

RNC Policy & Procedure: Approval of External Speakers and Events

Responsibility:	Commercial Manager and Lead Designated Safeguarding Officer		
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Other relevant Policies and reference documents: Safeguarding Children Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Prevent Visitors			
Version	Date	Amendments	Author
1.0	September 2017	Approved by SMT	CC/JP
1.1	September 2018	Draft version to SMT. Amendments made to internal procedures for approval of external speakers	MKJ
1.2	December 2018	Amendment made to 5.6 in line with amendments to internal booking procedure. Approved by SMT	MKJ

Commitment Statement

RNC is committed to the fundamental values of equality, diversity and inclusion, which creates a supportive environment for all members of our community to live, work and study. Our commitment to equality and diversity means that this policy has been screened in relation to the use of plain English, the promotion of the positive duty in relation to race, gender and disability and to eliminate discrimination to other equality groups related to age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity and religion or belief. We believe that safeguarding has paramount importance and RNC recognises its responsibility and duties within the Government Prevent Strategy to be aware of and where appropriate act to ensure the safety of all students from radicalisation and extremism.

This document is available in alternative formats on request. If you think RNC can improve the fairness of this policy please contact the author who has responsibility for the review and update.

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1. Introduction

The Royal National College for the Blind (RNC) is committed to creating an environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and where diversity is valued. This policy outlines the procedures relating to events involving the use of external speakers regardless of who is organising them.

It also details RNC's approach to ensure the protection of staff, students and the reputation of RNC whilst following the legislation that we are responsible for upholding. This policy is written with reference to the Prevent Duty contained within Section 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The Duty states that specified authorities including Further Education Colleges, in the exercise of their functions, must have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'.

2. Objectives

2.1 To provide an environment where freedom of expression and speech are protected, balanced with the need to ensure that the RNC community is free from harm and that incitement to hatred is never acceptable

2.2 To provide a supportive, inclusive and safe space for students

2.3 To provide clearly defined and effective procedures to ensure that the law is upheld

2.4 To collaborate with others to reach sound, evidenced judgments about proposed external speakers, ensuring that the College can meet its legal obligations

2.5 To encourage and provide a balance of opinion at any academic discussion or debate

2.6 To communicate to all staff, volunteers, visitors, customers, and thePoint4 members, that it is our mutual responsibility to comply with equality and safeguarding legislation and that both RNC and the individual can be held liable if they contravene the law

2.7 To provide clear instructions for organising an event with external contribution e.g. speaker, representatives, film and guidance for researching an external speaker

3. Freedom of speech and expression

3.1 Freedom of expression and speech are basic human rights that are protected by law. Freedom of speech and freedom of expression are not absolute freedoms but freedoms within the law. Colleges have a history of being open to debate and ideas, with students at the forefront of pushing the limits of freedom of expression. 'Academic freedom' is a term used to describe the law that allows for open and honest debate in an academic context.

3.2 However, we have a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of our staff, students and communities. The freedom to express views must be balanced with the need to secure freedom from harm for students and communities. We want all of our events, activities and initiatives to be safe without risk to the reputation of the College, and within the law.

3.3 Sometimes an external speaker or their topic of discussion has the potential to go against our conditions for a safe event. We are committed to working together with event organisers and in some cases, external speakers themselves, to make sure that we reach a judgement that is reasonable, informed and within the law.

4. External speakers and their responsibilities

4.1 For the purposes of this policy an external speaker or visitor is used to describe any individual or organisation who is not a student or staff member for RNC or one of its contracted partners, and who has been invited to speak to students and/or staff. This includes any individual who is a student or staff member from another institution.

4.2 For the purposes of this policy an external speaker or visitor includes the main contact from any external venue hire client who is paying to use College facilities.

4.3 For the purposes of this policy an event is any event, presentation, visit, activity or initiative organised by a student group/society, individual or staff member that is being held on the College premises. It also includes events where external speakers are streamed live into an event or a pre-recorded film is shown.

4.4 For the purposes of this policy an event also includes activity being held on College premises but organised by external venue hire clients.

