



Students' Union Report: October 2025

Introduction

It is a requirement of the Education Act (1994) Part II, that the Governing Body of the University of Sheffield ensures Sheffield SU's compliance with certain conditions provided by The Act, including ensuring that the SU is operated in a fair and democratic manner and is accountable for its finances. The primary mechanism for this undertaking is the development and monitoring of a Code of Practice, which was reviewed as recently as Summer 2023 and is provided within the University Calendar.

In conversation with the University Secretary, we have agreed to provide a regular report to University Council to update on matters of compliance relative to the Code of Practice, as well as to give Council the opportunity to hear of our broader work, and indeed the wider student experience here at the University of Sheffield.

Student Voice & Advocacy

This iteration of our report to Council has a particular focus on the 'Influence' strand of the SU's new strategy. University colleagues will recall that [the SU's new strategy](#) features 'Student Influence' as one of our main strategic themes (the other being 'Belonging'). As champions of student-led change we have committed that *"We will curate, promote and facilitate student representation, built on foundations of student community and agency, so our members have an impactful influence over their student experience."*

International Students and Policy Engagement

Kia, our International and Welfare Officer, has been a visible and active contributor to the Russell Group Students' Unions (RGSU) network and has represented Sheffield Students' Union at key national forums. Over the summer, Kia contributed to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) chaired by Abtisam Mohammed MP, strengthening our advocacy on issues affecting international students. Kia also met with Stephen Gethins MP to discuss the RGSU International Student Report and explore ways to support international students, particularly in the context of the Government's Immigration White Paper.





Key Findings from the Report

- International students generate an annual £41.9 billion contribution to the UK economy
- Every £1 million of university revenue from international students creates £2.3–£2.5 million in additional regional output, supporting jobs and growth in local communities
- In more than 100 parliamentary constituencies, international education now ranks among the top three export industries
- Applications for study visas fell by 17% in 2024, contributing to more than 5,000 university staff redundancies

This report provides robust evidence of the significant contribution international students make to the UK economy and society. It also highlights the risks created by short-term policy changes and underlines the urgent need for a stable and welcoming environment for international students.

Sheffield Students' Assembly

Sheffield Students' Assembly is a partnership of the city's Students' Unions, designed to give students across Sheffield an arena to share their stories, discuss issues affecting student life, and come together to make positive change. Working collaboratively as the collective voice of Sheffield students, the Assembly seeks to improve the student experience across a wide range of areas, including academic interests, housing, wellbeing, personal safety, civic engagement, and sense of belonging.

The Assembly's role includes:

- **Creating Conversations:** Providing Sheffield students with a dedicated space to discuss the issues that matter to them in a cross-city, collaborative forum
- **Sharing Insight:** Giving Students' Unions a clear pathway to raise key student issues and seek commitments from relevant elected representatives through political engagement, collaboration, and consultation
- **Harnessing Influence:** Bringing together the collective membership and influence of Sheffield's Students' Unions to advocate and lobby decision-makers on behalf of students
- **Delivering Accountability:** Holding elected political representatives to account for commitments that affect the student population

Sheffield is a diverse and vibrant city, attracting students from across the UK and around the world. Students play a vital role in the city's cultural, economic, and social life. We want our students to feel fully at home in Sheffield, and we want the city to embrace and celebrate its student community. We believe the best way to achieve this is through effective collaboration, visibility, and authentic civic engagement. The launch event will be taking place on 7 November in Sheffield Town Hall.

Sheffield Students' Union Submission to the House of Commons Education Select Committee

Sheffield Students' Union recently submitted evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee, which has been published as part of the Higher Education and Funding: Threat of Insolvency and International Students inquiry. In response to this and the wider challenges facing

the sector, Sheffield SU has launched a comprehensive organisational review to ensure our services are strategy-led and financially sustainable.



This review focuses on:

- Resizing services to reflect available resources and long-term demand
- Shifting to a community organising model that empowers students from the bottom up
- Reviewing staffing structures to prioritise areas that directly support student-led activity
- Deepening strategic partnerships with the University, the city, and the wider region

Freedom of Speech

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 took effect as of August 2025. As before, the University is the body to whom the SU is required to demonstrate our compliance, with new duties on the University in relation to the revised expectations of The Act.

