

BRIEFING FOR THE CHAIR OF A PUBLIC LECTURE OR DEBATE AT LSE

The purpose of this briefing is to provide essential, useful information and tips for those chairing LSE events. If you feel any issues are not addressed in this briefing or you have any questions please contact LSE Events at comms.events@lse.ac.uk.

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Key points as per the updated Code of Practice on Free Speech

Events that are open to others than current LSE staff or students should always be chaired by a suitable and experienced figure who is fully familiar with the School, meaning in principle an established (not visiting) or emeritus member of the LSE academic staff or a member of Council; this may be requested even for a limited access event if appropriate. The primary duty of the Chair at all School events is to uphold freedom of speech within the law.

This means that the Chair must adhere at all times to the School's [Code of Practice on Free Speech](#).

The Chair also has important responsibilities in maintaining good order at events, and must follow the relevant School guidelines.

Chairs at LSE events should therefore always act impartially in their facilitation of discussion and debate. At events where discussion is likely to be highly polarised and provoke especially strong feelings and responses, event organisers should consider whether it would be best for someone to Chair the event who has not previously made their views publicly known. In any case, at events of this type Chairs should take particular care to ensure that they act impartially and that they are seen to do so.

At events of this type, Chairs may pose questions to the speaker(s) but should not be a speaker at the event themselves or be expressing their own views on the subject matter of the event. Chairs for events of this type must be willing to undertake the relevant preparation, in coordination with the support of relevant School staff, in the run up to the event. SMC reserves the right to reject a proposed Chair and require event organisers to find a different Chair, but only if the proposed Chair is not a suitable and experienced figure who is fully familiar with the School or if there is evidence to provide reasonable grounds to believe that the proposed Chair has not acted impartially when chairing previous events or has not upheld freedom of speech at previous events. Imposing a change of Chair requires the explicit approval of the Director or another member of SMC, and the reasons for it must be communicated in written form to the event organiser.

It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that anyone who wishes to challenge or criticise the views of the speaker(s) in an orderly fashion is allowed to do so.

More essential event information can be found at [LSE Events Office](#).

Pre event issues - it can often be useful before going onto the stage to discuss the practical issues with the speaker(s) to prevent any confusion on stage and/or once the event has started. It is useful to:

- Arrange to meet the speaker(s) ideally around 15-20mins before the event. You should take the speaker through our [one-page speaker guidelines](#). Remind the speaker that the School has a Code of Practice on Free Speech; this protects free speech within the law which the speaker has joint responsibility with the School to uphold.

- Confirm the order of the event, i.e. usually introduction by Chair, lecture and Q&A session, and give the speaker/s an idea of when the event will end.
- Confirm the running order and seating position if there are a number of speakers.
- Re-confirm how long each speaker is expected to speak for: advise that you will tell speakers when their presentation ought to end and explain how you will do this.
- Check with speaker/s that any PowerPoint presentation they are using has been loaded onto the computer and they are aware of how to use the system. It is important as Chair to be assured that this has been done correctly: speakers sometimes assume things to be the case, that turn out not to be when they are on their feet.
- Advise the speaker to turn off their mobile phone, as this may interfere with the audio recording of the podcast.
- Please also ask the speaker to speak directly into the microphone and not walk about unless they have a lapel mic, regardless of the theatre's acoustics. This is essential for audibility on the day and the quality of the podcast recording. If during the event a speaker starts walking away from the microphone you should ask them to move closer to it, or if they prefer ask one of the stewards to give them a roving microphone.
- If applicable, remind the speaker of the book sales and signing arrangements, i.e. that the book signing will take place inside/outside the theatre immediately following the event.

Introduction – It is important that when kicking off proceedings the Chair sets the tone for the event and it is recommended that the Chair:

- Introduce themselves to the audience (always surprising how many people don't do this).
- Welcome the audience to LSE for the event and say which bit of LSE is hosting (if relevant) and where the event fits in a series (if relevant). If the event is being livestreamed the Chair should welcome the online audience.
- Tell the audience where the fire assembly point is for the building the event is taking place in. (See Evacuation procedures below for more info).
- Briefly set out the running order for the proceedings including highlighting the Q&A session and say when it is expected to end. If there is a reception afterwards that is open to all the audience say that there is but do not say where (say this at the end). If there is a book signing afterwards, let the audience know the details, and that books are on sale outside the venue.
- Provide some biographical information on the speaker/s: try to keep this short and avoid reading long CVs that speakers might have sent through.
- Inform the audience that events are recorded and that it is hoped that a podcast of the event will be made available online. Never say a podcast will definitely be available as there may be technical issues with the recording or speakers may not give their consent for a podcast to go online.
- Advise the audience to put their mobile phones on **silent** to avoid disrupting the event. We no longer ask the audience to switch off their phones, in case they wish to Tweet about the event.
- Announce the Twitter hashtag of the event, which will also be displayed on the background slide.
- Welcome the first speaker, and each speaker thereafter if there is more than one.
- Keep the speaker(s) to time, if possible.

