

This guidance is practical. It reflects patterns identified in Freedom in the Arts research across artists, venues and intermediaries.

Each situation will differ. Early, calm and documented action is usually more effective than public reaction. This is not legal advice.

1. I have heard I may be cancelled.
What should I do immediately?

Do three things:

1. **Do not respond publicly.**
2. **Preserve evidence.**
3. **Clarify your contractual position.**

Save emails. Screenshot messages. Keep records of conversations.

If a discussion happens verbally, follow up with a short written confirmation:

“Further to our conversation today, I understand you are considering withdrawing the booking. Please confirm this in writing.”

Creating a record is often the single most important step.

2. The organiser says there are “concerns”.
What does that mean?

Ask for clarity.

Request:

- What specifically is the concern?
- Who has raised it?
- Is this a formal complaint?
- Which policy is being relied upon?
- Is there a safeguarding or security issue?
- Has a risk assessment been conducted?

Avoid debating the politics. Focus on process.

Organisations often hesitate when required to formalise vague objections.

3. Can they cancel me if I have a contract?

It depends on the terms.

Review:

- Termination clauses
- Morals clauses
- Force majeure
- Payment provisions
- Notice requirements

If cancellation is proposed, ask:

- Which clause is being invoked?
- Is notice being given in accordance with the contract?
- Is payment still due?

Do not accept informal withdrawal where a written agreement exists.

4. What if I do not have a contract?

You are more vulnerable.

Immediately:

- Confirm booking terms in writing.
- Confirm fee, date and scope.
- Request written clarification if cancellation is proposed.

Proceeding on goodwill alone increases risk.

5. Pressure is coming from staff or other artists.
What should I do?

Do not escalate personal conflict.

Instead:

- Ask whether this is a formal organisational decision.
- Request communication from the senior decision-maker.
- Keep correspondence professional and written.

In several documented cases, junior staff or artists were used to communicate exclusions informally. Insist on clarity from those with authority.

6. Should I issue a public statement?

Only after you understand:

- Your contractual position
- The organiser’s formal position
- Whether legal advice is needed

Public escalation can harden positions and reduce the possibility of resolution.

In many cases, quiet insistence on process is more effective than public argument.

7. Can I be cancelled for lawful beliefs?

Certain beliefs are protected under the Equality Act. However, decisions are often framed as reputational or safeguarding concerns rather than belief-based exclusion.

Ask:

- Is my belief lawful?
- Has due process been followed?
- Has the organisation treated others differently?
- Is there evidence of discriminatory treatment?

If identity or protected belief appears central to the decision, seek legal advice promptly.

8. They want me to amend or withdraw my work.
What should I do?

Request written clarification.

Ask:

- Is this a contractual requirement?
- Is payment conditional on amendment?
- Is this a safeguarding issue?
- Which clause allows this request?

If the amendment alters the substance of the work, you are entitled to reconsider whether the original agreement stands.

Do not agree verbally.

Harassment and Security: Practical Guidance

Not all criticism is a security issue. Distinguish between:

- Organised criticism or campaigning
- Harassment
- Credible threats

Your response should be proportionate.

Immediate Practical Steps

1. **Preserve evidence.**
Screenshot posts, emails, direct messages and comments. Record usernames, timestamps and URLs.
2. **Do not engage directly.**
Public exchanges can escalate matters and complicate later action.
3. **Review your digital security.**
 - Enable two-factor authentication
 - Remove personal contact details where possible
 - Tighten privacy settings
4. **Inform the organiser or venue** if an event may be affected.

Security Escalation Ladder

Level 1: Criticism or Campaigning

- No direct threats
- Disagreement or calls for cancellation

Action: Monitor. Document. Do not escalate.

Level 2: Harassment

- Repeated hostile messages
- Attempts to intimidate
- Doxing (publication of personal details)

Action:

- Preserve evidence
- Inform organiser
- Consider reporting to platform
- Seek advice if harassment is persistent

Level 3: Credible Threats

- Threats of violence
- Threats to your home or family
- Stalking behaviour

- Explicit intimidation

Action:

- Contact the police
 - **999** if immediate danger
 - **101** for non-emergency reporting
- Request a crime reference number
- Inform organiser that a report has been made
- Ask whether a formal risk assessment has been undertaken

If Threats Are Cited as Grounds for Cancellation

Ask:

- Has a formal risk assessment been completed?
- Have proportionate mitigation measures been considered?
 - Security staff
 - Ticketing controls
 - Police liaison
- Is cancellation proportionate to the assessed risk?

In several documented cases, events proceeded safely where mitigation was implemented.

Cancellation should not be the default response to unassessed threats.

Can I find out if I've been blacklisted?

In some cases, you may be able to uncover internal discussions about you by using legal transparency rights. The two most important tools are:

- **Subject Access Requests (SARs)**
- **Freedom of Information (FOI) requests**

They serve different purposes and apply in different situations.

