



Academic Society Handbook

Your guide to thrive



Bristol SU

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Beth Eyre

Development Team

At Bristol SU, we've undertaken a lot of research about what community means to our students. For most, it stems from their course.

As an academic society, you have a unique opportunity to bring together a whole department of students.

This isn't an easy task - these students will want different things from you - so you should be prepared to create an offer that covers as much activity as possible.



There are 4 pillars of activity that make Academic Societies shine:



Enhanced
education

Families,
socials and
special events

Intramural
sports
teams

Outreach,
volunteering
and charity

Enhanced education

This covers talks about your subject that aren't covered by your lectures, seminars or labs; employment partnerships and opportunities; the chance to feedback into what your course and department looks like.

This doesn't need to be dull! It is an opportunity to get some interesting speakers or workshops in and a chance to create a community feel in your department.

What could this look like?

- Getting a famous academic or author to do a talk
- Coffee and cake to feedback to your academic reps
- Panel events including a variety of speakers
- Lectures that cover bits of secondary reading from your course
- Organising a mini careers fair
- A collaboration with a popular dual subject society
- CV workshops
- Study skills workshops
- Trips to conferences
- Posting about external opportunities for students
- Trips abroad
- Signposting to the SU Advice Service
- Reusing textbooks initiative



Relevant how to guides

Our webpages are full of helpful guides especially if you need information about health & safety, organising an event or GDPR. Here are some helpful links:

- [Group safety](#)
- [Running events and activities](#)
- [Bristol SU Learning Space](#)



People to contact

Your departmental admin team are a great place to start, you can find yours in the [contact info for your faculty/dept](#):

- various dept-admin@bristol.ac.uk

If you want to talk through potential ideas or general enquiries:

- beth.eyre@bristol.ac.uk

If you need to go through a risk assessment or adding a new committee position, e.g.:

- bristolsu@bristol.ac.uk



Creating a committee lead

If your society doesn't already offer this, putting an Education Officer on the committee can help you keep the academic focus.

If you don't already have one, you'll need to set up an EGM to vote and edit your constitution to add the role there, and then hold an election for the position. You can find guidance on how to do this in your constitution and [here](#).



Training and support

There are some tips further in the handbook about working with your department and you are always welcome to [book a development meeting](#) to work on any issue you're facing or want more information on.

Keep an eye out for our SU training sessions [here](#).

Intramural sport

Intramural sport is run by Bristol SU to give you an opportunity to play social sport at low cost (av. £2 per match!) and low pressure.

Academic societies can enter teams that represent their course or department and play against other subjects!

It's an accessible and pre-organised opportunity that your society can pull together teams for - all the leagues are mixed gender too!

Although you can't pay individual players' subs for them, you can buy things like equipment and training slots for the whole society to access!

What can you play?

- 6 a side Football
- 8 a side Football
- **11 a side Football**
- Basketball
- Cricket (TB2)
- **Netball**
- Hockey
- Volleyball

We recommend having a designated football and netball captain in your society as they are our biggest sports.

Get in touch

You can find out more information about signing up on our website here.



Outreach, volunteering and charity

Giving back to the local community is a great way to feel closer to Bristol. It is also an appealing offer for an academic society to have, as anybody can get involved and people often feel more comfortable doing things in a group.

A bonus of helping out is that you can do it related to your course, giving you the opportunity to build skills outside of the classroom, add to your knowledge and get an insight into a potential career.

How can you get started?

The SU has a Volunteering team that have all the tools to help you. We've even made a list of relevant volunteering projects (existing and some ideas!) to your academic subject, which you can view [here](#).

We also have more general opportunities. Whether it is a litter pick or collectively helping at a soup kitchen, you can see what is currently on offer [here](#).



Creating a committee lead

It might be worth electing somebody to be your Volunteering or Outreach Officer on the committee who can then lead on this segment of your offer. Depending on the scale of your outreach plans, it could be a large project to manage.



If you don't already have one, you'll need to set up an EGM to vote and edit your constitution to add the role there, and then hold an election for the position. You can find guidance on how to do this in your constitution and [here](#).

Finding the right project/s for your group

You can organise a chat with the SU Volunteering Team by emailing bristolsu-volunteering@bristol.ac.uk and have a look at our opportunities [here](#).

You could check with your Faculty Careers team if any of their contacts have any projects for outreach. You can email careers-service@bristol.ac.uk to be put in touch with your Faculty leads.



This is also a [helpful resource](#) from Bristol City Council.

Think about if there is something related to your subject or a valuable skill your members have that could be helpful for the community. There is no harm in reaching out and discussing your idea with a relevant organisation or charity.

Families, socials and special events

The aims in your society constitution will outline what you're expected to do, but you may want to have a look at your programme and how you execute it. You should also consider factoring in non-alcohol socials, picnics and pottery painting are always fun, but we have a random generator here that you may want to look at.

