

External speakers at commercial events – multi-agency working

Overview of situation that arose

- University head of security approached by local FE/HE regional Prevent coordinator about a full-day event due to take place at the university the following week. Concerns raised about the organisation arranging the event.

- University investigated the event details and discovered the following:
 - The event had been booked through official channels and was being attended by university staff to monitor proceedings
 - The event had been booked through the commercial arm of the institution and as a result had not been subjected to the same scrutiny as events organised by student societies and staff
 - Although the event had gone via the formal approval process, the institution was not fully aware of the organisation's background and some of the individuals associated with it
 - No speaker details had been received and consequently no concerns raised
 - Further investigation revealed that the planned speaker was an individual who had been proposed for two events previously. Both events had not taken place – on one occasion because insufficient notice was given and on the other the speaker did not agree to the terms and conditions the university set out for the event to go ahead
 - The event had been advertised by the organisers and a number of free tickets already allocated
 - As the arrangement had been made as a commercial booking the terms and conditions that had been set out and agreed upon were generic ones rather than specific to the event and therefore did not address the potential concerns that had now been recognised

- The local police were subsequently consulted and expressed concerns about the potential for public order issues. The police encouraged the university to consider cancelling the event on this basis. They informed the institution that the event going ahead would necessitate a police presence to monitor proceedings and ensure public safety.

- The university was keen to honour its commitment to the commercial booking and reluctant to cancel the event for reputational reasons as well as fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to ensuring freedom of speech on campus. However, it recognised that further consultation and action was needed to ensure this could

be done in keeping with the law.

Action taken

- In view of this the Prevent regional coordinator arranged a meeting with the university's assistant registrar and head of security and the local Police Prevent Engagement Officer
- During the meeting the issues were discussed and the Prevent coordinator suggested a course of action which included contacting the organiser of the event and seeking details of the speakers, the content of the day's events, and written assurances that as a registered charity, the organisers were aware of their equality and diversity and health and safety obligations, and in particular that there would be no enforced gender segregation.
- The suggestion also included obtaining agreement that the event could and would be monitored by university representatives throughout the proceedings. This advice was very well received and, after liaison with the Vice Chancellor, the university decided to act upon it and request the assurances outlined in order to make an informed decision on whether to let the event go ahead, and if it did indeed go ahead, to ensure the effective management of the proceedings on the day.
- The organisers provided the written assurances requested and the event went ahead as planned without incident.
- The event was attended by approximately 100 people, and the university's conference coordinator was in attendance to ensure that nothing untoward took place or was discussed. The university indicated that the content of the event was an academic discussion on Islam and in their view nothing improper or of concern was discussed.
- Some literature from the event was examined and was found to contain nothing of an inflammatory or concerning nature.
- However, the university security staff did comment that "the organisers were acutely aware that they were being monitored by security staff, so their choice of language may have been modified".
- As a result of the successful multi-agency approach taken to managing the event the university has asked the Prevent coordinator to work with them to ensure that their policies and procedures in relation to commercial bookings are in line with their student society bookings.
- The Prevent coordinator has also been asked to provide some staff training sessions to raise awareness of the issues involved in hosting potentially controversial speakers the importance of understanding and managing the risks associated with such events.

- The university is also going to provide details of future potentially controversial events in as timely manner as possible to both the Prevent regional coordinator and the local police.

University reflections

The university's head of security commented that the notification of the event and approach taken by the Prevent coordinator had meant that they had been able to "get things in place to find out more about the event and ensure there were appropriate clauses in the contract with regard to segregation issues, appropriate content and speaker behaviour early in the week instead of last minute on Friday".

The university's head of security also confirmed that as a result of the way that he had been able to put things in place in a timely manner around the security of the event, his staff were able to adopt a low key approach that helped ensure a good relationship between the security team and the organisers.