Visiting speaker policy

1 Introduction

1.1. Walbrook regularly welcomes visiting speakers from around the world. Such speakers bring great diversity of experience, insight, and opinion, enriching lectures, events, and activities, and sparking discussion and debate among students, staff, faculty, and visitors alike.

1.2. Walbrook commits to actively fostering an environment where lawful freedom of speech is not only protected but encouraged. This includes the open discussion of controversial, unpopular, or challenging ideas in a respectful and safe setting.

1.3. Walbrook welcomes and promotes freedom of speech and expression within the law. The purpose of this policy is to set in place a framework for those engaged with Walbrook, in whatever capacity, to ensure that activities where debate, challenge, and dissent aren't only permitted but expected, can continue for current and future generations.

1.4. This policy applies to all students, staff, faculty, members, partners, and visiting speakers of Walbrook in relation to any activity, whether in person or digitally delivered, on behalf of, or in partnership with, Walbrook.

1.5. All student-led events and activities, including those organised by student societies, fall under the remit of this policy. These groups must also complete the Visiting Speaker Risk Assessment prior to holding events with external participants.

1.6. To comply with the Education Act (No 2) 1986, Walbrook has a Freedom of Speech Code of Practice, and obligations relating to our Prevent duty. Anyone organising an event must follow this process and should be familiar with the Freedom of Speech Code of Practice and our responsibilities relating to the Prevent duty.

1.7. This policy also aligns with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and the guidance issued by the Office for Students (OfS) in Regulatory Advice 24. These place duties on higher education institutions to not only secure but actively promote freedom of speech within the law, and to ensure appropriate governance, complaints procedures, and transparency are in place

2 Booking a visiting speaker

2.1. It's the responsibility of the event or activity organiser (the individual from within Walbrook e.g., member of staff or student named in the Visiting Speaker submission) to ensure that

I. the Visiting Speaker Risk Assessment is completed for all speakers who are not contracted to us

II. the code of conduct is communicated to all visiting speakers before the event

III. all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that the requirements of the code of conduct are upheld during the running of the event.

2.2. The Freedom of Speech Code of Practice and Visiting Speaker Policy will be continually reviewed and updated in response to legislative changes and other factors. It's the responsibility of those organising events to ensure they're acting in accordance with the most recent version of the policies.

2.3. Most visiting speaker requests will be straightforward and can be handled entirely by the event organiser. However, some requests may be complex and may require referral for further consideration. The referral process will only apply in a minority of circumstances; to events or speakers deemed to be higher risk.

3   Risk assessment of proposed visiting speaker(s)

3.1. Prior to the confirmation of any visiting speaker, the event organiser will be responsible for assessing the speaker by completing the Visiting Speaker Risk Assessment. Once completed, the Visiting Speaker Risk Assessment should be submitted to the Registry Team.

3.2. The risk assessment has two parts. Part A (initial assessment) should be completed in all cases. If necessary, the individual should discuss this with their line manager.

3.3. Part B (referral) should be completed if any uncertainties or concerns are raised as part of the completion of Part A. This should then be reviewed by the appropriate Senior Manager.

3.4. The risk assessments will be filed in accordance with local procedures and follow the retention policy.

4   Training Requirements

4.1 All staff members and student leaders involved in the planning or approval of events must complete mandatory training on freedom of speech responsibilities. Training completion will be tracked and reviewed annually.

5   Complaints and Redress

5.1 If any party believes that freedom of speech has been unduly restricted under this policy, they may submit a formal complaint through Walbrook's internal procedure.

Where internal procedures are exhausted, they may escalate the issue to the Office for Students (OfS).

6   Transparency and Record-Keeping

6.1   All speaker risk assessments and decisions will be retained for a minimum of six years and reviewed periodically. Summary data may be published annually in line with transparency commitments.

7   Governance

7.1   The implementation of this policy is overseen by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. An anonymised report summarising event referrals, approvals, refusals, and complaints will be submitted annually.

7.2   This policy is subject to review approximately every 12 months by the Registry Team.

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