



Supporting Academic Societies at UWS

ACADEMIC STAFF GUIDE



SUPPORTING ACADEMIC SOCIETIES AT UWS

Academic Staff Guide



INTRODUCTION

Supporting societies is one of the main ways that the Students' Union brings students together to make friends, represent themselves and make the most of their university experience.

Recent years have seen consistent growth in the number of societies and activities they have organised.

- In 2025/26 there were 2018 society memberships, up from 1301 in 2024/25
- There were 65 active societies in 2025/26, compared to 43 in 2024/25
- The start of the 2025/26 saw 28 student-led welcome events hosted with 1429 attendees, an increase from 21 welcome events with 713 attendees in 2024/25

One of the key ways of building on this progress is through the development of academic societies across the UWS campuses.

The Students' Union aims to work in partnership with academic staff to facilitate the creation and development of academic societies.

The purpose of this guide is to explain how this can be achieved.

This guide, along with staff guidance for Students' Union representation and advice can be found on our website:

<https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/union/uwsstaffguidance/>

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WHAT ARE STUDENT SOCIETIES?

UWS Students' Union societies are student-led groups, formed and run by students, which bring together people who have a shared interest or identity.

- They can be formed at any time. Only three students are needed to officially set up a society through the Students' Union.
- Full details can be found here:
 - **Students' Union website:** <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/societies/>
 - **Societies Handbook:** <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/societies/guidance/>

WHY ARE ACADEMIC SOCIETIES IMPORTANT?

"It feels like I have an extended family who truly know what I am going through and can share thoughts and ideas on our course."

The aims of existing academic societies have focused on:

- Helping students socialise and make friends
- Peer support across different year groups
- Supporting their academic performance and career development opportunities

Societies with an active social aspect are more successful when it comes to achieving other aims. This can come in the form of:

- Social events
- Casual on campus catch ups
- Social media

"I was terrified... I was like, oh my goodness, what have I done. Very apprehensive"

Starting a university course can be a scary, intimidating and confusing experience. An academic society can provide new students with a peer support group to make them feel welcomed and reassured:

"It brings people together. Makes you have friends for life. Everyone's there to help each other. We're all in it together"

When interviewed for [society news stories](#), students have spoken about how their society has helped them with both their academic work and their career plans for once they graduate:

"It's helped me a lot with my confidence. When I came into university I wasn't very confident, I was pretty shy and I didn't really know anybody. Through my society I've been able to meet new people. It has really helped my university experience. I feel a lot less lonely. I feel more confident to talk to people in group work activities."

"It's helped with job interviews. I've found that running my society helps me answer every single question that employers can ask me. People are always interested to hear about it. It's definitely a conversation starter."

For a more in depth look at academic societies and the impact they can have, read our report on the **UWS Midwifery Society**:
[Understanding and sharing the success of the UWS Midwifery Society](#)

WHAT DOES THE STUDENTS' UNION DO TO SUPPORT SOCIETIES?

Society set up and committee training

- Every society committee completes a one hour training session with the Societies & Engagement Team Leader. This includes creating a Society Action Plan for the academic year, setting up their [page on the Students Union website](#) and a society Gmail account.

Financial and funding support

- Every society is provided with a bank account with the Students' Union
- They can apply for funding support from the Students' Union
- Societies are also encouraged to organise their own fundraising activities. The Students' Union will then match fund the amount raised for the society
- Society finance forms can be accessed here:
<https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/societies/resources/>

Help with organising events and activities

- Once a society decides what events or activities it wants to organise, the Students' Union will support the planning and delivery of these
- This includes booking spaces on campus, promotional planning and materials, financial planning, risk assessment
- Guidance and support is given to help them work together and engage more students
- Event booking forms can be accessed here:
<https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/societies/resources/>

Awards, collaboration and training

- The Students Union provides additional training to societies to support their career development and increase collaboration between societies
- The Students Union works with university services to help promote and deliver additional support for societies. This includes **Careers** and the **UWS Development Fund**
- Societies and their members are eligible for Students' Union and UWS awards



WHAT CAN ACADEMIC STAFF DO TO SUPPORT SOCIETIES?

1

Make introductions between interested students and the Students' Union

- The Students' Union can provide support and guidance to students interested in creating a society or organising **any other student-led activity**.
- To enable this, we encourage academic staff to make introductions, to put the Students' Union in contact with the relevant students.
- Introductions can be made at any time of year.
- Students do not need any set plans of what they want to do yet. The key is to capture their enthusiasm for whatever they are passionate about.
- Introductions can be made by emailing or setting up a meeting with Jamie McDowall: jamie.mcdowall@uws.ac.uk
- Academic staff can also book and use Students' Union spaces for any of your own activities (Ayr Snug, Lanarkshire Street, Paisley Union building). These can be booked using our **Event Booking Form**:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScDUZWjqjD599kVIY7fOK_LGqxnD_IDwAmxblCKfMqv_DnAKQ/viewform

