



University of Wolverhampton – External Speakers Staff Guidance

External Speaker Request: Staff Guidance

Introduction

The University of Wolverhampton has a legal duty under the *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023* to both **secure and actively promote lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom**. This applies to all staff, students, visiting speakers, and external partners.

The University's **External Speaker Process** provides a consistent framework for managing speaker requests and events — ensuring that lawful speech is supported, risks are identified early, and proportionate safeguards are in place.

If you have questions or need reassurance, please contact:

 freedomofspeech@wlv.ac.uk

Stage One – Self-Assessment Guide

When completing [Stage One: Self-Assessment](#), you'll be asked three key questions. Use the guidance below to answer accurately and refer to the **Freedom of Speech** [webpage for key definitions and examples](#).

Question 1: Is the intended speech within the law?

- **Yes:**
 - The speaker/event does **not** involve unlawful speech.
 - Remember: lawful includes views that may be controversial or offensive.
 - Unlawful includes harassment, threats, incitement to violence or hatred, defamation, or support for proscribed groups.
- **No:**
 - The form will **automatically escalate** to the University Secretary (or a delegated colleague).
 - You'll receive an automated notification, and no further action is required from you at this stage.

Question 2: Are there any concerns that may breach the University's Freedom of Speech Code of Practice?




- **Possible indicators:**
 - Speaker unwilling to engage in respectful debate.
 - Event structure limits opportunity for challenge or balance.
 - Lawful but extremist speech that could silence or intimidate others.
- **If Yes:**
 - You'll be guided to a **Stage Two Local Assessment** with your Faculty Registrar or Professional Services Director.
- **If No:**
 - Continue to the next question.

Question 3: Could the event attract significant media interest or large gatherings (e.g. protests)?

Consider:

- Is the topic likely to draw media coverage or counter-protest?
- Could crowd control, safety, or reputational issues arise?
- **If Yes:**
 - You'll be guided to **Stage Two** for proportionate planning.
- **If No:**
 - The form will close, and your event will be automatically approved.

What Happens Next


Responses	Outcome	Next Step
 No to Q1	Auto-escalation	Review by University Secretary or delegated colleague
 Yes to Q1, No to Q2 & Q3	Approved automatically	Confirmation with reference number
 Yes to Q1 and Yes to Q2 or Q3	Stage Two triggered	Faculty Registrar/Service Director assessment

Oversight: All submissions are stored securely under the University Secretary's governance to ensure transparency and audit readiness for OfS or external review.

Stage Two – Local Assessment Guide

A [Stage Two Local Assessment](#) must be completed by a Faculty Registrar or Director of Service, working in partnership with the event organiser.

It is triggered when responses indicate potential sensitivities or logistical issues:

-  **Yes to Q1 and Yes to Q2 or Q3 → Stage Two required**

Core Principle

“How can we ensure this event goes ahead safely?”
— not “How can we find reasons to stop it?”

Stage Two focuses on acknowledging risks and identifying **proportionate mitigations**.

Part 1 – Speaker, Audience & Topic Triage

Use the prompts provided to determine your outcome:

Risk Rating	Description	Outcome
Low Risk	Uncontroversial topic and speaker.	✔ Proceed to Event Risk Assessment.
Acceptable Risk	Controversial topic, no controversial speakers, audience restricted to UoW community.	✔ Proceed to Event Risk Assessment.
Moderate Risk	Controversial topic, no controversial speakers, event open to public.	⚠ Escalate to Stage Three.
High Risk	Controversial topic and controversial speakers.	⚠ Escalate to Stage Three.

If the risk is **Moderate or High**, the form automatically escalates to the University Secretary, and organisers are advised **not to liaise further with speakers** until review.

Part 2 – Event Risk Assessment

If Part 1 identifies **Low or Acceptable Risk**:

1. Complete the **Event Risk Assessment Template**.
 - Common risks and controls are pre-filled.
 - Add any event-specific risks.
2. Indicate in the form whether residual risks remain *high* or *extreme*.
 - **No residual high risks:** Event approved and confirmation issued.
 - **Residual high risks:** Auto-escalation to Stage Three University Assessment.

Stage Two Summary

Condition	Outcome
Low or Acceptable Risk + Residual Risk Controlled	✔ Approval issued
Moderate/High Risk OR Unresolved High Risks	⚠ Escalate to Stage Three
All records	Securely stored under University Secretary oversight

Stage Three – University-Level Assessment

Only the **University Secretary (or delegated colleague)** can authorise a final refusal. Most Stage Three cases will result in approval, subject to **reasonable conditions**, such as:

- Venue or timing adjustments,
- Requirement for a chair/moderator,
- Online delivery instead of in-person,
- Security or audience restrictions.

Conditions that are **disproportionate or obstructive** will not be used, as this may contravene the duty to secure free speech.

External Speaker Request – Quick Reference Summary

Purpose

To ensure all events and speakers at the University of Wolverhampton uphold **lawful freedom of speech** while protecting safety, wellbeing, and compliance with the *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023*.

The Three-Stage Process

Stage 1 – Self-Assessment (Event Organiser)




“Is the intended speech within the law?”

1 Complete online **Stage 1 Self-Assessment Form**.

2 Answer three key questions:

- Is the speech lawful?
- Are there any concerns under the Freedom of Speech Code?
- Could there be media attention, protest, or crowd issues?

Outcomes

Response	Result	Next Step
 No to Q1	Auto-escalate	Review by University Secretary or delegate
 Yes to Q1, No to Q2 & Q3 Approved		Proceed with planning the event and speaker
 Yes to Q1 + Yes to Q2/Q3 Stage 2 required		Faculty Registrar/Director leads

 Questions or reassurance: freedomofspeech@wlv.ac.uk

Stage 2 – Local Assessment (Registrar/Director + Organiser)

“How can we enable this event safely?”

Part 1 – Speaker, Audience & Topic Triage



Risk	Description	Action
Low	Non-controversial topic/speaker	Proceed to Event Risk Assessment
Acceptable	Controversial topic, no controversial speaker	Proceed to Event Risk Assessment
Moderate	Controversial topic, open to public	Escalate → Stage 3
High	Controversial topic + speaker	Escalate → Stage 3

Part 2 – Event Risk Assessment






- Use template to identify hazards and controls.
- If residual risks remain *high/extreme* → Stage 3.
- If risks are controlled → Approve and issue confirmation.

Stage 3 – University-Level Assessment

Led by the **University Secretary (or delegated colleague)**.

- Applies only to complex or high-risk cases.
- Decision outcomes:
 -  Approved (with or without conditions)
 -  Refused – only by University Secretary, with written reasons and appeal information.

Key Principles

-  Freedom of speech is the default – the duty is to **enable lawful speech**, not restrict it.
-  “Offensive” ≠ “Unlawful.”
-  Escalation is built in – no individual carries full risk alone.
-  All records are stored securely under University Secretary oversight.
-  Seek early advice: freedomofspeech@wlv.ac.uk

Summary and Key Messages

- Do **not** confuse *offensive* with *unlawful*.
- The process aims to **enable lawful speech**, not to restrict it.
- Escalation is built in **you are never expected to make decisions alone**.
- Keep all documentation — it protects both you and the University.
- Deferred decisions are **not refusals**; they ensure proportionate review.

Key Links and Contacts:

Email: freedomofspeech@wlv.ac.uk

Freedom of Speech Webpage: <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/university-life/freedom-of-speech/>

Stage One Self-Assessment Form: [Stage One: Self-Assessment](#)

Stage Two Local Assessment Form: (only needs to be completed if escalated via stage one) [Stage Two Local Assessment](#)