President or Chair Person

CONGRATULATIONS on being elected to the role of President or Chair Person for your society. Being part of a committee can be challenging. It takes time, commitment, dedication, and above all a belief in what you’re doing – especially as you are the President or Chair Person. This is a role of great responsibility and trust, but you need to make sure you also enjoy your time at President/Chair.

* The key to this position is having a **vision** of what you want your committee to achieve – and be able to **communicate** it to others. You are the leader, and the person to whom everyone will turn for advice and guidance.
* You will find that committee members expect you to know everything. It’s impossible for you to know every aspect of running your group, but you should know where to find the answer – whether that’s on the Wolves Union website (e.g. for forms or guides), knowing upcoming training dates, or simply asking The Student Engagement Team.
* You are both the figurehead and the key contact point for the Society or Committee. It is your responsibility to ensure that any communication from the Societies Support Co-ordinator and Student Engagement Staff are responded to and dealt with quickly.

**This guide covers**:

* Six key responsibilities of a President/Chair
* The leadership skills you will develop during your time in post
* What to do if you encounter problems

**LET’S START WITH SIX KEY RESPONSIBILITIES**:

**1. Managing Change**

**2. Delegating Tasks**

**3. Taking Responsibility**

**4. Motivating the Committee**

**5. Communicating**

**6. Calling and Chairing Meetings**

**1. Managing Change**

* As a new and enthusiastic President or Chair, you will probably want to bring in some changes: some small and others which may be fairly fundamental. It is worth bearing in mind that people often find change very stressful and the emotions that the word ‘change’ can bring need to be managed carefully and with consideration. People’s emotions are real to them and you will need to take your team with you, at a pace that is manageable, rather than force them to follow. When considering making changes to direction or activities, it is worth asking the Societies Support Co-ordinator to look at your Constitution. This will tell you what your group originally proposed to do when it was set up. Any changes to your constitution need to be approved by the Societies Support Co-ordinator
* As Societies and Committees are run democratically, you should put any proposed changes to the vote. That way, you will have the backing of the majority of your committee and change will then be easier to manage. As the leader, the person who drives the vision, you will need to persevere and continually motivate the committee when things aren’t quite working to plan.
* Many President/Chairs find it helpful to use the ‘Strategic Planning tool’ in order to create strategy for the upcoming year; a template is available in the resources section of The Societies area of the Wolves Union website.

**2. Delegating Tasks**

* President and Chairs often feedback that delegation is the aspect of leadership that they are the most worried about. Many President/Chairs (unfortunately) try to do everything themselves or want to control all matters. This has the dual effect of leaving you exhausted – but also leaving the rest of the committee aimless and frustrated.
* While it is the job of the President/Chair to liaise with the Secretary and the Treasurer regarding the overall running of the committee, you are not required to know, for example, *how* the Students’ Union finance system works. These finer details are embedded within your committee members’ roles, but you should ensure that the committee know what they are doing. Encourage them to contact the Societies Support Co-ordinator or The Student Engagement Team for help if they need it or visit: <https://www.wolvesunion.org/societies/societyresources/>
* It is important when delegating a task to somebody to explain to them why they have been chosen. Ideally, they should have the skills and enthusiasm for the task. If they don’t, they could work with someone else who is better skilled; or undertake some training.
* Setting a good example is crucial. President/Chairs need to ensure they complete their own tasks on time and be prepared to apologise if not. You also need to thank everyone for their
* Contribution, no matter how small.

**3. Taking Responsibility**

* Those running a society or committee have a *‘duty of care’* in law to ensure the safety of its members and any other people who may be affected by its activities and events. Anyone who creates ‘hazards’ needs to be responsible for managing them.
* All Societies and Committees are insured (third party public liability insurance) for their ‘usual’ activities. These are the activities that the original committee applied to do in their new society application which were then written into their Constitution. If you wish to do any other activity, trip or event where there might be a risk of a member or the general public being injured, you will need to complete a risk assessment and, for trips and events, some related safety paperwork. Please find a blank risk assessment template for you to use on: <https://www.wolvesunion.org/societies/societyresources/>
* Although you need to oversee everything your group does, it may be useful to delegate health and safety liaison to a suitably experienced member of the committee.

