



HISA Freedom of Speech policy

Purpose

This code sets out how the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) will take reasonable and practicable steps to secure freedom of speech within the law for its members, students at UHI and external speakers.

HISA believes in the right to express views and ideas freely, without fear of interference or persecution, and that this is an essential part of democracy. We know that Freedom of Expression is an important aspect of students' higher education experience, allowing them to think critically, challenge and engage with alternative perspectives.

At HISA, we want to foster an environment where our members can participate fully, feel able to question and challenge, express new ideas, discuss controversial and or unpopular opinions within the law, and all without fear of intolerance or discrimination. HISA wants to foster an environment where positive dialogue thrives.

This policy sets out the framework in which we aim to achieve these aims.

Principles

HISA will ensure that students, staff and visiting speakers/lecturers have freedom to question, test and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves at risk.

Whilst HISA will defend this freedom, we also expect that challenge, critical debate and the exploration of such ideas will be conducted within a spirit of dignity and respect. Respectful debate and conversation allow us to challenge discrimination, eliminate intolerance and harmful perspectives, and build strong and positive communities. Freedom of expression includes the right to "offend, shock or disturb", however, we are committed to ensure that this is not misused for the purpose of unchallenged hatred or bigotry.

In exercising the right to freedom of expression, we expect our members to be tolerant of the differing opinions of others and to be tolerant of the diverse identities of others, in line with the core values of freedom from discrimination. Notably, freedom of expression also includes the right to peaceful protest; however, it should not be used to shut down debate or infringe on the rights of others.

1.1 HISA has a duty to ensure that all members and student groups as defined in our Articles have the right to the freedom of speech within the law and they shall not be denied any facilities or entitlement on the grounds of their beliefs.

1.2 HISA will approach all events and activities on the basis of enabling them to proceed in a safe manner, and that individuals and groups will not be denied the use of premises or facilities on the basis of their beliefs, views, or objectives.

1.3 HISA will not deny the registration (affiliation) of any student society or group on the grounds of its policy or objectives, or the ideas or opinions of any of its members, except where this is a proscribed organisation banned by UK law: [Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations). A further exception may be where a group's objectives or beliefs are unlawful or promote unlawful activities.

1.4 HISA shall allow access to and the use of its premises, facilities, entitlements and services to any member or group of members unless it considers that such use is contrary to criminal law, make HISA, UHI or its Academic Partners liable to penalties under civil law.

1.5 HISA has other legal responsibilities, such as those relating to preventing discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, as well as consideration for the health, safety and welfare of employees, students, external speakers and other visitors.

Decisions made in respect of events and use of premises will be made in this context. While HISA is committed to freedom of expression, it reserves the right to refuse an organisation or external speaker where an assessment has been made that this freedom may be restricted in order to prevent violence or unlawful discrimination. Any activities or events must also comply with HISA's Staff and Student Codes of Conduct and other management policies such as required risk assessments.

1.6 HISA's Board of Trustees shall be informed in writing of the Executive Committee's (Schedule 3: Governance of the Association) decision to deny the right to HISA's premises, facilities, entitlements and services to any member or group of members should this be deemed necessary, following an investigation.

These **Principles** apply to the following activities:

- Meetings, events or gatherings of people to be held on UHI's premises (which includes all Association premises) or online by student members from registered student groups, elected representatives or recognised campaign groups.
- Meetings held online via digital platforms by Association members from registered student groups, elected representatives or recognised campaign groups. This Code does not apply to events organised by groups who are not registered with the Association. Nor does it apply to events being organised by individual students. UHI policies and procedures should be followed in these circumstances.
- Any individual or organisation who is not a current UHI member of staff or current student, or not a member of Association staff, invited to provide a viewpoint or speak, on campus or virtually.
- Views expressed in online Association-led fora

Assessing an event

The Association will approach all events on the basis of enabling them to proceed in a safe manner, and that individuals and groups will not be denied the use of premises or facilities on the basis of their beliefs, views, policy or objectives.

HISA will use the UHI process for the assessment of events and speakers as set out in the UHI's Protocols for Management Speakers Policy: [prevent-protocol-speakers-events.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#) which involve anyone wanting to invite a speaker onto campus must follow a procedure to have the event and speaker approved. This process starts with the submission of a form and an assessment of the speaker, and may then involve further meetings and questions, so it is vital you submit a request as soon as is possible.

Depending on the speaker, this process may also involve any assessment using the principles laid down by the equality and human rights commission: [Freedom of expression: a guide for higher education providers and students' unions in Scotland \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](#)

When considering external speaker requests, we must consider the potential risks associated with the event and/or speaker(s), so that we can mitigate these to ensure the event can run safely.

Complaints



Where organisers consider that permission to host an event or external speaker was withheld in contravention of Freedom of Speech requirements, please use the HISA complaints policy: [HISA Complaints Procedure FINAL-2.pdf \(uhi.ac.uk\)](#)

OR

Please contact hisa@uhi.ac.uk if you wish to ask questions or raise items more informally.