

Freedom of Speech Code of Practice



Purpose

This code sets out how Exeter Students' Guild will take reasonable and practicable steps to secure freedom of speech within the law for its members, students at the University of Exeter and external speakers.

Freedom of Expression

The Students' Guild believes passionately that the right to express views and ideas freely, without fear of interference or persecution, is an essential part of democracy¹. Everyone has the right to free speech within the law and, alongside our members, we work towards widening debate and challenge. We know that Freedom of Expression is an important aspect of students' higher education experience, allowing them to think critically, challenge and engage with alternative perspectives.

At the Students' Guild, we want to foster an environment where our members can participate fully, feel able to question and challenge, express new ideas, discuss controversial and or unpopular opinions within the law, and all without fear of intolerance or discrimination. We are committed to the principle that both debate and deliberation should not be suppressed, and we encourage and support our members to engage, within the law, in both a constructive and responsible manner to contest any ideas they oppose openly and vigorously.

Respectful debate and conversation allow us to challenge discrimination, eliminate intolerance and harmful perspectives, and build strong and positive communities. Freedom of expression includes the right to "offend, shock or disturb", however, we are committed to ensure that this is not misused for the purpose of unchallenged hatred or bigotry.¹

In exercising the right to freedom of expression, we expect our members to be tolerant of the differing opinions of others and to be tolerant of the diverse identities of others, in line with the core values of freedom from discrimination¹ and the Students' Guild core value of 'radical inclusivity'. Notably, freedom of expression also includes the right to peaceful protest; however, it should not be used to shut down debate or infringe on the rights of others.

As an independent member-led organisation, we let our students set the tone for the events and activities they want to organise and the speakers they want to invite. We collaborate with the University to work towards increasing the number and diversity of debates, discussion and conversations taking place, by creating networks, resources, and support for student leaders to enable them to invite diverse, knowledgeable, and experienced speakers to host at their events.

Our framework, developed by students for students, aims to empower members to run stimulating, challenging and diverse opportunities for debate, discussion, and dialogue, promoting and protecting the right to freedom of expression. It aims to manage and support events and activities in a way to ensure that they do not interfere with or deprive other people of their rights and to mitigate the risks posed by an event or activity to allow for a balanced and respectful event, whilst considering the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation as prohibited by Equality Act 2010.

[\[1\] Free Speech Report](#)

Scope

This Code applies to the following students and external speakers:

- All student members of Exeter Students' Guild and all students currently registered at the University of Exeter.
- External speakers who have received an invitation from a registered student group, elected representative or recognised campaign group.

This Code applies to the following activities:

- Meetings, events or gatherings of people to be held on University of Exeter's premises (which includes all Guild premises) by Guild members from registered student groups, elected representatives or recognised campaign groups.
- Meetings held online via digital platforms by Guild members from registered student groups, elected representatives or recognised campaign groups.

This Code does not apply to events organised by groups who are not registered with Exeter Students' Guild. Nor does it apply to events being organised by individual students. University of Exeter policies and procedures should be followed in these circumstances.

Definitions

Freedom of Speech

The freedom to impart ideas, opinions or information by means of speech, writing or images.

Members

For the purpose of this code, 'members' refers to student members of the Guild as per the Guild's Articles of Association.

External speakers

Any individual or organisation who are not a current University of Exeter member of staff or current student, or not a member of Guild staff, invited to provide a viewpoint or speak, on campus or virtually.

Principles

The Guild will approach all events and activities on the basis of enabling them to proceed in a safe manner, and that individuals and groups will not be denied the use of premises or facilities on the basis of their beliefs, views, or objectives.

The Guild will not deny the registration (affiliation) of any student society or group on the grounds of its policy or objectives, or the ideas or opinions of any of its members. The registration process for new societies is outlined on the Guild website here: <https://my.exeterguild.com/registrations>

An exception to this are proscribed groups or organisations that are banned under UK law. A list of proscribed groups or organisations is maintained by the Home Office:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>. A further exception may be where a group's objectives or beliefs are unlawful or promote unlawful activities.

The Guild has other legal responsibilities, such as those relating to preventing discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, as well as consideration for the health, safety and welfare of employees, students, external speakers and other visitors. Decisions made in respect of events and use of premises will be made in this context.

While the Guild is committed to freedom of expression, it reserves the right to refuse an organisation or external speaker where an assessment has been made that this freedom may be restricted in order to prevent violence or unlawful discrimination. It also has the right to refuse a request where due process has not been followed. In such circumstances individuals or groups will have the right to submit an appeal or complaint (see below).

Management of Events and Activities

The Guild will approach all events on the basis of enabling them to proceed in a safe manner, and that individuals and groups will not be denied the use of premises or facilities on the basis of their beliefs, views, policy or objectives.

When considering external speaker requests, we must consider the potential risks associated with the event and/or speaker(s), so that we can mitigate these to ensure the event can run safely. Approval must be sought for all external speakers from the Students' Guild.

The procedures for the management of external speaker events is outlined within the Guild's External Speaker Framework, which should be read in conjunction with this Code of Practice.

Apart from exceptional circumstances, the use of premise or facilities by an individual or group will not require the individual or group to bear some or all the costs of security relating to the use of the premises.

The cost that the Guild will cover to ensure the security of an event shall be, at the most, the equivalent cost of four security guards for a shift of four hours. Any costs required beyond this for security purposes may be considered exceptional and as such be passed onto the speaker or event organisers.

During an 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.

Attendees of an event must ensure they conduct themselves lawfully and are respectful of alternative opinion.

The chair/organiser 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 be removed by security if present.

Complaints

Where organisers consider that permission to host an event or external speaker was withheld in contravention of Freedom of Speech requirements, they can follow the University's appeal process outlined [here](#).

If a member of the Students' Guild has a complaint regarding an event they will need to follow the steps outlined in the Students' Guild Complaints Procedure.

Any breach of this Code or associated procedures may result in the Guild's Complaints Procedure or Disciplinary Procedure being invoked.

Monitoring and Review

There will be an annual review of the Guild's External Speaker Framework with consultation from key stakeholders, including the University, Student's Guild and student leaders to ensure it is fit for purpose and effective.

The Exeter Students' Guild Board of Trustees will receive an annual report, outlining how many events with external speakers have been requested and approved or denied.

Related Documents

- Exeter Students' Guild External Speaker Framework
- Exeter Students' Guild Complaints Procedure
- Exeter Students' Guild Disciplinary Procedure
- [Joint Freedom of Speech Statement](#)
- [University of Exeter Freedom of Speech Policy](#)

This Code of Practice was first implemented in August 2024.