The SU's Trustees have previously approved a Freedom of Speech Code of Practice, which had been a requirement set out in the proposed guidance relative to the Free Speech Act. With that guidance now changed, we have revisited this, and updated our own guidance accordingly. The revised guidance document is included at the end of this report (along with the associated 'Visiting Speakers Approval Policy').

Supreme Court Ruling on "sex" in the Equality Act:

The UK Supreme Court ruled on April 16, 2025, in the case of *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers*, that the term "sex" in the Equality Act 2010 refers to biological sex. This decision has significant implications for how organisations, including workplaces and service providers, interpret their legal obligations under the Act.

The Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC), as the regulator for the Equality Act, is responsible for providing updated guidance. Following the Supreme Court's ruling, they ran a public consultation from May to June 2025 on a new draft of the code of practice. With NUS' support, we provided a response to that consultation, raising concerns for the wellbeing of some of our members and the practical challenges of implementing the guidance.

The EHRC presented their final draft guidance to the Minister of State for Women and Equalities on the 4th September, and we await the Government's decision as to whether that guidance will be put to Parliament. In the meantime, we are considering internally if and how the draft guidance would impact our members and our practice.

Access and Participation

A long-time aspiration has been to build the SU's role as a delivery partner in the institution's Access and Participation Plan (APP), (a legally required document from all English higher education providers which outlines their commitments to improving equality of opportunity for students from underrepresented groups to enter, succeed in, and progress in HE).

Following finalisation of the University's 5-year APP, the SU now has membership of both the delivery, and data and reporting groups and at the time of writing is about to host a joint workshop with teams across both organisations to map opportunities for delivery, collaboration and alignment. There are particular opportunities for us to contribute, add value and make better

use of our respective resources, in relation to the interventions focussed on the participation, belonging and wellbeing of mature students, disabled students and BAME students, as well as some of the progression interventions.



Strategy Year 1

Having established 2024/25 as our strategy year zero, in which we aimed to prepare the organisation for the delivery phase of our strategy, we are now moving into that delivery phase, with 25/26 being our “strategy year 1”.

Taking direction from the strategy, SLT took time ahead of the summer to undertake some critical path analysis work on the array of projects and activities committed within our theory of change model, effectively scheduling the activity over the coming 3 years.

We have created a master planning board scheduled by year, from which managers and teams take their direction for their respective annual plans. SLT has recently signed off on the annual plans of all teams and Managers have in turn been reflecting those plans with their individual staff Performance and Development Discussions, so ensuring that everyone has a clear line of sight from their own personal objectives to the intentions set out in the strategy.

Much of this new strategic imperative informed our welcome planning for September, and we are delighted with the attitude demonstrated by those leading the respective projects and plans. We will be monitoring our progress against the plans over the course of the year, measuring performance against the agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).

Naturally, there will be some learning to be taken as we embark on new ways of planning and working, and as new team members, and those who have changed roles, become embedded in their new work. We anticipate the need for adjustment of plans as our work develops, as is expected with the Theory of Change model, at all times staying focussed on the expected impacts as described in the 8 vision statements of the strategy.

Research and Insight

Preparations are well advanced for the go-live of the annual ‘Big SU Survey’ in November. This important research will let us know how students are feeling about a range of issues. We will be asking students to tell us the extent to which they feel that they belong at the SU, the University, the city and the UK and the extent to which they feel they have influence over the same four settings. The answers to these questions will contribute to our tracking of a group of important strategic KPIs. In addition we will be asking for our members’ views on emergent local, regional and national issues to ensure that our change makers are furnished with robust evidence for change.

We are targeting a 10% response rate, which is something we have been able to achieve in most years. We will share the resulting insight with University colleagues early in 2026.

Daryl Ormerod, SU Chief Executive



Appendix

Sheffield Students' Union

Guidance on Freedom of Speech

1. Overview

1.1 This guidance sets out Sheffield Students' Union's (SSU's) approach to freedom of speech.

1.2 Broadly speaking, SSU is regulated on freedom of speech by the University of Sheffield (UoS), as defined by the various legal operating frameworks which underpin our relationship.

1.3 As legally required by the Office for Students (OfS), UoS has its own Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech which sets out its approach to freedom of speech and academic freedom for the benefit of all students and staff of the University.

1.4 SSU is subject to the UoS' Code of Practice, which this guidance should be read in conjunction with. SSU works in partnership with UoS where required to ensure compliance and good practice.

2. Principles and scope

2.1 Freedom of speech refers to the right to receive and impart ideas, opinions or information by means of speech, writing or images (including in electronic form), freely and without unwarranted interference.