Subject Access Requests (SARs)

A Subject Access Request is a legal right under UK data protection law that allows you to ask an organisation for **all personal data it holds about you**.

This may include:

- Emails mentioning you
- Internal correspondence
- Meeting notes referring to you
- Complaint records
- Risk assessments involving you

A SAR can often reveal whether decisions about cancellation were influenced by internal discussions or external pressure.

Legally:

- Any organisation holding your personal data must respond
- This includes private venues, universities, charities and companies
- Requests are usually free
- Organisations typically have **one month to respond**

A SAR only covers **your personal data**, not general organisational information.

Official guidance:

Make a subject access request (ICO guidance)

A SAR is especially useful where:

- Decisions appear informal or undocumented
- You suspect reputational concerns influenced outcomes
- You want to understand how decisions were made internally

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

A Freedom of Information request is different. It allows you to request **recorded information held by public authorities**, not just personal data.

FOI applies to:

- Government departments
- Local councils
- Publicly funded theatres, museums and universities
- NHS bodies
- Police and public agencies

FOI requests can uncover:

- Internal communications
- Policy discussions
- Risk assessments
- Correspondence between organisations

Requests must be made in writing and authorities usually must respond within **20 working days**.

Official guidance:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/make-a-subject-access-request/>

<https://www.gov.uk/make-a-freedom-of-information-request/how-to-make-an-foi-request>

Key Differences Between SAR and FOI

SAR	FOI
Covers your personal data	Covers general recorded information
Applies to any organisation holding your data	Applies only to public authorities
Focuses on information about you	Can cover policies, emails and decisions
Based on data protection law	Based on transparency law

When Each Is Most Useful

Use a **SAR** when:

- You want to see internal emails discussing you
- You suspect informal decision making

- You want to understand how you were characterised

Use an **FOI** request when:

- A public body may have cancelled or excluded you
- You want policies, risk assessments or correspondence
- You want evidence of external lobbying or pressure

In complex cases, both tools may be used together.

Practical Tip

When making requests:

- Be specific about dates and issues
- Request particular email exchanges where possible
- Keep a record of submission dates

This increases the likelihood of receiving useful information.

Templates – Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests

Below are simple templates that can be adapted to your situation. You do not need legal language – clarity and specificity are more important.

Template – Subject Access Request (SAR)

Use this when requesting personal data held about you by a venue, funder, employer or other organisation.

Subject line:

Subject Access Request – [Your Name]

Email wording:

Dear [Organisation Name],

I am writing to make a Subject Access Request under UK data protection law.

Please provide copies of all personal data you hold about me, including but not limited to:

- Emails in which I am named or discussed
- Internal correspondence referring to me
- Meeting notes or minutes mentioning me
- Complaint records involving me
- Risk assessments relating to any event, booking or engagement involving me

For clarity, my request covers information held between: [Insert date range if known]

Please provide the information in electronic format.

If you require any further information to process this request, please let me know as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,
[Your Name]

Practical tips:

- Include any previous names or aliases if relevant
- Provide event dates to help locate records
- Be specific but not overly narrow

Template – Freedom of Information (FOI) Request

Use this when requesting information from public authorities such as councils, universities or publicly funded venues.

Subject line:

Freedom of Information Request – [Your Name]

Email wording:

Dear [Public Authority Name],

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act.

Please provide copies of recorded information relating to:

- Internal communications discussing [your name or event]
- Any complaints received concerning [your name or event]
- Risk assessments conducted regarding the proposed event or performance
- Correspondence with external organisations or individuals relating to cancellation or review of the event

Please provide information covering the period:
[Insert date range]

I would prefer to receive this information electronically.

If any part of this request is unclear, please contact me so it can be refined.

Yours sincerely,
[Your Name]

Official Guidance Links

Subject Access Requests:
<https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/make-a-subject-access-request/>

Freedom of Information Requests:
<https://www.gov.uk/make-a-freedom-of-information-request>

Additional Practical Advice

When making requests:

- Keep your wording neutral and factual
- Avoid emotional or argumentative language
- Record the date you send the request
- Follow up politely if deadlines pass

Using these tools often shifts situations from informal decision making to formal accountability.

Are there countries where it is illegal to perform certain works or views?

Yes. In some jurisdictions laws restrict artistic expression involving political criticism, religion, sexuality, national security or cultural sensitivities.

Risks can include:

- Censorship or refusal of performance licences
- Visa denial or entry refusal
- Fines or criminal liability
- Restrictions on recording, broadcasting or publicity

These restrictions vary widely and may change quickly in response to political events.

How to Check Restrictions Before Performing

Before accepting an international engagement, you should review:

- Local censorship laws
- Visa conditions for performers
- Cultural or religious restrictions
- Contractual liability with promoters
- Insurance coverage for legal risks

Official UK Government Travel and Legal Guidance

The most reliable starting point is the UK government's country guidance, which includes information on local laws affecting speech, performances and public behaviour.