The Bristol SU events team can help you with ball planning. And if you're a smaller group, you can always collaborate with another society in your faculty!

Initiatives to get people involved are always good too - Give it a Go! or campus treasure hunts e.g. For many societies, though, a family scheme is key for helping new students feel comfortable.

Family schemes

Commonly associated with academic societies, family or house schemes are a perfect example of how forced friendships can be perfect, especially for anybody new to university. We all know how hard it is to put yourself out there!

All you need are some volunteers who have been settled in Bristol and would be happy to be a contact for their 'children'. Someone to go to socials with, chat to about the course and give recommendations about Bristol is gold dust to new students.

Applying for a special event

Starting a family scheme

You'll need:

- Volunteers from older years to be 'parents'
- Someone to organise sorting people into families once they've signed up
- Get your social media officer on board for advertising the opportunity
- Some events before the Christmas break to get families together
- A code of conduct so that boundaries and expectations are obvious
- Think about how you could get postgraduate students (especially on a 1 year masters) involved

You don't need to call it a 'family scheme' - whatever you go for, it just needs to give anyone new a friend. Some groups have used a 'House system' instead, some just have 'buddies'. Whatever you choose, have fun with it and don't forget about your children,!

Relevant 'how to' guides

Our webpages are full of helpful guides especially if you need information about health & safety, organising an event or GDPR. Here are some helpful links:

- [Group safety](#)
- [Running events and activities](#)
- [Bristol SU Learning Space](#)

If you want to host a special event in an SU space - talks, balls, fairs - the deadlines are as follows.



Term 1 - 14th August
Term 2 - 16th October

You can find out more information [here](#) too and can contact the SU Events team through this email: bristolsu-events@bristol.ac.uk

International students

Our community of international students is growing at Bristol and it is important that they feel part of their academic society.

Have you considered:

- Reaching out to [Global Lounge](#)
- Broadening your social media presence - have you tried WeChat, Sina Weibo, Telegram, [Little Red Book](#)?
- Be proactive - seek out staff members in your department who work with international & year abroad students or have a large international cohort on their course and advertise your group or organise a Give it a Go
- Trips to UK cities, global cultural events (is there anything you can link to your subject?), trips to museums and galleries are the most popular events with international students according to our recent survey
- Some have issues getting to Bristol for Welcome Week, so make sure to stagger your events
- Academic Skills sessions and Careers Events are also a priority for international students according to our data - if you're already running those kinds of events, could you market them better to international students?

Welcome and Give it a Go!

From A Level results day, you should be actively engaging with potential new members. Other peak times are September and January - someone should feel comfortable buying a membership at any point.

We regularly hear feedback that students weren't sure they had an academic society and that after September was over they felt awkward getting involved, so it's good to make sure these initiatives are spread out over the year.

Firstly - **find out what your department are doing and how you can collaborate! Email your dept. admin for information.**

Some of our groups have delivered some amazing things, so here is some inspo:

- AeroSoc hid ducks around Queens Building (notoriously hard to navigate), they even appeared in lecturers' slides! On top of this, instead of a family scheme, they opted for a House Scheme, so each House was working together to beat the others
- Classics and Ancient History have done a classics themed picnic
- Some groups have done a BBQ and invited 1st year lecturers
- You could find out when the intro lecture is or when intro seminars are and if all on the same day, coordinate with the academics to bring their students to a free pizza party held by the society
- Chaos (Physics) hold a stargazing session for welcome!

Welcome and Give it a Go!

Welcome Fair is a key event for introducing yourselves. Below is an example of how your stall could look. Freebies, games, engagement initiatives, the date of your Give it a Go! or next meet up and your stallholders being welcoming are great! You should take as many chances as you can to advertise your group.



Finances and Grants

Finance can be a big part of running a range of activities. You're expected to generate your own income - mainly through memberships and events. However, I just wanted to highlight some other routes you may want to explore.

Sponsorships

Many academic societies have sponsorships with at least one company. You may want to consider a relevant company to your subject, or one with a popular grad scheme that may be interested in reaching out to your particular members. Alternatively, if you have a place in Bristol you frequent a lot of socials, you could enquire with them. There is loads more information and tips on our webpage.

SU Grants

You can apply for any of the SU Group Grants for up to £3000. You should check to make sure the criteria aligns with what you are applying for, and you can apply for the general or the sustainability grant. You should book in a meeting with me to go through your application too and I can help. We also have the Activity Hardship Fund that you can advertise to your members.



Working with other University teams

The University has a range of projects that are ongoing, some of which are really beneficial for your society. The main two are the Development and Alumni Relations Office (DARO) and Careers Service. DARO can help pair you with alumni from your group, fundraising opportunities and with Bristol Connects. The Careers Service can help you with events and sourcing potential sponsors.