2.2 SSU places great value on freedom of speech and expression, and has a proud history of facilitating engagement, debate and activities on diverse, innovative and challenging ideas and opinions.

2.3 As set out by UoS, we are committed to *“creating an environment that secures and promotes free speech within the law and the open exchange of a multitude of ideas and their critical evaluation”*.

2.4 To highlight particular sections of UoS' Code of Practice:

- (a) Creating an environment conducive to free exchange of lawful speech does not mean that the Students' Union endorses the speech itself. But it does mean that *“we will do all that we can to foster an environment where students and staff are encouraged to debate with each other with mutual respect, including on controversial questions”*
- (b) We further recognise that *“freedom of speech consistent with the law extends to ideas and information that can shock and disturb, or might be unpopular”*
- (c) We believe that our values shape how freedom of speech is best exercised, *“namely respectfully, reflectively, and with a generous spirit defined by curiosity and the courage to*

learn. Nothing in our commitment to freedom of speech is an excuse for abuse, bullying, discrimination, harassment, victimization, hatred, intimidation, violence or any act prohibited by law”.



2.5 In upholding freedom of speech, SSU will also give due consideration to other Regulations as required, including Charity law and the Equality Act 2010, and seek to reasonably and practicably balance the rights to legal free speech for different individuals and groups.

2.6 SSU will take all reasonably practicable steps to secure freedom of speech within the law - for our members, students, and visiting speakers (any individual or organisation who is not a student or employee of SSU or UoS and is invited to provide a viewpoint, or to speak publicly, at the invitation of SSU (i.e. Officer, Councillor, Committee, Society or employee)).

2.7 Whilst SSU staff and others outside of the groups specified in 2.6 above are not within scope of this guidance or the freedom of speech regulatory framework, where relevant, due regard will be given to freedom of speech and other regulatory duties as required.

3. Arrangements to secure freedom of speech

3.1 SSU's commitment to freedom of speech is reflected in the following ways in our day-to-day operations:

- (a) our policies and processes for student services and activities development, delivery and approval will respect the rights to freedom of speech, *and*,
- (a) our student democratic policies and processes will respect the rights to freedom of speech, *and*,
- (b) our student recruitment, training, performance and reward policies and procedures will respect the rights to freedom of speech, *and*
- (c) our student complaints, disciplinary and other such processes will respect the rights to freedom of speech

3.2 SSU is aware that the terms of certain funding, including funding from gifts, donations, contracts, and educational or commercial partnerships may present a risk to freedom of speech, and has processes in place to identify and appropriately manage such risks.

3.3 The right to access funds and resources for SSU societies and for students, members or visiting speakers to access official activities will not be denied to any individual or body on any grounds connected with:

- (a) the lawful ideas or opinions of that individual;
- (b) the lawful policy or objectives of that body, or the ideas or opinions of any of its members.

3.4 SSU will work with UoS to ensure that the relevant resources are provided for staff and students, including ensuring information is included in relevant policies, handbooks, training and guidance, as appropriate.



4. Measures in place to consider complaints about freedom of speech

4.1 SSU's Complaints Procedure and SSU's Staff Grievance Policy and Procedure each include provision for complaints about possible infringement of, or departure(s) from this guidance and/or UoS' Code of Practice. Subject to the outcome of the initial investigation, further investigation may take place in accordance with SSU's student or staff disciplinary procedures.

4.2 If any action involves infringements of the criminal law which are being pursued by the police or other civil authorities, SSU procedures will normally be suspended pending the outcome of such procedures and SSU will assist the prosecuting authorities to implement the process of the law.

4.3 Where relevant, SSU will inform UoS of any relevant complaints relating to freedom of speech and where required, SSU and UoS will agree on the most appropriate route for investigation.

4.4 The Chief Executive will report to SSU's Trustee Board on the circumstances of any significant infringements of, and departures from, this guidance and/or UoS' Code of Practice. Trustee Board will determine whether any significant infringement constitutes a 'serious incident' for the purpose of Charity Commission reporting.

5. Governance, review and monitoring

5.1 SSU Trustee Board recognises the importance of freedom of speech and their respective legal duties, and approves the relevant policy framework and schedule of reviews.

5.2 Trustee Board delegates responsibility for SSU's compliance with UoS' Code of Practice and implementation of this guidance to the Chief Executive who in turn nominates a Director of SSU as senior lead with responsibility for this work.

