



Help I'm an artist and I'm being cancelled!

Background

In 21st century Britain, performing artists are at risk of being cancelled for expressing perfectly lawful, legitimate beliefs, such as a belief in the biological reality of sex.

The tactics used to cancel artists range from full blown attacks on social media to more subtle setbacks such as lost opportunities, quiet rejections or the withdrawal of work and funding.

The purpose of these 'FAQs' is to provide FITA and FSU members with some general guidance.

Funding

I want to make a gender critical (or race-related) piece of theatre, but I'm worried I won't get funding. What should I do?

Make sure you fully understand the Terms of Reference for the funding on offer. While funding organisations are not allowed to discriminate against individuals based on their protected philosophical beliefs, they are permitted to exercise a significant amount of discretion in deciding what to support. You should familiarise yourself, therefore, with any policies published on the sponsor's website, especially those relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the use of social media. This will help you understand the public stance of the potential sponsor on gender or race issues. The discretion of the potential sponsor to reject your work will vary according to the organisation type:

- A private business or individual will have a large amount of autonomy on how to disburse funds and is only required to operate within the law and (in the case of a private company) its Articles of Association.
- A registered charity must operate in accordance with its [Charitable Objects](#) and you should familiarise yourself with these. You can search the register of charities [here](#).
- Certain publicly-funded organisations will be required to comply with the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) ('PSED'). One of the aims of the PSED is to "put an end to unlawful behaviour that is banned by the Equality Act 2010". Following the 2021 Maya Forstater ruling, this unlawful behaviour would include penalising someone for expressing gender-critical beliefs.



In general, it is worth researching any public statements made by a sponsor that relate to the subject-matter of your work, as well as the types of work they've sponsored in the past.

In your application, you should be honest about the nature of your intended piece of work and the ways in which you believe it meets the funding criteria. Where you think there's a risk your work might conflict with the 'values' of the sponsor, it may help your application to be up-front about this and explain in a matter of fact way why you believe that your work has merit and doesn't in fact conflict with their values. It is important not to be unnecessarily confrontational.

Finally, the funding application stage is an opportunity to be as clear as possible about your work in order to avoid ambiguity later should you be asked to change it in any way. If you've been up front about what it is you'll be doing, it will be harder for the sponsor to ask you to change it in response to pressure from some of their stakeholders or social media users.

Venues

What is the best way to manage my relationship with a venue, such as a theatre?

When it comes to finding and booking a venue, you should make sure there's a signed contract between you and the venue provider as early in the process as possible. This should set out the duties and responsibilities of both parties and will be your main fallback should anything go wrong down the track. When it comes to potential cancellation, the contract should outline costs payable (or refundable) and the circumstances in which compensation may be due to you. You should try to pay the cost of hiring the venue up front and in full since that will make it harder for the venue to cancel.

If activists ask a venue to cancel you, you should open a dialogue with the venue to understand how best to manage the situation. This will always be easier if there's a signed contract between you and the venue and you've at least paid the deposit. You should also familiarise yourself with any public statements made by the venue on the importance of freedom of expression that you can make reference to in your correspondence with them.

If you're concerned more generally about 'woke programming' at certain venues and the way in which this is leading to the suppression of free expression and/or censorship, this is usually best challenged through a campaigning organisation, such as FITA or the FSU.



Cancelled opportunities

What can I do if an offer to exhibit or speak is cancelled or if a gallery reneges on a promise to exhibit my work?

Situations like these arise regularly and are always easiest to manage when you already have a signed contract between you and the venue (see the answer to the previous question). If there is an attempt to cancel your booking, you should reach out to the FSU straight away before contacting the venue or engaging with any of the people putting pressure on the venue to cancel the booking. If you're not already a member, you should join.

When you approach the FSU, it would be helpful to have compiled all the facts so you can pass them on to your case officer. Some initial cancellations may take place for perfectly innocent reasons (such as the temporary closure of a venue) or due to a simple misunderstanding. In these circumstances, it may be possible to resolve the situation quickly and simply.

