

Lit and Deb and David Irving

The proposal to invite David Irving to the Literary and Debating Society was comprehensively assessed during the academic year 2008/09. There was a detailed review by the Vice-President for Physical Resources, the Director of Physical Resources and the Head of Security, with advice from the Health and Safety Office. This review included consideration of the reaction to the proposal on various websites and consultation with security personnel with relevant experience in other universities. On the basis of this review, the Vice-President for Physical Resources informed the relevant officers of Lit and Deb that, in his capacity as Director of Safety, he was unable to permit use of the University's facilities for the proposed debate on the grounds that there would be an unacceptable risk to the safety and well-being of security staff, students and others who might be in attendance.

During the period of this assessment, the University community's commitment to the principle of free speech was amply demonstrated by the comprehensive and constructive efforts undertaken to ensure that guests invited to the campus would not be intimidated and would be allowed to contribute to debate on important social issues. These efforts were necessary because of incidents taking place on campus in late 2008 and early 2009 when Government ministers and a former Taoiseach were harassed. Through close cooperation between the security staff and the Head of Security, officers of the Lit and Deb, and relevant members of the University's senior management, subsequent visits passed off peacefully without any denial of the right to protest.

The University has recently been asked for its assessment of the possible use of video conferencing facilities on the campus to allow David Irving's participation in a debate. Whilst this would almost certainly reduce the risk of physical confrontation or damage to property on the campus considerably, the assessment remained that the level of risk was still significant and unacceptable.

Keith Warnock
Vice-President for Capital Projects/Physical Resources

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