5.3. This guidance will be periodically reviewed and where necessary, significant amendments will be recommended to the Finance, Risk & Compliance Committee of Trustees (FR&C) for approval.

5.4 Any concerns regarding the implementation of this guidance or the actions of SSU in respect of UoS' Code of Practice should be raised in the first instance with the Chief Executive via SSU's Complaints Procedure. Any complaints which relate to the Chief Executive should be addressed to the Chair of the Trustee Board.

6. Meetings and Students' Union organised activities and events

6.1 In line with its commitment to freedom of speech, and compliance with UoS' legal duties relating to freedom of speech, SSU has a general expectation that all visiting speakers will be facilitated to speak at SSU organised events to share their views, ideas and opinions. This includes



ensuring that, so far as is reasonably practicable, no approval of a visiting speaker nor premises of SSU shall be denied to any individual or body on any grounds connected with:

- (a) the lawful ideas or opinions of that individual;
- (b) the lawful policy or objectives of that body, or the ideas or opinions of any its members

This shall be without prejudice to the other legal obligations of SSU which may require it to have regard to what is said on its premises.

6.2 SSU recognises that there may be some exceptional circumstances where further measures are required to ensure that certain visiting speakers do not break the law or breach the lawful rights of others.

6.3 It shall be reasonable to refuse consent where SSU reasonably believes (from the nature of the speakers or from similar activities in the past whether held at SSU or otherwise) that:

- (a) the intention of any speaker is likely to be to breach the law, incite breaches of the law or to intend breaches of the peace to occur;
- (b) the event will include or is likely to include the denial of the right to hold or to express an opposing opinion;
- (c) the speaker and/or the organisation they represent advocates or engages in violence or non-violent extremism in the furtherance of their political, religious, philosophical or other beliefs;
- (d) the views likely to be expressed by any speaker are for the promotion of any illegal organisation or purpose, including organisations listed on the government's list of proscribed terrorist groups or organisations;
- (e) it is in the interest of public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime or the protection of those persons lawfully on premises under the control of SSU, (or where relevant, SSU-organised events on other premises) that the meeting does not take place.

6.4 Where SSU is reasonably satisfied that the otherwise lawful expression of views at a meeting on SSU premises or at a SSU organised event, is likely to give rise to disorder or threats to the safety of participants or the wider student community, SSU shall consider what steps are necessary to take to ensure the safety of all persons and where relevant, the security of the premises controlled by SSU.

These steps may include but are not limited to: requirements as to the provision of security/stewards; the speaker being part of a panel; ensuring that a member of staff is in attendance; ticketing and/or audience conditions, or suggested changes to the event location, date or time. SSU may impose such conditions and requirements upon the organisers as are reasonably necessary in all the circumstances, while ensuring that the conditions and requirements go no further than is reasonably necessary to address the risks it has identified.

6.5 Where SSU reasonably concludes that imposing conditions would not be sufficient to prevent serious disorder within premises subject to our control, a serious threat to health and safety or other breaches of the law or legal obligations, it may decline to permit the meeting to proceed.

6.6 Peaceful protest is itself a legitimate expression of freedom of speech and where possible, support for organising student protests can be provided by SSU. As with any event, notification



should be provided to the Events or Student Communities Teams at least 2 weeks in advance of the planned event date wherever possible, and with as much notice as possible, and the appropriate event-organising procedures followed (e.g. Health & Safety, Risk Assessment etc). Any protest must not shut down debate. UoS has also developed guidance for UoS students wishing to engage in protest on campus.

6.7 Everyone who organises, speaks at, or attends a SSU event (at SSU, University, non-University premises, or online) is required to observe good order. Good order includes, but is not limited to, refraining from the following: preventing participants from accessing events; preventing speakers from being heard clearly; chanting or using foul or abusive language, including racial abuse; refusing reasonable requests from an event chair, or other staff involved in managing an event; using intimidating, abusive or threatening language via communications, placards, banners, posters, or other means; acting in any other way which is threatening or abusive, or which denies to others their right to legal free speech.

6.8 Other than in exceptional circumstances, the costs of security (whether in whole or part) relating to use of SSU premises by, or in connection with, a visiting speaker who has been invited by SSU (or some part of it) to speak at an event in order to provide or disseminate their views, ideas or opinions shall **not** be passed to the person or organisation arranging the event.

