

# Briefing and role of the Chair at KCLSU Student Activity Group Events

The purpose of this briefing is to provide essential, useful information and tips for those chairing KCLSU Student Activity Group Events.

The Chair should not be a speaker at the event or be expressing their own views on the subject matter of the event in a manner that would risk impacting on the freedom of speech of any of the panellists or attendees. The chair shall ensure that KCLSU's Safe Space Policy is adhered to by all and act in the event of a breach.

At controversial events the chairperson should be neutral and not someone whose own views mean they may not be seen or act as such. KCLSU or KCL may appoint the chairperson to ensure neutrality.

**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, you will usually undertake this with the event organiser. It is useful to:

- Arrange to meet the speaker(s) ideally around 15-20mins before the event. You should ensure the speaker is aware of KCLSU Safe Space policy and remind the speaker that free speech is protected within the law.
- Confirm the order of the event, i.e. introduction by chair, lecture, Q&A session and give speaker/s 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.

**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.
- Welcome the audience to the event and say who is hosting.
- Tell the audience where the fire assembly point is for the building the event is taking place in.
- 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.
- Provide some biographical information on the speaker/s: try to keep this short and avoid reading long CVs that speakers might have sent through.
- Advise the audience to put their mobile phones on silent to avoid disrupting the event. We do not ask the audience to switch off their phones.
- 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 say 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 3rd 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. If they start talking before they have the microphone, ask them to start again.
- 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 who 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.

**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 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.

### **Safe Space Policy**

On the night it is the responsibility of the chair to ensure the policy is enacted by all at the event. If the chair witnesses a breach of the policy, or a complaint is made about a speaker or a member of the audience the chair should act immediately, through a number of ways:

- Give the complainant a platform to express their complaint.
- Reiterate to speakers and those in attendance of the Safe Space policy and issue them with a warning that they can be asked to leave an event.
- If it continues ask any speakers, students or attendees complained against to leave.
- If appropriate work with any security put in place to remove speakers/ attendees.
- Make KCLSU aware of any complaint or incident that has violated the policy.

If KCLSU has assigned Safe Space Marshals to observe the event they are responsible for supporting the chair in upholding the policy. Where the chair needs support or fails to uphold the policy the Safe Space Marshal will take appropriate action.


### **Evacuation procedures**

All KCLSU and University operate a self-evacuation procedure within their spaces, except in the case of those who require Personal Evacuation Plans (PEEPS), which should be arranged in advance with KCLSU or the University. As Chair of the event you should make yourself aware of the location of the fire assembly point for the building, which can be found here - <https://internal.kcl.ac.uk/about/ps/safety/fire-building/build-fire-plan.aspx>

In the event of an emergency follow the fire exit routes, which are signposted in green and evacuate by the nearest fire exit, as directed by Fire Marshalls. Fire Evacuation controllers will ensure all buildings are clear.

### **Protests/disruptions and the role of the chair**

Serious protests or disruptions at KCLSU events are rare but we strongly advise those acting as 'chair' to be 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 KCLSU 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 the event organisers.

At “controversial” events it is not prudent to have someone in the chair whose own views mean they may not be seen as a neutral chairperson. If there are indications prior to the event that protests may occur or the speaker/s and/or topic are controversial, 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 a opportunity for questions to the speaker/s later in the event.