



Supporting Academic Societies at UWS

ACADEMIC STAFF GUIDE



SUPPORTING ACADEMIC SOCIETIES AT UWS

Academic Staff Guide



INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, students are facing difficulties which are creating new challenges for them both academically and socially:

- feeling isolated
- struggling to engage and stay motivated with online learning
- unsure of where to access support

One approach we can use to support students through this, and enable them to help themselves and each other, is to encourage the creation of academic societies.

Every course group will already have their own methods of communicating with each other through group chats and social media. If these can be formally developed into academic societies, the Students' Union will then be able to work with them to organise activities and create the social and peer support groups they need to help them through their time at university.

We cannot solve all these challenges for them but what we can do is follow a few small steps to enable students to create their own opportunities and solutions.

The aim of this guide is to provide information on academic societies and show the steps you can follow to encourage and support their development.



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<https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/societies/>

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE?

- What are Student Societies?
- Why are Academic Societies important?
- What does the Students' Union do to support them?
- What do the students need to do?
- What can academic staff do to support them?
- Examples of UWS Academic Society Activities

WHAT ARE STUDENT SOCIETIES?

UWS Students' Union societies are:

- Student-led groups, formed and run by students
- They bring together people who have shared interests
- They can be formed at any time

WHY ARE ACADEMIC SOCIETIES IMPORTANT?

In our May 2021 Society Feedback Survey, committee members said their favourite things about their roles were:

- Bringing people together
- Supporting others
- Opportunities for personal development
- Sharing interests

These can all contribute towards improving academic and overall university experiences

The aims of existing academic societies have focused on:

- Helping students socialise and make friends
 - The main reasons students gave for creating societies was to help “bring people together”
- Supporting their academic performance and career development opportunities
- Peer support across different year groups
 - Favourite thing about your society: “Being able to bring together people from different year groups. We have been able to give support and help to the years below us.”
- Societies which have an active social aspect are more successful when it comes to achieving other aims.



WHAT DOES THE STUDENTS' UNION DO TO SUPPORT THEM?

Help societies manage their memberships and communication

- Every society is provided a page on the [Students' Union website](#) and an official society email address
- To join a society, all students need to do is sign up through the society webpage
- The society's committee will decide if they want to charge a membership fee (most are free). If they choose to charge a joining fee, this can also be paid through the website

WHAT DOES THE STUDENTS' UNION DO TO SUPPORT THEM?



Committee training

- Every society committee completes a one hour training session with the Student Opportunities Coordinator. This includes creating a Society Action Plan for the academic year

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 encouraged to organise their own fundraising activities. The Students' Union will then match fund the amount raised for the society

Help with organising events and activities, including online activities

- Once a society decides what events or activities it wants to organise, the Students' Union will support the planning and delivery of these

Awards and training

- The Students' Union provides additional training to society committee members to support their career development
- The Students' Union works with university services to help promote and deliver additional support for societies. This includes Careers & Skills and Library Services
- Societies and their members are eligible for Students' Union and UWS awards

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



WHAT CAN ACADEMIC STAFF DO TO SUPPORT THEM?

1 Promote the idea and benefits of having an academic society. Encourage students to create one

- The most effective way of doing this is to promote it at the beginning or end of online lectures or classes
- If you prefer, you can invite a member of the Students' Union staff to do this by contacting the VP of Student Development: unionvpsd@uws.ac.uk
- If there is already an academic society for the course group, you can invite the society's committee to introduce themselves and the society to other students

2 Identify students who are interested in being part of the society's committee

- Ask interested students to put themselves forward if they think they might want to be involved with running the society
- These students can come from any year group
- You can then send an email to the Student Opportunities Coordinator with the interested students copied into it: jamie.mcdowall@uws.ac.uk
- You can also encourage students to complete a New Society Application Form: <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/societies/starting/>
- The Student Opportunities Coordinator will then be able to provide the students with more information and help them set up their society

3 Provide an online space for students to socialise

- Current restrictions mean students have very limited opportunities to socialise and get to know each other. This is a problem within and outside of their academic learning
- An easy way to encourage and enable students to socialise is to leave some online sessions open for a set time (eg. 10mins) after the conclusion of a lecture/tutorial
- This will provide an alternative to the time students would ordinarily speak to each other before and after face to face teaching
- It may also help students feel more comfortable speaking in and engaging with online learning environments
- This would not require any involvement from staff other than making students aware that they are free to use this time to chat to each other

4 Providing ongoing support for the society

- If the society wants to organise events to support their academic work (eg. study groups) and career development (eg. events with guest speakers/networking events), staff can support the planning of this
- Staff can provide relevant external contacts for the society
- Many academic societies receive sponsorship from relevant organisations and professional bodies. Staff can advise which organisations the society could approach for this
 - Any formal agreements must be approved by the Students' Union before they are signed by the society

EXAMPLES OF ACADEMIC SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

Midwifery Society

- Hosted student study days through their sponsorship with the Royal College of Midwives
- Work with academic staff to deliver events and fundraising activities
- Hosted a Christmas Party at the Lanarkshire Students' Union for students and staff
- Provide peer support during placements through their social media channels

Chemical Engineering Society

- Organise annual trip for joint sports competition with Chemical Engineering Societies across Britain
- Host social fundraising nights throughout the year, bringing together students from all year groups

Psychology Society

- Organise annual end of year ball
- Hosted students vs lecturers social events
- Raised money for charities through fundraising events and activities
- Designed Psychology Society hoodies for their members

Accounting Society

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