Whether the circumstances are exceptional in this context shall be determined by the relevant Director of the Students' Union as senior lead with responsibility for this work, acting reasonably and taking into account the factors below. The University will cover the costs of their events.

6.9 In assessing the costs of security and whether exceptional circumstances exist, the following will **not** be taken into account so far as is consistent with the law:

- a. in relation to an individual speaker, their views, ideas or opinions;
- b. in relation to an external organisation, their policies or objectives or the views, ideas or opinions of its members;
- c. in relation to an event itself, the lawful ideas, opinions or information likely to be expressed.

In considering whether exceptional circumstances exist, regard will be had to the following:

- a. that the costs of security will exceed £1000, being a level which SSU has reasonable grounds to believe will rarely, if ever, be exceeded;
- b. the need to engage additional security staff to ensure the proper conduct of an event, including but not limited to ensuring the health and safety and wellbeing of participants and attendees and the prevention of crime and disorder;
- c. the need for SSU to take additional measures to ensure that its activities are not disrupted, notwithstanding that the event is taking place.

Where exceptional circumstances are found to exist, SSU will bear the costs of security up to the value of £1000 and pass on the residual costs to the event organisers. Where it is reasonably practicable to do so, the calculation of security costs will be provided to the event organisers who shall have the right to appeal the calculation to the Director of Social Enterprises or Director of Finance.

Annex A - Sheffield Students' Union Visiting Speakers Approval Policy



1. Introduction

1.1 Trustees are required to have in place procedures that consider the risks that might be associated with inviting a visiting speaker to a Sheffield Students' Union (SSU) meeting or event. We have a responsibility to maintain good order in respect of the events we organise.

1.2 SSUs Visiting Speakers Approval Policy should be read and applied in light of SSU's guidance on freedom of speech and the University of Sheffield's (UoS') Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, to which SSU must adhere.

1.3 This policy is specifically written to ensure that appropriate processes are in place for hosting speakers visiting SSU or attending SSU organised events (including events hosted online).

1.4 In line with its commitment to freedom of speech and compliance with UoS' legal duties relating to freedom of speech, SSU has a general expectation that all visiting speakers will be facilitated to speak at SSU organised events to share their views, ideas and opinions.

1.5 SSU recognises that there may be some exceptional circumstances where further measures are required to ensure that certain visiting speakers do not break the law or breach the lawful rights of others. SSU must have regard to its other legal responsibilities including, but not limited to, preventing discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and ensuring the health and safety and safeguarding of students, staff, visitors and visiting speakers.

1.6 SSU may take action to facilitate the inclusion of diverse voices in a debate, particularly voices from underrepresented and marginalised groups.

1.7 In accordance with the various legal obligations outlined, all such events involving visiting speakers, whether arranged for internal groups or for external clients, must comply with the SSU's statutory obligations, as set out in this policy and UoS' Code of Practice.

2. Scope and definitions

2.1 A 'Visiting Speaker' is any individual or organisation who is not a student or employee of SSU or UoS and is invited to provide a viewpoint, or to speak publicly, at the invitation of SSU (i.e. Officer, Councillor, Committee, Society or employee).

2.2 For the purpose of this policy, the definition 'Visiting Speaker' excludes the following:



- (a) people who are invited to the SSU building or UoS campus for a private meeting, interview or similar;
- (b) commercial advertisers of SSU unless they will be speaking to an 'external audience' (other than outreach/open day activities);
- (c) trainers or tutors who are invited to teach knowledge or skills, rather than provide a viewpoint and/or who will be delivering Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training, such determination being at the discretion of a Director of SSU.

2.3 This policy and UoS' Code of Practice relating to Freedom of Speech applies to meetings and other activities taking place on SSU premises and/or events taking place on non-University premises which are SSU organised, funded or branded, including events organised by individuals, groups or societies legitimately using SSU's name or resources. This includes events taking place online.

2.4 Where SSU organised events including SSU society events, that involve a visiting speaker are to be hosted on UoS premises, these are overseen by UoS security and the decision-making regarding those events lies with UoS. UoS' Visiting Speakers' Approval Policy should be referenced in these instances. Appropriate communication and liaison takes place between SSU and UoS as required, to reduce confusion and duplication of process.

2.5 Events might include, but are not limited to, public lectures, student society events, meetings, debates, protests, vigils, fairs and conferences, including those held online.

