



University of Wolverhampton

Students' Union

# SOCIETIES

## HANDBOOK

## Introduction

Societies are small organisations which are run for students, by students. They provide students with lots of opportunities to meet new people and really get involved in University life. They also help students enhance their own development, both personally and professionally, gaining numerous skills that will be hugely beneficial when looking for a job. At Wolverhampton we have a wide range of societies catering for many different interests, if we don't have one that interests you then you can always set one up!

Any student can set up any society that they wish to, but in order for it to enjoy the benefits that are offered by the Union it must first be approved by us. The Union expects that societies should be run in a fair and democratic manner, for the benefit of its members and in a safe and respectful manner. Students elected to the society's committee are legally responsible for the activities of the society; this includes financial activity and health and safety (committee members could be legally responsible for any accidents). To help you run your society the Students' Union offers this handbook, a practical how to guide, training and expert advice.

We want to have loads of active societies, run by enthusiastic students like you! That's why we have developed this guide. Starting or running a society doesn't have to be hard, and it doesn't have to take up all of your time. However all too often societies do fail and those running them do end up taking too much time away from their studies. This usually happens because people fail to get the basics right, you aren't expected to know how to run your society from the start! That's why we're here, if you read, follow and understand the guidelines in this handbook you will learn how to run an active, successful society without adversely affecting your studies. Loads of students from the University of Wolverhampton and all around the country manage this year on year without too much hassle; let us help you to manage it too.



## **People, places and contacts**

The Students' Union has well developed staff and structures that are able to support many different types of student society at the University. It is important that you take full advantage of these to help make your society a success.

### **Activities Vice President**

The Activities Vice President is a student who is elected to fill this role on a full-time basis for one year. They are accountable to you and it's their job to make sure that everything in the Students' Union is running as you (the students) want it to be. They will work with Society Chairs to ensure that all societies are being given as much support as possible.

### **Student Activities Coordinator**

The Student Activities Coordinator is a permanent, full time staff member who is employed to support the day to day running of your society, as well as trips and large scale events for the Students' Union. He will also be your first point of call for any constitutional issues, planning requirements or any support you require, you will also deal with him in relation to your societies finances. His office is based in the

Ambika Paul Student Union Centre and any society can make an appointment to see him through the Activities Centre Reception. Get in touch with him by email at [N.Reading2@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:N.Reading2@wlv.ac.uk)

## **Students' Union**

As a society you will probably find that the Students' Union space is central to a lot of the things you do, whether it is meeting for an informal coffee and a chat, holding a meeting in our boardroom, or booking out our venue space to hold a large event. It is important to remember that the Students' Union space is there for you, so make the most of it!

## **Website**

The Students' Union website will be the digital hub of your society. From there you will be able to email your members, advertise and promote events, and keep the wider student population up to date on exactly why they should want to be a part of your society. Your members will use the website to become members of your society.





## Setting up a new society

### What is a society?

It is important to understand what a society is; societies have the legal status of unincorporated associations. The society (or association) comes into existence when a group of people meet together, say that they are now a society and agree to work together to achieve joint aims. As far as the law is concerned this constitutes a contract and ties the members into the agreements they've made. This new society cannot take on debt, sign contracts or hold assets as a society; the members must do these things on behalf of the society. Where debt or other liabilities are incurred they are jointly shared by the society's elected management committee, since they are agents acting on behalf of, and with powers delegated from the rest of the members. As you can see there is not a lot of regulation governing the set up and running of societies.

### Students' Union approval

The Students' Union seeks to protect societies, their committees and their members falling foul of the law and also help them to be successful. We set our minimum standards for societies to adhere to if

they want to be approved by the Students' Union. Approval will enable societies to take advantage of room booking, banking, financial grants and other facilities and much more to aid their development.

### **The set up process**

Firstly you should check with the Activities Coordinator that there are no similar societies already in existence. To be approved by the Students' Union you will need a minimum of 10 full members, and a committee. The committee is made up of three different positions, Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, all of which need to be filled upon applying for approval of a new society. When this is done and the relevant names are on the society application form, you can hand it in to either the Activities Coordinator or the Activities VP for approval. After this process is complete you should hopefully be an approved University of Wolverhampton Students' Union society!