Question and Answer session - This can be the hardest bit to manage but speakers and audiences tend to appreciate a job done well.

- At the start of the Q&A session it is recommended that the Chair reminds those wishing to ask a question to ask a question rather than deliver their own lecture, as it is not uncommon for questioners to ramble on.
- Please be proactive and be willing to interrupt someone who does embark on a speech rather than a question. In doing this, however, you should remember that some questioners may be quite nervous and may perceive this to be antagonistic so that you have to be polite

but firm on that point. You can interrupt saying something like “Thank you, we have got your point, let’s take the next question.”

- When identifying members of the audience to ask questions please avoid referring to a person’s gender (which may be an assumption) and instead identify them by their position in the audience and for example, colour of clothing (e.g. the person with the red tie in the middle of the third row).
- Remind those asking questions to wait until the roving microphone gets to them before they start speaking and to make clear their name and where they are from unless they specifically do not want to do this. If they forget to say who they are, interrupt and ask them: other questioners will soon get the message. If they start talking before they have the microphone, ask them to start again.
- Remember that in certain LSE venues such as the Old Theatre, HK Theatre and the Peacock there are balconies and therefore to take questions from those areas. In the Old Theatre there is more seating upstairs than down stair.
- Equality law guidelines recommend that the Chair repeats or paraphrases the question to ensure that anyone with hearing difficulties can hear the question. This can also be useful to speakers for whom English is not their first language.
- Sometimes a Chair can improve discussion by taking a cluster of questions before returning to the platform for comment. This reduces the risk of the panel dominating the Q and A session.
- Chairs should ensure that they take questions from a balance of those in the audience, including women and minority groups. Be proactive in encouraging these groups to ask questions. To encourage more women to ask questions best practice is to take the first question in the Q and A session from a women as research appears to show this encourages more women to follow suit.

Conclusion – at the end of the event the Chair should:

- Thank the audience for coming.
- If the event is part of a series tell the audience details of the next event.
- If there is a book signing once again remind the audience of the procedure, where the books are on sale and where the speaker will be signing.
- If there is a reception, inform people of where it will be, but only if this is an open reception for anyone to attend.
- Most importantly thank the speaker/s.
- If the speaker/s has security issues ask the audience to remain seated until the speaker has left the venue.

Impact at LSE

The School strongly encourages departments and research centres to think about ways in which to fully exploit the opportunities which public events offer to promote LSE academics and their research.

Either in your introduction or in the vote of thanks before the Q&A session, please consider whether there is any research by your department or research centre relevant to the speaker and topic of the event which you could mention briefly – though do try to avoid turning this into a mini lecture, instead let people know where they can find out more information if they are interested.

Evacuation procedures

As Chair of the event you should make yourself aware of the fire assembly point for the building the event is taking place in. This information can be found at [Fire Assembly Points](#).

On hearing the fire alarm signal, all persons must leave the building they are in promptly and make their way to the appropriate assembly point for that building (pdf). Note: in the Towers, NAB and

SAW there is an additional signal for occupants to prepare to evacuate. If you hear this signal, you should wait for the full alarm before leaving.

Reassure the audience that the situation is being investigated by the Security Staff. If members of the audience wish to leave they may do so via the emergency exits. Room Bookings staff will keep you updated on the situation.

Event stewards will facilitate the evacuation, including directing any wheelchair users or persons who cannot use the stairs to the nearest fire refuge point (FRP).

People should not attempt to re-enter the building until they have been directed by a member of LSE Security staff that it is safe to do so.

For more information please see the Health and safety web pages

PROTESTS/DISRUPTIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE CHAIR

Serious protests or disruptions at LSE events are rare but we strongly advise those acting as 'Chair' to be fully aware of the formal procedure. The Chair of any public event is an important figure as under UK legislation the Chair of any 'public meeting' is the person in charge including during incidents of disorder. You are the representative of the School at these events, not just the sponsoring or organising group if there is one. If you have any concerns that the event you have agreed to Chair is likely to attract protest or if you find out that protest or disruption is planned at the event then please alert both the event organisers and LSE Security ASAP.

