

SURHUL Safe Space Policy

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7. **Introduction**

1.1 As a Students’ Union we represent all of our students and endeavour to ensure their time at university is as enjoyable and rewarding as possible.

1.2 In order to do this, many Students’ Unions have created their own Safe Space policies inspired by the NUS. These policies apply to all of their events, spaces, activities and services. They are in line with the protected characteristics from the Equality Act 2010 and the Unions’ own policies surrounding Equality and Diversity.

1.3 SURHUL is committed to creating a safe, tolerant and inclusive environment so that all students are able to participate in Union events, activities and affairs that are free from bullying, harassment, intimidation, aggressive, violent, oppressive and discriminatory behaviour.

1.4 This policy seeks to enable equal participation by challenging oppressive and discriminatory behaviour, and creating safe spaces.

1.5 This policy serves to:

1. Define Safe Space, and who it affects (our members)
2. Set out SURHUL’s commitment to Safe Spaces, and to guarantee members that concerns around Safe Space will be taken seriously
3. Set out how and where the responsibility lies so that Safe Space concerns can be raised and resolved
4. Provide guidance on how to run a Safe Space

**2. What is a Safe Space?**

2.1 Our Safe Space policy means that every member should feel welcome to participate in empowering, non-judgemental and non-threatening discussions, activities, services and events. Members should be free from intimidation, harassment and the deliberate, or negligent, creation of unsafe or unwelcoming conditions.

2.2 The Equality & Diversity Schedule 6 of our Constitution already outlines our commitment to “...the elimination of all forms of discrimination and harassment within its organisation, both in relation to its members and guests and in the provision of its service. The Union will strive to achieve ... equality of opportunity for all in terms of its members and guests and advancement within the Union…”

2.3 All students should be free from prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, marital or maternity/paternity status, race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity, trans status, ideology, culture, socio-economic status or any other form of distinction.

2.4 Safe Space does not mean “no debate” - it means discussing issues so that people don’t feel threatened or unsafe. Upholding a safe space policy means that all students can have their say without intimidation. SURHUL believes strongly in the right to free speech, but acknowledges that this shouldn’t be at the detriment to the rights of other individuals and groups. Intention to incite hatred is never acceptable.

2.5 Having a Safe Space policy suggests that there will be incidents where people do not feel safe. It is important to recognise that there will be limitations, and that the policy on its own is no guarantee to automatically creating a Safe Space. All members are covered by this policy is therefore encouraged to be mindful of the barriers members might face around raising issues, and that discrimination can occur whenever it is not consciously challenged.

**3. Responsibilities**

3.1 This policy is applicable to the whole student community, whether an individual or a member within a group including but not limited to; Students’ Union societies and sports clubs, volunteering projects, media outlets, councils, forums, training, fixtures, rehearsals, productions, classes and public social media.

3.2 This policy applies to all members. SU staff are mandated to internal staff policies and procedures, specifically “Dignity at Work” and “Equality & Diversity”.

3.3 Affiliated organisations, external partners, companies and contractors will also be expected to adhere to this policy. They will be asked to sign a copy of this policy by our Marketing Department.

3.4 Everyone has a responsibility to challenge unacceptable conduct, and to try to respond constructively when challenged.

3.5 Any person in a SURHUL space or attending a SURHUL event is accountable for their own language and behaviour. If behaviour is reported that is not in accordance with this policy, members may be asked to leave immediately by staff, a member of the executive committee, the president, event organiser or chair.

3.6 Equality & Diversity Schedule Six of the constitution cites all members’ responsibility to “Promote equality and diversity. Ensure that behaviour doesn’t amount to discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation in any way.”

3.7 Student Activities Club and Society Presidents and Executive Officers will receive specific training on SURHUL Safe Space policy at either Student Activities Conference or Executive Officer Training. Presidents will sign this policy on behalf of their club or society along with their constitution in July, alongside the Co-President Societies & Media and Co-President Sports & Development. The Presidents have the responsibility to ensure this policy is enacted at all of their events, and if needs be may ask individuals to leave. If Presidents are not in attendance, the lead committee member should take responsibility.

3.8 The event organiser is responsible for upholding the Safe Space policy at any event, and for informing speakers of the policy beforehand. If the event is a discussion or debate panel, the responsibility for maintaining a Safe Space lies with the event organiser and/or the chair of the discussion.

**4. Communication**

4.1 Every member of the SU is responsible for familiarising themselves with this policy.

4.2 The Students’ Union will highlight this policy to students and others through:

1. Publication of the policy on the Students’ Union website
2. Training and Information provided for Presidents, Staff, Executive Officers and Sabbatical Officers
3. An announcement at the start of each democratic meeting (including Councils and General Meetings) and debates or discussions. See 4.2.
4. Adding Safe Space training to existing training sessions, such as Welcome Week volunteers or Course Rep Training.
5. Any other appropriate method

4.3 The Union Chair should be fluent in this policy and able to act on it. The Union will facilitate as much training as is needed in order to make this possible.