### **The committee**

All societies should have at the very minimum a president, secretary and treasurer. This will enable the society to run. Job roles will vary between societies and depending on the circumstances a committee member may have to do things which are not normally in their role. Committee members should judge for themselves and act accordingly


Generally the chairperson should:

1. Convene and chair committee meetings
2. Be the key contact for the society
3. Ensure the committee work effectively to achieve aims and objectives.
4. Ensure long term sustainability for the society
5. Ensure the society is run to a good standard.

Generally the secretary should:

1. Ensure the committee meetings run properly by producing agendas in advance and keeping accurate minutes.
2. Ensure up to date records of membership are kept.
3. Ensure the committee communicates well with one another.
4. Ensure society documents are kept up to date.
5. Ensure an up to date record of equipment is kept.
6. Working with the treasurer, develop a robust system for recording payment of subscriptions.

Generally the treasurer should:

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1. Manage and keep up to date records on the societies accounts.
  2. Ensure the society account does not go overdrawn.
  3. Take responsibility for applications to the Society Support Fund.
  4. Organise the paper work for all financial transactions authorised by the committee.

## **Membership types**

### Full Members:

All University of Wolverhampton students can be full members. Full members are entitled to vote in society elections, and make up the committee who run the society. Having only full members on the committee ensures that the society will always remain student-led.

### Affiliates:

Societies may invite non-students to join their group however non-students will be considered as affiliate members. They may join in with meetings and events but have no voting rights and may not sit on the committee. Student members must make at least 80% of the membership or 10 members whichever is greater.

## **Membership fees**

It is recommended that all societies should charge a membership fee. This reflects the members commitment to the society and provides funds for the society to operate. It also gives the Students' Union an idea of the value of your society to students. If there are more students willing to pay a membership fee, it is more likely that your society is actually providing a benefit to students. Society activities should be primarily for it's members, however they can be opened up to non members at an inflated price if the society wishes. The Students' Union advises that you set your membership fee around £5 for one year, although you can offer anything from a free membership upwards. Remember though, that your members will want to see value for money.



## What are you promoting?

The first mistake most society committees make is not having clear aims and objectives. What will the society achieve, what are your overall aims? After the aims are set you should decide how you will achieve those aims, these are objectives. Each aim may have a number of objectives.

### Example:

**Society:** Skiing Society

**Aim:** To help students fill their passion for the activity of Skiing whilst at university.

**Objectives:** To run trips once a semester to different Ski locations around Europe at an affordable price.

Once you have set your objectives you can create a plan which will help you develop these.



**Plan:** A ski trip in December and one in April. We will work out the cost for a total of 20 members and then divide that cost between society members.

You know now exactly what your society is offering and you can start to develop clear messages to promote what you do. Of course this example is quite vague and we would advise you to work out your plans in finer detail to increase chances of success in carrying them out.

### **Who are you promoting to?**

Effective promotion requires a little bit of thought. It's no good to assume that you are targeting all students. In the skiing society for example you are targeting students with an interest in skiing and also students who may have an interest in exploring different parts of Europe. There maybe students who are interested in sport photography or students on a degree relating to the society. All of this allows you to target a specific groups of students when you promote.




## How to promote effectively

Thinking about this carefully also helps you to more effectively craft the key messages you want to get across to people seeing your publicity. People will only join if they will benefit from it. The benefit may be meeting new friends, enjoying the activities your society offers or developing themselves. You need to pick out the “key benefits” and SELL them to students. This is also a good time to evaluate your society; are there any key benefits that you are offering? If not then you need to develop some! The “key benefits” will help you develop key messages which communicate the benefits to students in short, snappy, catchy sentences.

### Tips for promoting your society:

1. Keep your web page constantly updates, if it looks busy people will feel like they want to be involved in what's going on.
2. Place articles in the student newspaper covering events you have done or are about to do, which genuinely constitute news. This will entice people to join your society.
3. Run amazing events and do amazing things! It sounds obvious but if you do great things and promote them people will want to be part of what your society is doing.
4. Don't get stuck doing the same thing in the same place, run stalls around different areas of the university to promote what you are doing. Make stalls as interactive and interesting as possible; one person with a tatty bit of paper won't inspire confidence in anyone!
5. Attend and get involved in other society events, network, make contacts promote what your society does and deliver partnership events. Together you're stronger!
6. Exciting and relevant society information can be put into the main news section of the Students' Union website by the Activities Coordinator.
7. Flyers are a powerful promotional tool but they can also be a complete waste of time. Get them designed properly and don't just pile them on a window ledge somewhere, give them out!
8. Combine flyering with chatting! Get your society members out for an afternoon chatting to students. The chatting is the important bit; the flyer just serves as a reminder of what has been said and helps the student follow up on their interest. Make sure everyone out promoting is aware of the key message.
9. Organize taster days so that non members can come along and sample the activities/benefits of your society. Spend as much time promoting the event as you do planning it otherwise you'll get low numbers.