In the early stages of seeking a resolution it is generally not advisable to publicise the situation on social media as this can lead to the venue digging in. It may also compromise your position if you need to act more formally (up to and including taking legal action) later down the track. Don't say anything in public without first running it past the FSU.

Blacklisting and/or Silent Cancellations

Is there any way for me to find out whether I have been blacklisted or silently cancelled?

Where you believe activists may have persuaded a venue to cancel a booking, or that you may have been 'blacklisted', then it may be worth submitting a [Subject Access Request](#). This requires an organisation to release to you any copies of your personal information they may be storing. If you have been named in internal conversations via email or in the minutes of meetings, this should be revealed by a SAR. The FSU can help with this if you're a member.

Where a public organisation may be involved in your cancellation, then an alternative is to submit a Freedom of Information (Fol) request. This can be used to request access to all recorded information held by public authorities. This includes emails, letters, computer files, printed documents and audio and video recordings, but does not extend to information that is unrecorded. The Free Speech Union has published an [informative guide](#) for its members on how to submit an Fol request.



Harassment & Social Media

What should I do if I find myself being harassed on social media?

If you express contentious views on social media then some form of negative reaction is almost inevitable – and you should be prepared for this. The solution is sometimes as simple as developing a ‘thick skin’ and being careful in the way that you curate your social media following (including discerning use of the ‘block’ function and installing software that deletes all posts more than a week old).

While the use of anonymous accounts and/or online pseudonyms is often used to provide a layer of protection on social media, there is no such thing as complete anonymity in the virtual world. For this reason, it can be helpful to have more than one account with a given social media provider (where the terms and conditions allow it) so that if one account becomes unusable then you have a back-up.

On occasion, you may need to avail yourself of the platform’s complaints process. Unfortunately, most social media sites now take decisions in an algorithmic fashion, which means that it can be difficult or impossible to reach a human being. However, it’s normally worth persevering with the appeals process.

In situations where any hostility you are experiencing escalates to release of your personal details (doxing), bullying or serious intimidation, then you should contact the police.

Finally, it’s worth bearing in mind that even messages posted in private chat groups, such as in a WhatsApp group, can be screenshotted and posted on X or Facebook. If you’re a performing artist, it’s generally inadvisable to post any opinions, even in a private chat group, that wouldn’t be out of place on the editorial pages of a national newspaper.

Protecting my Reputation

What is defamation and what should I do if my reputation is being harmed?

Defamation is a spoken or written statement by an individual or business that turns out to be false but is harmful to your reputation. There are two types of defamation: Slander – spoken words or comments. Libel or written defamation – words that are published in writing or broadcast.

Where you believe that you’ve been (or are being) defamed, you may wish to seek legal redress. You should be aware, though, that defamation cases generally carry considerable risk and uncertainty, with legal costs often reaching hundreds of



thousands of pounds – or more. A more practical alternative is to point out the factual error to the other party and ask them to correct their inaccuracy and/or apologise for the mistake. If they refuse, you can make a complaint with IPSO, the independent press regulator, or IMPRESS, depending on whether the publication is a member of either.

The Free Speech Union does not, in general, pursue defamation cases on behalf of its members, though we are aware of reputable lawyers who specialise in this area that we can put our members in touch with.

Physical Security

How should I manage threats to my physical security at a venue or during a performance?

When it comes to your physical security at a venue, the key point is to be prepared and to have a plan ready in case the feared disruption takes place during a performance (or similar). Most experienced venues will be aware of the risks and should be more than willing to work with you to mitigate them, up to and including the hiring of additional security.

It is not always easy to distinguish between hoaxes and legitimate threats. If you or the venue are concerned about the nature or scale of any threat, it is essential to speak to the police.

Therapy and health impacts

What should I do if my mental wellbeing is suffering as a result of cancellation?

Both FITA and the FSU are able to point members towards professionals who will be able to provide confidential help and advice to artists and creatives whose mental health may be suffering as a result of being cancelled.