4.5 All speakers or visitors should be made aware by the person or group arranging the event (by referring visitors to this policy on the College website) that they have a responsibility to abide by the law and the College's policies including that they:

- Must not advocate or incite hatred or violence, or call for the breaking of the law
- Are not permitted to encourage, glorify or promote any acts of terrorism including individuals, groups or organisations that support such acts
- Must not spread hatred and intolerance in the community and thus aid in disrupting social and community harmony
- Must be mindful of the risk of causing offence to, or seek to avoid insulting, other faiths or groups, within a framework of positive debate and challenge
- Are not permitted to raise or gather funds for any external organisation or cause without express permission of the College

5. Guidance for College staff and students organising an event with an external speaker or venue hire client

5.1 No event involving any external speakers may be considered, confirmed or promoted until the speaker has been cleared through the procedure detailed in this policy. This includes advertisement through any social media platform.

5.2 RNC reserves the right to cancel, prohibit or delay any event with an external speaker if the policy is not followed or if health, safety and security criteria cannot be met.

5.3 Any internal room booking/event organisation with an external speaker involved must be made no later than 10 working days before the date of the event. This is to allow for the organiser to have made adequate safeguarding checks, as well as allowing time for alterations to the event if necessary. Any request made outside this timeframe will only be considered in

line with the procedure set out in Appendix 1 (Internal Request).

5.4 The individual/group organising an external speaker should conduct brief research into the proposed speaker. If in doubt as to the suitability of a speaker, they should refer the decision to the Lead Designated Safeguarding Officer (LDSO).

5.5 Reasons for doubt could be (but are not restricted to) the following: -

- any person or group on/or linked to the UK Government list of proscribed terror organisations: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>
- talks by organisations generally considered to be extremist
- any speaker who has previously spoken in public in a manner which has caused fear or intimidation
- a speaker who is known to have breached the guidelines in Section 2 or 3 of this policy
- a speaker accepted by the mainstream as being highly controversial
- a link or links to any person or group that has been connected with any controversy of a negative or positive nature
- a speaker who has significant profile and attracts a following that could create crowd control and health and safety issues
- a speaker from a political party during an election purdah

5.6 The External Speaker approval process is an additional requirement of the visitor booking form available on the MIS which must be completed at the time of making the provisional booking (no later than 10 working days before the planned event).

Staff must clearly identify that the visitor for whom they wish to seek authorisation is an external speaker which will prompt a requirement for additional information relating to purpose of visit and evidence of background checks being completed.

The auto-generated approval process will forward the request to:

For Learning Directorate - Director of Learning and Curriculum

For all other Directorates - LDSO

Final approval for all external speakers will always be from the LDSO.

5.7 In making recommendations, the LDSO may consult on a wider basis with the Senior Management Team and/or Prevent Committee and risk will be assessed on the following basis:

- The potential for any decision to limit freedom of speech
- The potential to cause reputational risk to the College
- The potential for the speaker's presence on site to cause fear or alarm to students or members of staff and/or to give rise to breach of peace

5.8 One of the following decisions will be made:

- To not permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead
- To not permit the external speaker to attend the event (if it is a wider event)
- To fully permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead unrestricted

- To permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead on the basis of regulatory steps designed to reduce risk. These may include observation, independent filming, and the inclusion of opportunities to debate or challenge the view being held

5.9 Managers are responsible for ensuring that their staff team and students are aware of and follow the policy.

6. Additional Guidance for Venue Hire Clients organising an event with external speakers

6.1 The Bookings Team will make external venue hire clients aware of this policy and request details of any external speakers, presentations etc that they are bringing in. This information should be provided no later than seven working days before the booking goes ahead. Any request made outside this timeframe will only be considered in line with the procedure set out in Appendix 2 (External)

6.2 RNC reserves the right to cancel, prohibit or delay any venue hire booking with external speakers if the policy is not followed, requested information is not produced, or if health, safety and security criteria cannot be met.

6.3 If in doubt as to the suitability of speakers, the Bookings Team should refer the decision to the Commercial Manager who may liaise with the Lead Designated Safeguarding Officer. Reasons may be as outlined in 5.5.

6.4 In the event of referral, one of the following decisions will be made within 5 working days:-

- To not permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead
- To not permit the external speaker to attend the event (if it is a wider event)
- To fully permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead unrestricted
- To permit the event with the external speaker to go ahead on the basis of regulatory steps designed to reduce risk. These may include observation, independent filming, and the inclusion of opportunities to debate or challenge the view being held