

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 have any questions, please contact LSE Events at comms.events@lse.ac.uk.

Alan Revel
Head of Events

Communications Division, LSE

Updated Code of Practice on Free Speech

The Code was reviewed and updated in early 2024 and can be found at [Code of Practice on Free Speech](#).

- Public events “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.
- Those chairing public events should familiarise themselves with the Code and ensure that it is followed.
- Since the pandemic, many public events are hybrid, with both an in-person and online audience. The chair should always be present in the event venue on campus and should always be sat on the stage for the duration of the event.

The primary duty of the Event Chair at all School events is to uphold freedom of speech within the law. This means that the Event Chair must adhere at all times to the School’s Code of Practice on Free Speech. The Event 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, 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.

If you have any queries, please contact comms.events@lse.ac.uk.

Pre-event issues for speakers in the theatre - 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 the [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 for both the in person and online audience 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.
- 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 starting proceedings the Chair sets the tone for the event and it is recommended that the Chair:

- Briefly introduce themselves to the audience (always surprising how many people don't do this).
- Welcome the audience, both in person and online to LSE and say which bit of LSE is hosting (if relevant) and where the event fits in a series (if relevant).
- Tell the audience in the theatre where the fire assembly point is for the building the event is taking place in. (See Evacuation procedures below for more info). Advise the audience in the venue to put their mobile phones on **silent** to avoid disrupting the event.
- Briefly set out the running order for the proceedings including highlighting the Q&A session and say when it is expected to end.
- Briefly run through how the Q&A will work – both for audience members in the theatre, and for the online audience, explaining all platform features (a script to follow directly can be found as an accompanying document, 'Example speaking notes'), including Q&A (attendees must type their questions, and the Chair will choose which to answer), screenshare, attendee view types, and anything else that may be relevant to the event.
- 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.
- Announce the event hashtag, 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. The challenge with hybrid events is ensuring audience members in the theatre and online both feel equally engaged. The chair will be required to select a balance of questions from both audiences and consider diversity when selecting audience members to ask questions. More details relating to this are covered below.

The Events team offer two options for the dealing with the online aspect of the Q&A, which is decided upon in advance of the event.

1) The departmental event manager will keep an eye on and choose questions to be forwarded on to the Chair through the chat (to avoid the Chair having to sift through all of questions). The Chair then chooses the ones they find most appropriate to read aloud to the speaker/s. For this option, we provide the chair with an iPad.

2) The departmental events manager would read out questions loud to the audience using a microphone in the venue, and the Chair then follows them up by repeating and directing them towards a certain panellist if appropriate. In this instance, there chair would not need a device on stage.

- At the start of the Q&A session it is recommended that the Chair reminds the online audience wishing to ask a question to type it in the Q&A function. They should also be reminded to state their name, affiliation and geographic location. Those in the theatre should be informed to raise their hand if they wish to ask a question. When indicated to do so, they should state their name and affiliation clearly. 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.
- It is important to remind those in the theatre wishing to ask a question to, just ask a question, rather than delivering 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 understood 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).
- Equality law guidelines recommend that the Chair reads out 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 diverse selection of the audience. Be proactive in encouraging these groups to ask questions (this is obviously challenging when dealing with an online audience). To encourage more women to ask questions best practice is to take the first question in the Q and A session from a woman as research appears to show this encourages more women to follow suit. The second question, where possible to do so, should be taken from a BAME member of the audience.

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

- Thank the audience (both online and in the theatre) for joining the event.
- If the event is part of a series tell the audience details of the next event.
- If there is a book signing to remind the audience of where that will be.
- Most importantly thank the speaker/s.
- If the speaker/s has security issues ask the audience in the theatre 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.

Note: in the Towers, CKK, SAW or Centre Buildings there is a 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. Events 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 those chairing events should ensure they are 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 academic department/centre. 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.

Colleagues in LSE Events are always happy to have a meeting with the Chair ahead of any event where disruption is expected to offer advice and support, please emails comms.events@lse.ac.uk.

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 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 their 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 for the speaker/s later in the event. It can also be useful to highlight the importance of debate, discussion and discourse, and that universities are about being open to listen to new ideas and concepts and discuss or indeed challenge them.

GUIDE TO CHAIRING PUBLIC MEETINGS IN THE EVENT OF DISORDER

Online Aspect:

The online aspect of hybrid events allow us to minimise disruption from the online audience, so there should be no situation in which this will apply. With LSE Live the audience are automatically unable to show their video, audio, or screenshare. All an attendee can do is watch the event and submit questions to the Q&A.

In the Theatre:

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.

Below is the official text you should use when issuing warnings, but before you move to this stage one option is to appeal to those disrupting remind them that in a university it is appropriate that we debate and discuss issues, rather than shout over people. You can remind the audience that there will be time for questions later in the event, and that they should also respect their fellow audience members.

Sometimes while this process is going on you might get other audience members indicating to any protestor/s to be quiet, and sometimes it can be sensible for the chair to just pause for a moment or two if it appears the audience are pressuring the protestor/s to stop.

If however the protestor/s are continuing to disrupt, please use the formal text below.

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 their 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

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

Everyone who organises, speaks at or attends an Event at LSE is required to 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.

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