4.2 Suggestion of what is to be said before meetings and events, and on social media:

*“Student’s Union Royal Holloway has a Safe Space policy. This means that every member should feel welcome to participate in an empowering, non-judgemental and non-threatening space. By being in this space, you are agreeing to abide by this policy.*

*If you feel that this Safe Space policy has been breached, please bring this to the attention of [President/Executive Officer/Chair/Event Organiser] who will treat it seriously and confidentially. A full copy of the policy is available on the Students’ Union website (link)”*

**5. What to do in a breach of Safe Space policy**

5.1 Those raising the issue: If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, raise it with the individuals causing discomfort (either now or later) if you feel able to. If the matter is still not resolved, raise it with the person responsible for the event or running it (either now or later).

5.2 Those resolving an issue: Someone has told you that they have been made to feel unsafe or uncomfortable - raise it with the individual(s) causing the discomfort. Ask them to change their behaviour or leave “the space”.

5.3 If the matter is still not resolved, or individuals wish to pursue it further they should raise it as a complaint through SURHUL’s complaints procedure with the President (Education and Campaigns).

5.4 The chair, event organiser, President, member of SURHUL staff or Executive Officer can immediately act upon a complaint through a number of ways including:

1. Giving the complainant a platform to express their complaint.
2. Reiterate to speakers and those in attendance of the event the Safe Space policy and issue them with a warning that they can be asked to leave an event.
3. Talk to the individual to make them aware of how they are breaching the safe spaces core function and issue them with a warning that they can be asked to leave an event.
4. Ask any student or speaker complained against to leave “the space”.
5. Make SURHUL aware of any complaint or incident that has violated the policy.

5.5 Breach of the Safe Space policy can result in disciplinary procedures, as outlined in Regulation F. Potential consequences vary depending on the severity of the incident.

**6. A Guide for Facilitating Safe Spaces**

6.1 Language

* Understand that language can make others feel uncomfortable and create an intimidating space. For example using the word “gay” as something bad.
* As members of a diverse community it’s important that we make an effort to educate ourselves and learn from others. Often there is a lack of awareness around the use of certain terms, so the use isn’t malicious.
* Remind your members that the Safe Space policy applies to all spaces. Make sure that if your members are using terms that make someone feel uncomfortable, you all make an effort to stop using the term.
* If people are still using the term, be sure to give them a warning and a chance to correct their behaviour. If it continues however, it should be dealt with.

6.2 Running Events: External Speakers

*Before the event*

* Ensure that if the debate is likely to be contentious you have a balanced panel
* Email your speakers with the Safe Space policy and ask them to read it through
* Put a statement about the Safe Space and a link on the Facebook Event / your website
* If it is a self-defining space, make it clear on the event beforehand

*During the Event*

* Get the Chair to mention the Safe Space policy at the start of the event
* Run through who Safe Space breaches should be brought to (usually event organiser / chair / president) and that people may be asked to leave if they violate it.
* If a discussion, make sure the Chair balances the debate by inviting other views, and taking questions/points from around the room.
* Get the Chair to explain “Content Warnings” (see below) if topics will refer to upsetting content

6.3 Running Events: Socials

* Even if your club or society are meeting off campus, the safe space policy still applies. Make sure the policy in linked to the Facebook / Website event page.
* Socials are a lot more relaxed, and so keeping the Safe Space policy may be a little trickier - in particular students who may be offended might be more reluctant to bring it up. Keep this in mind and remind people that things can be brought up at the time or later.

6.4 Social Media (Facebook etc)

*Moderation:*

* Assign at least one moderator responsible for monitoring comments. This can be anyone, but should be appointed promptly. The name of the online moderator should be sent to the Marketing department and the Sabbatical Officer team.
* The moderator should aim to be impartial and will have to manage difficult situations when they arise. Moderators can seek support from the Marketing Coordinator in charge of Social Media and any one of the Sabbatical Officer Team.
* Post the Safe Space policy in the description with a link to the online document in the group information or page information. It applies to both.
* Make it clear to the members of the group how Safe Space online will be upheld - for example if someone has violated the Safe Space policy they will be issued with a warning, and after that removed from the group.
* In order to make the running of the group transparent, all administrative actions upon members of the group should be noted publicly in the interests of letting members know that something is being done about unacceptable behaviour. This must be done sensitively in order to avoid victimisation.

*Tips on interacting in a Safe Space online*

* Tone can be easily misinterpreted. Before assuming the worst of a comment, seek clarification and generally err on the side of good faith until clarified.
* Several people arguing forcefully or at length against another person can seem intimidating or alienating - consider this when commenting.
* If you are posting a comment or article that refers to upsetting things such as abuse, self-harm, rape or eating disorders (not an exhaustive list) post a “Content Warning” at the top. This helps to prevent people who have a strong response (such as post-traumatic flashbacks) to certain subjects encountering them unaware.
* You can use content warnings in debates offline as well, just make sure people are given the chance to leave the room if they want to before continuing, and that people are able to do so without any questions asked or comments made. Anyone drawing attention to this should be issued with a warning, or if more severe, asked to leave also.