The procedure the Chair needs to follow in the event of disruption can be seen below. Disruption on the scale that means the Chair has to use this procedure is very rare. But if it does happen you as the Chair need to be aware that LSE Security are not allowed to remove protestors in an arbitrary manner unless you have followed the official legal procedure as set out below. The exception to this is if there is a physical threat to the audience/speaker/Chair; in those circumstances immediate action would be taken by LSE Security or the police.

The Head of Security or his representative has the responsibility to take the final decision to close the event in the interests of the safety of the speaker and/or the audience.

If there are indications prior to the event that protests may occur or the speaker/s and/or topic are likely to provoke especially strong feelings and responses, one possible option is that when introducing the event the Chair can highlight to the audience the importance of free speech within the law and that there will be an opportunity for questions or challenges to the speaker/s later in the event.

GUIDE TO CHAIRING PUBLIC MEETINGS IN THE EVENT OF DISORDER

The guidelines given below are in accordance with the Public Meetings Act 1908, and should be used where you are chairing a public meeting which is being disrupted, for example by repeated heckling, abuse or offensive signs, behaviour or language.

Please note that unless you are being physically threatened it is important that you keep control of the microphone.

You should issue the following declarations in the first instance. Be clear and direct. Don't waffle or embroider.

1 "As Chair of this public meeting I remind you that it is the policy of this School to ensure freedom of speech within the law for speakers. Please stop disturbing this meeting"

2 "You are allowed into this meeting on condition that you abide by the school's ground rules, a copy of which is displayed at the entrance to this meeting. You are not allowed to use abusive signs, behaviour or language or to chant to such a degree that your actions disrupt the purpose for which this meeting has been called"

(Remember that a degree of heckling is allowed, but not if it continually disrupts the speaker)
If the person or persons continue to disrupt the meeting the following warning should be issued:

3 "You are disrupting this meeting. Unless you stop I will ask you to leave the meeting. This is a public warning to you. Please stop disrupting the meeting"

REPEAT THIS SLOWLY AND CLEARLY TWICE

If the disruption continues you have no alternative but to say

4 "I have asked you twice to stop disrupting this meeting. I am reminding you that this School is determined to ensure freedom of speech for speakers. Unless you stop disrupting this meeting immediately, I will ask stewards to remove you"

ALLOW TIME FOR COMPLIANCE

If the individual(s) fail to comply you may now call on the Chair's Agent (at LSE this is the LSE Security staff) to remove them.

It is the Chair's responsibility to exercise control over the meeting. However, where a Chair's agent is appointed, they should be directed to remove individual(s) with the stewards' assistance and will call the police if required.

Premature end of the meeting

If you the disturbance continues, you should consult with the Head of Security or their representative who will be present and who will take the final decision on whether the meeting should be closed on the grounds of safety.

The Head of Security or his representative will be in charge, from the moment you announce closure, of arrangements for dispersing the audience.

RULES GOVERNING EVENTS AND MEETINGS ON LSE PREMISES

Everyone on LSE premises must refrain from unlawful activity. This includes but is not limited to

- * expression of racial hatred or religious hatred, or incitement to such hatred or to violence or other criminal acts;
- * direct support of an organisation that is proscribed in the UK;
- * contravention of counter-terrorism legislation;
- * breach of the peace;
- * public order offences;
- * contravention of health and safety legislation.

Everyone who organises, speaks at or attends an event on LSE premises is required to abide by the School's Code of Practice on Free Speech. The Code is a legal requirement, under Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986. Everyone must observe good order. Good order includes but is not limited to refraining from the following:

- * preventing participants from accessing or leaving events safely;
- * preventing speakers from being heard clearly;
- * chanting or using foul or abusive language, including racial abuse;
- * refusing reasonable requests from an event Chair, event steward or other LSE staff involved in managing an event;
- * displaying flags, banners, placards or similar items in an event;
- * throwing any item;
- * acting in any other way which is threatening or abusive, or which denies to others their right to legal free speech.

The School reserves the right of admission to its premises, and to impose special requirements such as limited access or restrictions on cameras and recording equipment. Anyone who fails to comply with the above rules may be asked to leave the premises.