2.6 Where required under this policy, formal approval of visiting speakers by SSU must be obtained, in advance, for SSU organised events to be held on SSU premises, on non-University premises, or online.

2.7 Usual SSU operating policies should also be considered and complied with when organising an event involving a Visiting Speaker, including: risk assessments, and Health and Safety procedures.

2.8 SSU will publicise its Visiting Speakers Form and associated procedures via:

- (a) a prominent statement on SSU Room Bookings webpage that a Visiting Speakers Form must be submitted with as much notice as possible;
- (b) training for relevant SSU staff;
- (c) information and guidance for student groups (Societies, Working and Representative Committees, Councillors and Officers).

2.9 Whilst every effort will be made to ensure that all student groups inviting a Visiting Speaker(s) will inform SSU in advance and/or seek permission for meetings and events held in its premises and off-campus, this cannot be guaranteed due to the number and diversity of societies and committees.

3. Key roles and responsibilities

3.1 The Event Organiser is the person responsible for the event involving the Visiting Speaker. They are responsible for applying for approval under this Visiting Speakers' Approval Policy and



should consider at the outset of organising the event and *before any invitation* is issued whether any of the criteria set out below are likely to apply, seeking advice as required:

- a. the intention of any speaker is likely to be to breach the law, incite breaches of the law or to intend breaches of the peace to occur;
- b. the event will include or is likely to include the denial of the right to hold or to express an opposing opinion;
- c. the speaker and/or the organisation they represent advocates or engages in violence or non-violent extremism in the furtherance of their political, religious, philosophical or other beliefs;
- d. the views likely to be expressed by any speaker are for the promotion of any illegal organisation or purpose, including organisations listed on the government's list of proscribed terrorist groups or organisations;
- e. it is in the interest of public safety, the prevention of disorder or crime or the protection of those persons lawfully on premises under the control of SSU (or where relevant, SSU-organised events on other premises), that the meeting does not take place.

3.2 The Event Organiser:

- a. must be a current member of SSU or UoS staff, or a current member of the SSU as defined by the Articles of Association. Event Organisers are able to access and receive advice from SSU Events or Student Communities Teams in relation to their event, or from UoS in relation to events held on UoS premises;
- b. must consult SSU about the event and shall ensure that they apply for approval with enough notice to allow this procedure to be completed. The Event Organiser is responsible for entering details into the Visiting Speaker's Approval Form;
- c. is responsible for leading engagements with the Visiting Speaker before and during an event, including ensuring that the Visiting Speaker is aware of any specific procedures or measures attached to the event and Visiting Speaker approval;
- d. should report any breaches of guidance, procedure or UoS Code of Practice to the SSU Events or Student Communities Teams.

3.3 SSU Events and Student Communities Teams are responsible for carrying out (and/or supporting) initial risk assessment and mitigating the risks associated with events involving Visiting Speakers, which are hosted on SSU premises or events taking place on non-University premises which are SSU organised, funded or branded, including events organised by individuals, groups or societies legitimately using SSUs name or resources. This includes events taking place online.

3.4 A Director of SSU as designated by the Chief Executive of SSU makes the final decision about whether a SSU event can proceed on SSU premises or on non-University premises. As part of our risk assessment process, the relevant Director may request additional advice from UoS' Head of Security (and others, including the Police, as may be appropriate) for events considered high risk. SSU's Events and Student Communities Teams keep a local record of all Visiting Speakers that are invited to be involved in an event.



3.5 The Chief Executive acts as the point of appeal for the Visiting Speaker or where relevant, for the Event Organiser, should the Director decide that the event should not take place on SSU or non-University premises, or online.

3.6 Where events are organised in external venues (not on SSU or University premises) by SSU staff, student groups, individuals or other official SSU representatives, there is generally shared liability between SSU/Event Organisers and the venue owners. External venues may also have their own policies and procedures which Event Organisers need to follow, and appropriate time should be built into event planning schedules to allow for this. Appropriate arrangements should be in place to ensure that all parties responsibilities' are clearly defined and understood.

3.7 In line with SSUs other legal obligations, where individuals, groups or societies are organising an event in partnership with an external party and/or receiving funding from an external party, additional information and process may be required at the submission and assessment stage.

4. Stage 1: Submission of request

4.1 To seek formal approval for a Visiting Speaker, the Event Organiser must complete the Visiting Speakers Approval Form.