Your department and faculty are also invaluable to the running and existence of your group. Make sure to approach them over summer, and maintain a relationship with them throughout the year that you can eventually handover. They can help with advertising, putting on events, helping you source speakers and you should definitely work with them to put on a Welcome event for the new cohorts in your subject.

Top tips for engaging with your department

Having a strong relationship with your department can be really beneficial. Not only could it bring you other opportunities to get funding, book space and get good contacts for events, it can fundamentally help you to increase your membership and feel like a community on your course.

Show them you are professional

Book in a meeting with the staff who can support you (you can email your dept. admin and ask them to forward you to be best person).

Make sure you're prepared and tell them your plans for the year and where you can see collaboration opportunities - maybe they could send out a leaflet on your behalf to new starters?

If you make a promise, keep the promise and turn up.

Make life as easy as possible for them

Use canva.com to create resources in advance, like a presentation slide, advertisement slide that can be put onto a screen. You can even create leaflets on canva.com that look really professional, for free!

The easier you make things, the more likely your academic staff will engage - they already have a lot on so will hopefully appreciate this.

Stay organised!

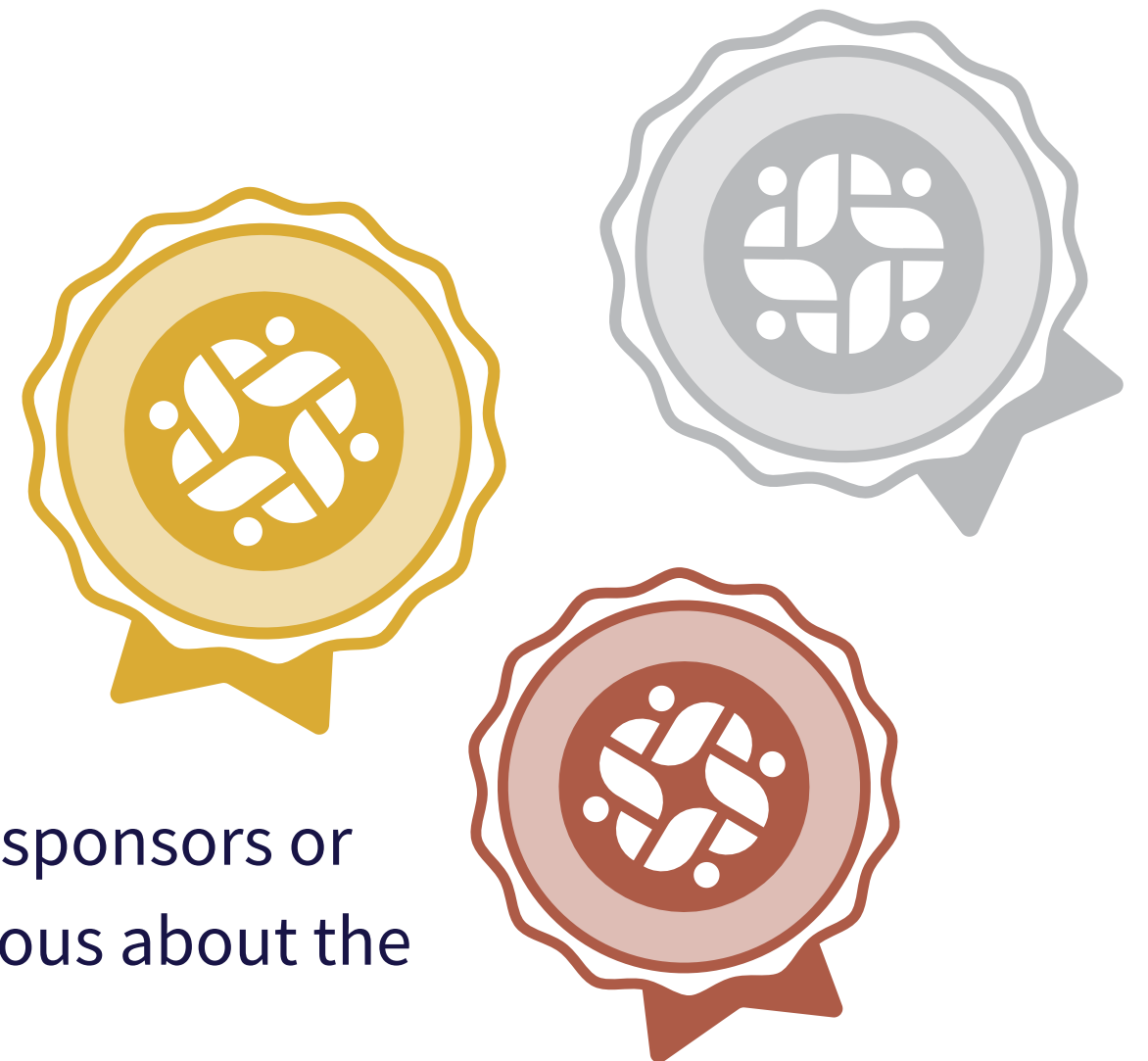
Make sure you're feeding back to the rest of the committee about the relationship and what is happening - you don't want university staff to get confused because different people from the society are telling them different things.