**4. Motivating the Committee**

* A President/Chair will always have the central aims of the society or committee at the forefront of their mind – but this is not always shared by all the members. It can be particularly difficult to motivate the committee if you are low on numbers, if cliques form or if people are disheartened for some reason. However, there are lots of ways to keep everyone excited and motivated (see ‘*What if there are Problems?****’*** below).
* Being available to provide advice and support for members throughout the year where necessary is crucial in helping them feel motivated. Indeed, encouraging an atmosphere of thoughtfulness and care will make the committee a better place to be a part of. President/Chairs should encourage their committee members to tell them when something is going wrong. Open and transparent communication systems tend to mean that people feel motivated for longer.
* Make sure you run team building sessions and activities (see below for ideas) but also committee socials. These can be delegated to the Secretary.
* Reward committee members whenever they do something to contribute. Encouraging words can have a positive effect.

**5. Communicating**

**Internal:** The President/Chair introduces meetings and directs the committee as a leader who is looked to for guidance. You ensure your group is represented at relevant meetings. You are also responsible for ensuring the committee attends any relevant Students’ Union training.

**External:** The President/Chair needs to decide upon a system for reading and actioning emails. This may fall to the Secretary as communication is a large part of their role. The President/Chair may wish to delegate the passing on of information about future events and positive news to the publicity officer in Societies Committee. The President/Chair is also the first point of contact in media relations, and must make sure the Publicity Officer is actively promoting successes to the student body.

**6. Calling and Chairing Meetings**

* Chairing committee meetings is a main activity of the President/Chair although it is usually the Secretary who pulls together the agenda before committee meetings and writes and sends out the minutes afterwards. Meetings are the perfect opportunity to inject enthusiasm into the committee members and discuss what events are coming up, as well as a time to provide feedback on previous events and activities. It is important to learn what worked well, and what could be improved upon. It is also a brilliant chance to make sure everyone is able to have their say in an open and safe atmosphere, and that all members are having fun, practising their skills and developing their roles.
* Make sure that the agenda is used to focus the discussion and to keep the meeting on track and running efficiently so no one becomes bored. Secretaries may wish to try out different styles and types of agenda to see what works. Stick to the agenda to ensure that relevant discussions take place and appropriate decisions are made. The agenda should keep the meeting on topic as much as possible.
* Use the agenda to keep the discussion relevant should it stray off topic. Ensure all points on the agenda are covered, and that if they are not, a time is arranged to reconvene. Points to be covered and the date chosen to reconvene **must** be noted in the minutes.
* Ensure all members have the opportunity to voice their opinions, whilst avoiding irrelevant small talk. No *one* person should dominate. It is the duty of the chair of the meeting to enforce democracy and ensure that quieter committee members have a say.
* It is essential in meetings that the President/Chair ensures all identified tasks are clearly delegated to someone or a small team, so as to fulfil the role of overseer of all activities. You must manage the committee members in a way that ensures they all pull their weight, and have a chance to get involved and demonstrate their skills.
* It is also a good idea to make sure that everyone has a diary, or at least notes down what they are supposed to do and by what date. By doing this it reminds people what they are doing, but also allows you as a President/Chair to know things have been noted down by both the secretary in the minutes and also by the individuals.
* The President/Chair must pursue delegated tasks to ensure they have been carried out sufficiently, in meetings or in between. It is important to remember that the buck stops with you. Yet, by encouraging a vibrant committee spirit and making sure all members are properly trained, a feeling of empowerment and inspiration will serve to partially release the pressure resting on your shoulders.
* Remember – not all committee members will read the minutes (even though they should) therefore the Secretary should insert committee member tasks and the associated deadlines in the body of the email, ensuring everyone will have easy access to the most important information.
* Committee members must be aware that if they cannot complete a delegated task, due to other commitments, they must inform you, so that it can be re-delegated.
* The President/Chair should advise and support all members with their tasks. The Student Engagement Staff and the Societies Support Co-ordinator are valuable resources; they are there to help you budget for events, help with finances and even provide ideas for future events and activities.
* Post-meeting socials are usually well received. They will help your committee to bond and work better as a team. Communicate with your Secretary to arrange such events and ensure they are as inclusive as possible.

**NOW ONTO SKILLS…**

**SKILLS SET**

What skills does a President/Chair require? The skills you will most use will depend on some extent to the specific needs of the committee. This diagram shows you a summary of some really useful leadership skills that you should develop during your time in office.



Hopefully now you can see that being a President/Chair of a society will take you through a brilliant learning curve – and will hopefully be an enjoyable role too. Do not be daunted though! There is lots of support available from the Societies Support Co-ordinator and The Student Engagement Team.