For SSU events (any SSU organised events not taking place on UoS premises), the following form should be completed:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfhUtOHDqbsJRumroLkT3UGZxKzwASsF6TVswD99IM0mf0wMA/viewform>

For SSU events taking place on UoS premises, only the form below requires completion:

<https://staff.sheffield.ac.uk/it-services/room-bookings/external-speakers>

4.2 The Event Organiser should submit the Application Form with as much notice as possible, and with a minimum of 2 weeks (14 days) notice prior to the planned event, so that the relevant decision makers have sufficient time to consider and put in place appropriate procedures, if necessary. Forms submitted late may still be considered if reasonably practicable to do so.

4.3 Situations may change rapidly and if any of the information submitted on the Application Form changes or any additional information becomes apparent which might reasonably be considered to increase risk prior to the event, then the Events or Student Communities Teams must be notified immediately to reassess the event. All reasonable steps will be taken to enable the event to proceed, but additional measures may be considered reasonable to apply, including potentially the postponement of the event to a later date to allow sufficient time to assess and respond to any new risks identified.

5. Stage 2: Initial risk assessment

5.1 On receipt of the Application Form the Events and/or Student Communities Teams shall review the information and conduct an initial risk assessment to determine whether the proposed event would be either: low risk, medium risk or high risk. This risk assessment will be conducted solely



for the purpose of determining the likelihood that a Visiting Speaker may break the law or breach the lawful rights of others, as set out in SSUs guidance on Freedom of Speech, and in order to ensure that SSU has due regard for its other legal responsibilities including, but not limited to preventing discrimination, harassment and victimisation and ensuring the health and safety of students, staff, visitors and visiting speakers.

5.2 The initial risk assessment conducted by the Events and Student Communities Teams may include (without limitation):

- a check as to whether the speaker is associated with an organisation on the Home Office's list of proscribed groups and organisations;
- an internet search on the Visiting Speaker and the subject matter of the proposed event;
- A search on social media on the Visiting Speaker
- advice from UoS' Head of Security
- consultation with external parties, for example: the police, the Regional Prevent Lead, officers/staff at other SU's and/or universities.

5.3 If the Events and Student Communities Teams determine that the event proposal is low risk, the event involving the Visiting Speaker should be approved and the decision communicated to the Event Organiser as quickly as circumstances allow. The decision and the information used to inform the decision (including links to relevant websites/social media) are recorded by the specific staff member within the Events or Student Communities Team on the Visiting Speakers Database.

5.4 If the Events and Student Communities Teams determine that the event involving the Visiting Speaker is medium/high risk, then further information and intelligence will be obtained on the Visiting Speaker and subject matter of the event. In addition to the initial investigations undertaken, this will include:

- a review of the proposed content of the speech if this is known and a detailed discussion with the Event Organiser and other colleagues as required; *and*
- if necessary, consulting any relevant external parties (for example: the police, the Regional Prevent Lead, officers at other universities).

5.5 The Events and Student Communities Teams shall review the gathered intelligence and make a decision to approve, or approve with conditions, medium risk events, and the decision will be communicated to the Event Organiser, as quickly as circumstances allow. Liaison will take place as required with the relevant Director as senior lead with responsibility for this work. The decision and the information used to inform the decision (including links to relevant websites/social media) are recorded by the specific staff member within the Events or Student Communities Teams on the Visiting Speakers Database.

5.6 In the case of high-risk events, the Events and Student Communities Teams will make a recommendation to a Director of the Students' Union as designated by the Chief Executive. The Director will decide whether the Visiting Speaker is either:

- Approved.
- Approved with Conditions, with reference to the appeals procedure.
- Refused with reference to the appeals procedure.

5.7 Reasonable grounds for refusal are listed in Section 3 of the Visiting Speakers Approval Policy.



5.8 Where a Visiting Speaker is approved by the Director of the Students' Union with conditions imposed, such conditions will go no further than is necessary to address any risks identified. Examples of such conditions include, but are not limited to, the following examples:

