

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

Last updated August 2015.

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 the LSE Events office at conferences@lse.ac.uk.

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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. 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.

Public events held at LSE organised by LSE academic units or by the LSESU or LSESU societies should in principle always be chaired by an LSE academic as a representative of the School. This means someone fully familiar with the School and its values. It would include emeritus LSE academics and perhaps even lay Governors if they have relevant expertise. However visiting staff would be less appropriate as they might be unfamiliar with the School.

More essential event information can be found at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/communications/conferenceAndEventsOffice/Essential-Event-Information.aspx>

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. 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.
- ☐ 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 him or herself 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 event fits in series (if relevant).
- ☐ 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 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, 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.
- ☐ 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 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.

NEW 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

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/healthAndSafety/pdf/FireAssemblyPoints.pdf>

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 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.

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. The ground rules of public events which are listed below state that "the School exists for the pursuit of learning. Its fundamental purpose can be achieved only if its members, and visitors to it, can work and conduct their business peacefully in conditions which permit freedom of thought and expression within a framework of respect for the rights of other persons".

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 or offensive 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 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 his 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.

For more information, see the LSE Code of Practice on Free Speech.

Entrance to the School's premises is conditional on acceptance of the following

The School exists for the pursuit of learning. Its fundamental purpose can be achieved only if its members, and visitors to it, can work and conduct their business peacefully in conditions which permit freedom of thought and expression within a framework of respect for the rights of other persons.

1 All persons entering the premises must abide by the School's Code of Practice on Free Speech. That Code is a legal requirement, under Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986. It requires everyone attending a meeting at LSE, **whether members of the School or not**, to observe good order. Good order includes allowing

speaker(s) to be heard clearly. Any conduct which denies a speaker a hearing, including interference with access to or egress from the meeting, or interference with the conduct of the meeting, is contrary to the Code.

1 In light of the above the following applies:

- (a) No articles such as flags, placards or other items which could be used as offensive weapons are permitted on the premises
- (b) The throwing of any object within the premises is forbidden
- (c) The use of foul and abusive language, chanting or racial abuse towards any person is forbidden, as is unnecessary noise or behaviour likely to cause confusion or annoyance
- (d) Banners, placards, signs or other visible representations which are threatening, abusive or insulting and which may cause any person alarm or distress may not be displayed on the premises
- (e) In the Old Theatre and the Peacock Theatre unauthorised personnel are forbidden from entering the stage area
- (f) Anyone who fails to comply with instructions from a steward or other authorised agent of the School will be asked to leave the premises

3 The School reserves the right of admission to its premises

4 The School reserves the right to change advertised events without notice or liability

5 If an event is held off the record, then it is not permitted to bring recording equipment (either audio or video) or cameras into the event venue.