

## **Managing Events – Controversial speakers**

A student has requested to host an event on campus featuring an external speaker giving a talk entitled “Britain: is our culture and history going down the drain?”

The speaker is the leader of a far right political organisation of which several high ranking members have previously been convicted of incitement to racial and religious hatred. This will be the first time that his speaker has been given a platform at a UK university.

### **Factors to consider**

- Universities should be aware of their responsibilities to not subject staff, students or others to discrimination, victimisation or harassment
- Academic freedom and freedom of speech are cornerstones of higher education institutions, and they should encourage debate and intellectual challenge. Institutions also have a legal (but qualified) duty to provide free speech on their campus
- Is there the potential for disruption or protest at the event?
- What marketing material has been produced to accompany the event?
- Has the event been organised by an official student society?
- Have the correct booking procedures been followed, as set out by university policy?
- What measures does the university have in place to help mitigate risks and manage events?
- Is there the possibility of public order offences taking place?
- Could extra measures be adopted in this case, such as providing extra security or filming the event?
- The university has a responsibility under the public sector equality duty (PSED) of the Equality Act (2010) to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and further to foster good relations
- Will there be an alternative viewpoint given by another speaker, or challenge / questions raised by the chair of the event?
- Has the speaker given any indication of what they might say in their speech?
- Has the speaker been provided with instructions of what he can or cannot cover? He could be given copies of the relevant policy or code of behaviour of the institution

### **University Reflections**

***“It’s important to get the formula right in these debates, our formula is not to set up a fight but different perspectives are particularly appropriate in the University. We look at bringing in people that are not solely scholars, those from the business sector and the private sector. We ideally want three minds that are capable of being critical in a constructive way.”*** Director of academic programme and lecturer

***“The University has introduced revised arrangements for the booking of space by external organisations. These arrangements are supported by a lease agreement that has been drafted by the University’s Legal Department. In addition, the University has established a single point of contact, through the Registrar’s Office, for confirming what meetings, events, etc. can be publicised and/or endorsed through the official institutional channels of communication”.*** University Vice Chancellor

***“To reduce risk in this area [events on campus], the University has developed a robust and effective culture of communication and liaison between the Vice Chancellor’s***

***Office, the University Security Office, University Departments, the police and relevant community representatives. Joint briefings and de-briefs are carried out, especially for larger, major events". Respondent – Universities UK members survey, 2010***