**WHAT IF THERE ARE PROBLEMS?**

Below are three suggestions that you can try if you feel that things aren’t *quite* going as planned:

1. Committee bonding and re-training

2. Holding members to account

3. Rewarding members

**1) Society/Committee Development Day**

* Bring the committee together for a fun bonding session and work out what you want to achieve together this semester.
* Get everyone enthused about the projects ahead, and clarify everyone’s roles and responsibilities on the committee and what is expected from them, so everyone feels in the know and comfortable.
* To start off the committee bonding training, why not run some games to get to know everyone a bit better? It would be a great to plan these in between other exercises you run – like setting the constitution, strategic planning, team values and planning the semester ahead. There are loads of creative things you can do – a simple google search will give you lots of ideas.
* Incorporate a fun activity into the day so everyone has a chance to talk socially and make friends. Chocolates and soft drinks go down well if you are able to organise refreshments.

***Committee Bonding and Re-Training***

Whether you are experiencing problems or not, it might be a good idea to think about having a bonding session to plan the semester ahead – in a fun way!

**2) Aims, Objectives and Roles**

* Every Society must have aims and objectives. You can decide on them together as a committee: throwing out ideas of what you think your committee should be aiming to do, what the basic reasons are for existing.
* Then draw out the different committee positions and how they work together to achieve this – so that everyone writes out their roles and all the details that entails. Then you can write your Constitution (aims and objectives) but also a description of roles that everyone can sign and knowingly agree to what they are signing up to. This doesn’t have to be too formal, it just gives every committee member the security to know what responsibilities lie with them.

**3) Team Values**

* In addition, set some “team values” – values you think the committee share to make working together easy: e.g. phones off in meetings; listen to one another; if you agree to do something – follow through – if you can’t, let the President/Chair know ASAP; don’t be afraid to ask for help and be creative!
* Remember, it is best if values come from the committee itself, so let them throw out these ideas, and from all the ideas formulate the list you then circulate to everyone. It might be best to do this in small groups that feed back together.

**4) Plan the Semester Ahead**

* As this guide has shown you, the role of the President/Chair is to think of the bigger picture and to co-ordinate all the activities of the society or committee. However, your committee members will be so much more on-board if they are the ones driving the vision. Ask your members what they would like to see their society or committee providing for them, why did they join in the first place?
* Perhaps go back to basics and run a ‘thought shower’ exercise to get everyone thinking creatively about the semester ahead and plan what you would like the committee to achieve. Set goals and targets, plan dates of socials and talk to the inclusion officer about how everything you do can be inclusive and welcoming.
* Try ‘road mapping’ the year ahead: split the committee up into teams who look at different things the committee wishes to achieve. The teams then draw out a ‘road’ for the semester on a big piece of paper and ‘travel’ the road, to set the milestones and the barriers along the way. This is a great way to get the committee sharing the vision for the weeks ahead – and willing to back the projects!

**5) Wolves Union Website and Students’ Union Support**

* After you’ve established on paper for yourselves the roles of your committee, it’s helpful to print off the relevant guides for each committee member from the Resources section of the Societies area on The Wolves Union website.
* If you are struggling at all with any aspect of leading your committee, come and talk to the Societies Support Co-ordinator in The SU– or email societies.wolvesunion@wlv.ac.uk

***Holding Members Accountable***

**1) Hold to Account through Discussion**

* A great product of creating team values and going through everyone’s assigned roles together is that you know that each committee member is fully aware of what is expected of them. Therefore if you or any other committee member feels that others are not upholding their role or the values, you can hold them to account by discussing this with them, but not in a public or personal way.
* Focusing on undesirable behaviour rather than the person stops discussions dissolving into an argument. Discussion should be based on specific constitutional points, or team values. This depersonalises the process. It is important that the committee feel comfortable enough to raise (in confidence) when they feel others are not contributing what they should, and you should make everyone aware of this from the start.
* Apologies should be raised in meetings, or in discussions, so tasks can be taken forward and a ‘no blame’ culture is established. After an apology is given, a way forward should be found e.g. *“Sorry, I had a deadline - the minutes will be done in three days next time.”*

**2) Be Positive!**

* The best thing to do is to think about the future after issues have been resolved. This process will only be successful if everyone is willing to put all the previous bad feeling and incidences behind them and move on.
* The best way to attack a new semester is with enthusiasm, boosting up the members of your committee. If you are not excited about the challenges, aims of the group and events ahead, no one will be. YOU can turn this around.

***Rewarding Members***

* You can never say ‘thank you’ enough as a leader. As you are not able to give financial awards, there might be other things you can do, like bringing cakes to a meeting or writing certificates for everyone at the end of the year.

**Any questions?**

Contact the Societies Support Co-ordinator:

[**Societies.wolvesunion@wlv.ac.uk**](mailto:Societies.wolvesunion@wlv.ac.uk)

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