- Event Organiser to obtain details of the areas which the speaker's talk will cover in advance or a copy of the speaker's notes or other material to be used by the speaker at the event;
- require coordination with representatives from communities likely to raise concerns about the speaker to put in place mitigation measures;
- appointment of an experienced Chair for the event, who has the authority to terminate the event should there be a breach of this procedure or UoS' Code of Practice;
- appointment of a member of staff to be a note-taker at the event;
- inviting a speaker with opposing views to ensure that discussion is balanced;
- providing additional security staff, conducting bag searches or checking invited or pre-authorised guests;
- implementing specific conditions for the arrival, departure and itinerary of the Visiting Speaker;
- delaying/postponing the event to facilitate further planning;
- changing the event location to ensure public safety; *and/or*
- imposing restrictions, such as numbers able to attend, pre-booking (ticket only entry) *and/or* identity verification

5.9 The Events and Student Communities Teams shall provide written confirmation of the decision where applicable, as quickly as circumstances allow. Where the application is "Approved with Conditions" or "Refused", the reasons for the decision will also be communicated to the Event Organiser along with information about how to appeal the decision. The Events and Student Communities Teams will also inform SSUs Marketing and Communications Team and relevant UoS colleagues.

5.10 The Director of SSUs decision and the information used to inform the decision (including links to relevant websites/social media) will be recorded on the SSU Visiting Speakers Database.

5.11 Any formalities, conditions, or restrictions on free speech SSU deems it necessary to apply shall reflect applicable rules in legislation *and/or* in common law and UoS' regulatory obligations.

6. Objections to Visiting Speakers raised by stakeholders

6.1 Should an internal or external stakeholder submit a complaint or raise an objection about a Visiting Speaker that has been approved via this process, in advance of an event taking place, then the Events and Student Communities Team may re-investigate and thereafter make a recommendation for a decision to the Director of the Students' Union as designated by the Chief Executive.

6.2 Irrespective of the outcome of the re-investigation, SSU shall use reasonable endeavours to reach a satisfactory solution with relevant internal and external stakeholders to minimise the



potential damage to good relations on campus and to facilitate free speech for all groups, with regard to those from underrepresented and/or marginalised groups. This could include arranging alternative spaces on campus where opposing views can be expressed and/or exploring other ways for different groups of students and staff to work together to promote good relations.

6.3 Where the decision has been made to approve the Visiting Speaker notwithstanding the concerns received at 6.1, SSU will consider the potential harm to individuals and relations between groups and will explore appropriate mitigations. This could include signposting internal stakeholders to relevant support services.

7. Appeal

7.1 If the application is “Approved with Conditions” or “Refused”, the Event Organiser shall be entitled to submit an appeal against the decision.

7.2 An appeal must be submitted in writing to the Chief Executive, stating the reasons for the appeal and accompanied by the original Application Form. The appeal decision will be taken by the Chief Executive or their designate. The designate cannot be the Director of the Students’ Union involved in the decision being appealed.

7.3 The decision of the Chief Executive, having reviewed the information, shall be final and there shall be no further mechanism for appeal within SSU. The Chief Executive shall report to Trustees any decision to withhold permission for an event/speaker.

8. SSU statement on monitoring compliance at events

8.1 SSU reserves the right to monitor any event on its premises, particularly in terms of compliance with the specified conditions attached to the approval of the Visiting Speaker, and for compliance with this procedure and other relevant SSU policies and procedures.

8.2 In cases where it is reasonable for SSU to assume that disruption may occur at an event, whether at the approval request stage or at any time thereafter in the run-up to the event, SSU may consult with UoS or relevant external parties (for example: the police, the Regional Prevent Lead, security advisors) as to the measures necessary to prevent or minimise any such disruption. These measures could, in certain circumstances, include postponement, enhanced security arrangements and/ or police presence throughout.

8.3 While an event is in progress, SSU shall have the right to require the Event Organiser to terminate the event if the conduct of the event gives rise to concerns for SSU that the safety of persons attending cannot be reasonably assured or that a breach of the law or a breach of any of the conditions imposed on the event is likely to occur. In such instances whereby the SSU may close an event, all persons or external visitors may be asked to leave SSU premises.

8.4 All events must comply with SSU guidance on freedom of speech, SSU Visiting Speakers Policy, UoS’ Code of Practice and the booking contract.



8.5 In refusing a Visiting Speaker request in accordance with this procedure, SSU shall have no liability for any costs or other obligations incurred by the Event Organiser in connection with the proposed event involving the Visiting Speaker.

8.6 Any members of SSU or UoS who fail to ensure that this procedure or the provisions of UoS Code of Practice are adhered to may be liable to disciplinary action in accordance with SSU or where relevant, University policies and procedures, in addition to any possible prosecution and/or claim for breach of criminal and/or civil law.