2

Allocate time for a student-led, peer support introduction to year groups

- This has proven to be a highly effective way of introducing the idea of students taking the lead on their own university experience.
- It also helps students settle in and feel welcomed and reassured.
 - [\(see Midwifery report\)](#).
- If there is an existing academic society for a course, or a society with an overlapping interest (eg. Film Society for Filmmaking course), they can be allocated a session to lead **as part of the course induction**.
 - The Paramedic Society have been given this opportunity since 2023, which results in almost every first year student joining during their induction.
- Where there is not a relevant society, the session can be given to final year students to share their experiences and give their advice.
 - Everyone likes to be asked to share what they have learnt, so there should be no hesitation in offering this opportunity to them.
 - This will help embed the idea and understanding of peer support, which increases the potential of an academic society being established.
- **Students' Union staff are available to assist students with planning and facilitating sessions.**
- This can also be arranged at **any time in the academic year**. Societies are often established later in the academic year, once students have settled into their course.

WHAT CAN ACADEMIC STAFF DO TO SUPPORT SOCIETIES?

3

Help students decide a time to host their society's first event

- An essential step for establishing a society is to arrange an initial time and space to bring students together.
 - This is when they will start conversations with each other and establish what the purpose of their society will be.
 - This is equally important for new societies and existing societies continuing into a new academic year.
- Students should take the lead on the ideas and content of the event/activity/meeting.
- Academic staff can help to identify a suitable time to host this, by checking course timetables across the different year groups.
 - This will help the students organising the event find a time which will be best for as many people as possible to attend.
- Once a date and time are chosen, the Students' Union can help the students to organise everything else.
- Academic staff can support the event by promoting it to all students on the course. This can be done in classes and by putting announcements on Brightspace.

4

Share information and promote the society to all relevant students

- Academic staff can provide quick, ongoing support throughout the year by sharing information of society activities with all students on the course.
- **Brightspace and email:**
 - Announcements can be made for upcoming events and activities that the society have planned.
 - This can include a link to join the society through their page on the Students' Union website: <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/societies/societies/>
- **In class announcements:**
 - Using the start or end of a class to encourage students to attend upcoming society events can be very effective, especially as this is when students are already in the same space together.
- **Sharing social media posts:**
 - If there are relevant social media accounts that staff can use to share society posts, this can help them reach relevant students while also highlighting successful student engagement to the wider community.
- **Sharing information with other UWS staff members:**
 - Society events and activities might be of interest to students on other courses.
 - Collaboration between societies can be very helpful for achieving their respective aims. All UWS students are welcome to join any society.
 - This can also link students to other relevant support opportunities within the university.

WHAT CAN ACADEMIC STAFF DO TO SUPPORT SOCIETIES?

5 Offer course specific knowledge and contacts

- If the society wants to organise activities to support their academic work (eg. study groups) and career development (eg. events with guest speakers/networking events/additional training and courses), academic staff may be able to give guidance on how to approach this.
- Staff can provide external contacts for the society relevant to their area of study.
- Many academic societies receive sponsorship from relevant organisations and professional bodies.
- Staff can advise which organisations the society could approach and potentially make introductions.
- Any formal sponsorship agreements will be checked and approved by the Students' Union before they are signed by the society.
- Societies can have non-students as ordinary members (not committee members). This means that academic staff are welcome to join a society too!



WHAT DO THE STUDENTS NEED TO DO?

All societies are led and organised by students.

- Academic and Students' Union staff can encourage students to create societies and can provide them with the support they need.
- But it is the responsibility of the students to decide if this is something they want to do.
- It is up to students to decide what events and activities they want to organise.
- Students are responsible for maintaining and developing their societies.

EXAMPLES OF ACADEMIC SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

“It has made it a little bit more exciting for me personally because I have something outside of classes that I can look forward to that also relates to my studies. While you're going through the stresses of assignments and studying, you have this other thing that relates to your passions to fall back and enjoy. It has its own set of stresses, but it's definitely made it more fun, and I feel like I'm creating something good within this environment.”

Midwifery Society

- Hosted external training workshops and courses to gain additional qualifications and experience.
- Organised a calendar of peer support and social events to create a feeling of community within the course.
- Maintained active social media accounts to create ongoing communication between students when on placements.
- Strong partnerships with academic staff and the Royal College of Midwives.

Paramedic Society

- Arranged site visits to potential employment opportunities including the Ardrossan Coastguard, Prestwick Search & Rescue and Ochils Mountain Rescue.
- Hosted online CPD events with potential employers.
- Held CPRathon on campus to raise money for British Heart Foundation.

Physics Society

- Hosted series of guest speaker events on areas of specific interest in their course, including Professor Dame Jocelyn Burnell.

Ayr Student Film Festival

- In partnership with Ayr Film Society, created the UWS Film Festival in Ayr town hall.
- This provided students the opportunity for their films to be shown to a live audience and a panel of industry experts.
- The festival enabled collaboration between students from a wide range of courses.

Accounting Society

- Worked in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants to host activities including:
 - Mock Assessment events
 - Networking events
 - Career Development events