Also keep a record of who has helped you and remember to pass this information onto the next committee - a handover meeting with the staff member will work well too!

Getting involved in the SU

Bristol SU Accreditation scheme

The Bristol SU Accreditation Scheme is a surefire way to ensure you're checking off all the characteristics of a successful group. It is also great for getting more perks from the SU, like better Welcome Fair stall location, a virtual and physical rosette, advertising on our screens and room booking priority. As well, it shows potential sponsors or university teams that you're professional and serious about the work you're doing.



Statistically, we don't always get a lot of academic societies getting involved - which is a shame! If you follow the suggestions of this handbook, you're going to be hitting a lot of the criteria, so you may as well submit it for accreditation!

Rate My Group

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Engineering Design

96%

Satisfaction Score

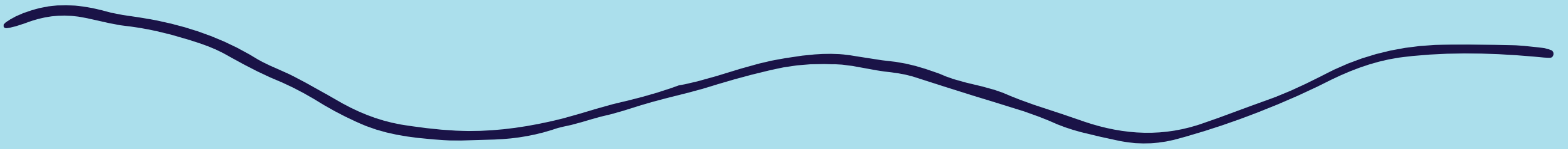
Thanks to all our wonderful members
who took part!

 Bristol SU

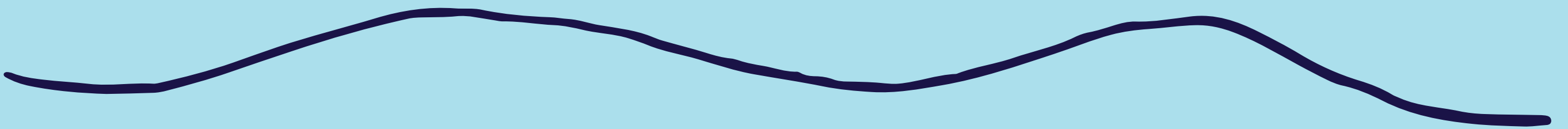
The Rate My Group survey comes out every year around March. It is not only an opportunity for committee members to feed back their suggestion and experiences of being part of Bristol SU, but also a chance for your members to give you feedback too. To score well, start thinking about Rate My Group early on. Is there any way you can gather feedback at points before RMG is released so you can get some solutions in place? Any group that scores over 90% satisfaction can submit it for an Accreditation criteria too!

Things to think about

Who currently isn't getting involved in your society?



Are there any gaps in your offer?



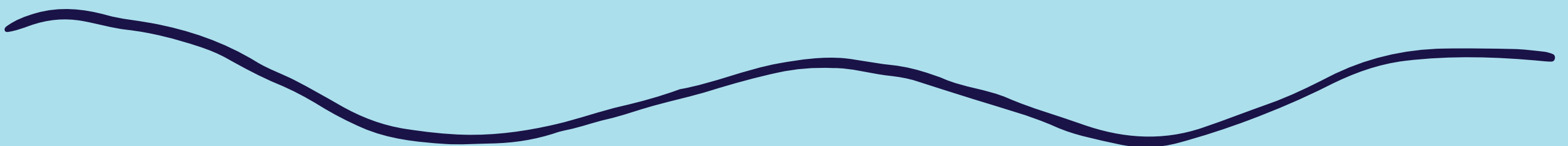
Does your committee reflect your potential offer?



Do you feel confident about where to seek help if you need it?



What is the pitch for your society? Are you appealing to the right stakeholders?



How is your relationship with your department?

If you're unsure about any of these questions (or anything in this booklet) meet with me and we can talk through it!



Beth Eyre

(she/her)

Student Development
Coordinator (Academic
Societies)

Contact me directly

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Contact my team

bristolsu-development@bristol.ac.uk

Book a meeting with me

In person

On Teams

My meeting hours are 10am-5pm, happy to meet outside of this if helpful for you, just email me.