**10.** Always include the Students' Union logo in publicity. Association with the union supports credibility of societies, which becomes a self-reinforcing cycle. All societies can benefit from the credibility generated by each other and the union rather than having to build it slowly on their own.

**11.** Don't be a fool, do fewer things better rather than most things badly. Effective promotion is a combination of effective society planning and management and effective communications planning. You have to be realistic with yourself, it may be better to run fewer activities to free up time to properly plan and implement your promotional work.

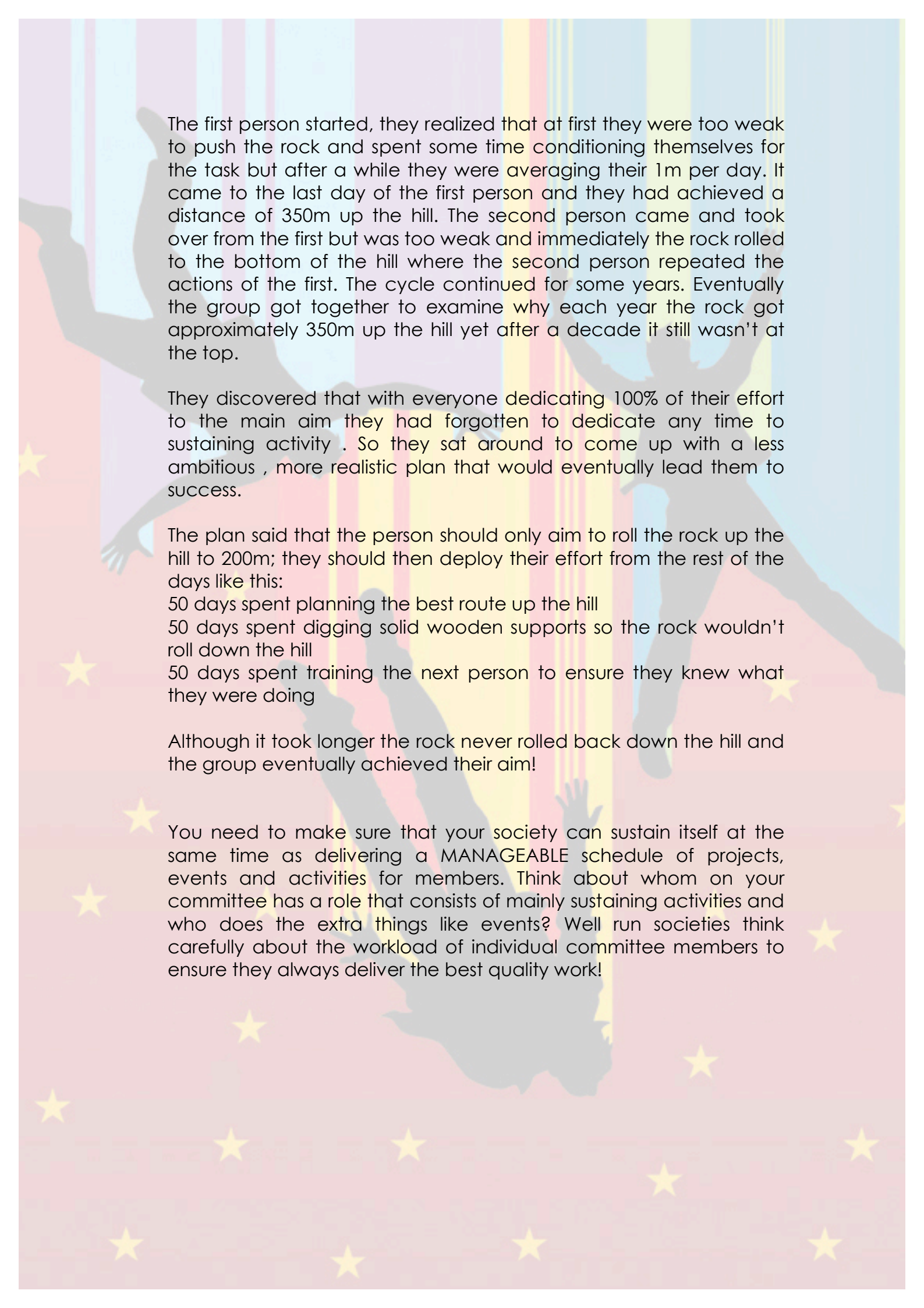
## **Sustainability and handover**

Sustainability might sound daunting but it is really just the idea we want all of our societies to get bigger and better each year. This section will be really important if you want your society to live on after you leave and save all of your hard work going to waste.

