‘Prevent’ duty?

Universities have a duty (Prevent) to safeguard students or staff members from becoming radicalised and drawn into extremism or terrorism. This can apply to all forms of radicalisation and extremism including political and religious activities across a wide spectrum. This followed the passing in law by government of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which outlined a number of measures aimed at tackling extremism and radicalisation of people in the UK.

More information can be found here:

http://services.sunderland.ac.uk/hr/safety/prevent/


Experimenting with political ideas and exploring faiths will be part of the University experience for many students or staff members and are not necessarily negative. Prevent is a contentious issue for many students and they are not alone in questioning how it is being implemented in some areas. NUS are challenging the Prevent agenda and a link to information about their campaign ‘Preventing Prevent’ is here:

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/preventing-prevent-handbooks

Our responsibilities in relation to PREVENT

Within Charity law the Students’ Union must avoid involvement in promoting, supporting or giving platform to inappropriate radical or extremist views (extremism defined by reference to the Prevent duty). Also we should ensure that literature and publicity produced by the Students’ Union (including all student groups) does not contain or support terrorist material or material likely to encourage terrorism. As Universities and Students’ Unions are closely linked, the Prevent guidance states there is an expectation on Students’ Unions cooperate with policies introduced by the University.

NUS have issued guidance to Students’ Unions about their Prevent duty which can be found here:

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/nus-guidance-for-students-unions-prevent-duty
SU Communities Process to Request Approval for an External Speaker

Step 1.

The SU Communities Group fully completes the required sections of the “External Speaker Notification Form”. This form should be sent to the SU Communities email address 21 days before the event.

Step 2.

The Student Activities Development Senior Officer will review the form, using the decision making process and inform the group of their recommendations and any related requirements and/or conditions of approval. This information should be included in the Event Schedule and Risk Assessment for the event in the usual way. The Students’ Union reserve the right to cancel or prohibit any event with an external speaker if the requirements and/or conditions of approval cannot be met or are not met to a satisfactory level.

Step 3.

To be completed after the external speaker event:
The SU Communities group they should complete an External Speaker Evaluation outlining any issues relating to the external speaker before, during or after the event and return this to the Student Activities Development Senior Officer.

In all cases correspondence and confirmations will be in email format.

Complaints

If any SU Communities group disagree with the decision that has been made they shall have the right to submit a complaint using the Students’ Union Complaints Procedure which is set out on www.sunderlandsu.co.uk