Check country specific legal risks here:
<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

Each country page includes sections on:

- Local laws and customs
- Entry requirements
- Safety and legal risks
- Restrictions affecting artists and media

Additional Specialist Sources

For detailed information on artistic freedom restrictions worldwide:

Index campaigns internationally:
<https://www.indexoncensorship.org/>

Mimeta's report highlights deep concerns:
<https://www.mimeta.org/mimeta-work/2026/2/4/january-2026-artistic-censorship-analysis>

Freemuse – global monitoring of artistic censorship:
<https://freemuse.org>

PEN International – freedom of expression reports:
<https://pen-international.org>

These organisations track laws, arrests and censorship affecting artists worldwide.

Practical Tip

If a country has:

- Strict blasphemy laws
- Broad national security offences
- Laws restricting political speech
- Heavy media censorship

You should seek legal advice before performing or touring there.

Can I be asked to sign or compelled to sign a political statement as a condition of performing?

Artists are sometimes asked to sign statements of values, codes of conduct or political declarations linked to an event, venue or funder.

Whether this is lawful depends on **who is making the requirement, what the statement contains and the legal context.**

State Compulsion vs Private Requirements

In most democratic legal systems, including the UK:

The state cannot compel political speech.

Public authorities generally cannot require individuals to express political views or endorse ideological positions as a condition of participation.

This principle is linked to freedom of expression, which includes the right not to express views.

However:

Private organisations may impose contractual conditions.

Venues, promoters or funders may require compliance with policies, codes of conduct or values statements as part of a voluntary agreement.

The key distinction is between:

- Legal compulsion by the state – generally prohibited
- Contractual conditions imposed by private parties – often lawful

When Requirements May Raise Legal Concerns

A requirement may become problematic where it:

- Compels endorsement of a specific political belief
- Penalises refusal based on protected philosophical beliefs
- Is imposed by a public authority
- Appears discriminatory in application
- Was not disclosed before agreement

In the UK, certain beliefs may be protected under equality law. Compelling endorsement of opposing views could potentially raise discrimination issues.

Public Bodies and Legal Duties

Where a requirement is imposed by a **publicly funded organisation**, additional legal duties may apply.

Public bodies must generally:

- Respect freedom of expression rights
- Avoid unlawful discrimination
- Act proportionately and fairly

In these contexts, mandatory political declarations may face stronger legal scrutiny.

Common Real-World Situations

Artists may encounter requests such as:

- Signing “values statements” linked to institutional policies
- Publicly endorsing campaigns connected to events
- Agreeing to political pledges or boycotts
- Adopting required language or terminology

Some requests are routine administrative matters, while others may involve ideological endorsement.

Practical Steps if Asked to Sign

If asked to sign a political or ideological statement:

Request the requirement in writing.

Clarify whether it is mandatory or optional.

Check your contract.

Determine whether compliance is required.

Ask how refusal would affect participation.

Clarify whether consequences are formal or informal.

Seek advice if concerned.

This may include legal advice or professional support.

Possible Options

Depending on the circumstances, artists may choose to:

- Sign without objection
- Request clarification or modification
- Provide a neutral statement
- Decline to sign
- Withdraw from the engagement

The appropriate response will depend on legal risk, contractual obligations and personal considerations.

Key Principle

You cannot normally be **legally compelled by the state** to express political views.

However, you may face **contractual or reputational pressure** from private organisations, and these situations often require careful, documented and proportionate responses.

UK Legal Context – Freedom of Expression and Compelled Speech

In the United Kingdom, several legal principles are relevant when artists are asked to sign political or ideological statements.

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is protected under the **Human Rights Act 1998**, which incorporates Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

This protection includes:

- The right to express opinions
- The right to receive information
- The right not to express views

Public authorities must respect this right unless restrictions are lawful, necessary and proportionate.

This means public bodies generally cannot require individuals to endorse political positions as a condition of participation.

Protected Beliefs under Equality Law

The **Equality Act 2010** protects certain philosophical beliefs. To qualify, a belief must typically be:

- Genuinely held
- Concerned with a serious aspect of human life
- Coherent and worthy of respect in a democratic society

Where a belief is protected, it may be unlawful for an organisation to:

- Penalise someone for holding that belief
- Require them to express opposing views
- Treat them less favourably because of refusal

However, equality law does not prevent organisations from setting neutral policies applied fairly.

Public vs Private Organisations

Legal protections differ depending on the type of organisation:

Public bodies – must comply with human rights law and equality duties.

Private organisations – generally have greater freedom to set contractual conditions, provided they do not discriminate unlawfully.

Key Practical Point

In most cases:

- The law protects you from being compelled by the state to express political views.
- It does not prevent private organisations from imposing contractual conditions, although these may still be challengeable in some circumstances.