## **Understanding sustainability**

It is really important to understand sustainability. This is the art of "sustaining" your society. All committee members will have a limited amount of time or energy to put into the society and this must be used effectively. For example, if all your committee members put 100% of their time into organizing events each year that leaves no time to recruit new members. Although you may have a great year of events, without refreshing the members the society will be weaker. Sustaining activities like membership and recruitment may not be one of your key aims but if you ignore them your society will gradually weaken.

One way to understand sustainability is with the rock example. A group of people decided their aim was to push a large rock up a hill. They knew it would take many years to get the rock to the top because it was so big and heavy. So they decided to take pushing the rock in turns, one person per year, one after the other. They decided it was realistic to expect to roll the rock about 1m each day so they could achieve rolling it a distance of 365m per year.



The first person started, they realized that at first they were too weak to push the rock and spent some time conditioning themselves for the task but after a while they were averaging their 1m per day. It came to the last day of the first person and they had achieved a distance of 350m up the hill. The second person came and took over from the first but was too weak and immediately the rock rolled to the bottom of the hill where the second person repeated the actions of the first. The cycle continued for some years. Eventually the group got together to examine why each year the rock got approximately 350m up the hill yet after a decade it still wasn't at the top.

They discovered that with everyone dedicating 100% of their effort to the main aim they had forgotten to dedicate any time to sustaining activity . So they sat around to come up with a less ambitious , more realistic plan that would eventually lead them to success.

The plan said that the person should only aim to roll the rock up the hill to 200m; they should then deploy their effort from the rest of the days like this:

50 days spent planning the best route up the hill

50 days spent digging solid wooden supports so the rock wouldn't roll down the hill

50 days spent training the next person to ensure they knew what they were doing

Although it took longer the rock never rolled back down the hill and the group eventually achieved their aim!

You need to make sure that your society can sustain itself at the same time as delivering a **MANAGEABLE** schedule of projects, events and activities for members. Think about whom on your committee has a role that consists of mainly sustaining activities and who does the extra things like events? Well run societies think carefully about the workload of individual committee members to ensure they always deliver the best quality work!

# Handover

As a society, a good handover is one of the most important things you can do. If you get this right it means that new committee members will be able to run the society as well as you have, and maybe even take it to new levels! Handover can be as simple or as elaborate as you want but the principle remains the same.

Here are a few suggestions that will help toward making sure your handover is as effective as possible.

- Handover starts as soon as you begin your role on the committee. Speak to members who were on the committee in previous years. Learn from their successes and their mistakes. During your time in office keep a record of everything things that went well and why, things that went wrong and why and other helpful tips and tricks. Try to organise it so the information is useful and easy to find. If each committee member does this for their role then you will soon have the beginnings of a training package for newly elected committee members. This package can then be added to and improved with each passing year.
- After elections the outgoing and incoming committees should meet to discuss exactly when power will move from the old members to the new ones. Members will want to consider allowing time for new members to be trained and the process should be completed in good time before the end of the academic year.
- Old committees should ensure they handover all essential information and knowledge; membership lists and contact information, important contacts, society documents, society assets and anything else the new committee may find useful.
- Plan what you would like to achieve during the forthcoming year; diversify and increase your membership, run more or better events, organise regular socials, do more fundraising, attract sponsors, create a new logo etc. Harness the experience and expertise of the old committee but remember the final decision will now be in the hands of the new members.

## So what do I do now?

We hope this handbook gives you all the information you need regarding how to set up and run an effective society at the University of Wolverhampton. So now all you have to do is hop on the students' union website [www.wolvesunion.org/societies/startasociety/](http://www.wolvesunion.org/societies/startasociety/), download your application form, your step by step starting up guide, and get your shiny new society up and running!

### Contacts

#### **Neil Reading**

Student Activities Coordinator  
n.reading2@wlv.ac.uk  
01902322119

#### **Alex Blower**

Activities Vice President  
Alex.blower@wlv.ac.uk  
01902322047

#### **Selina Hussain**

Communications Officer  
communicationsofficer@wolvesunion.org