

Relating to other groups on campus

Your university campus, as you know, is chocabloc with all kinds of societies that exist to meet every need or interest a student could possibly have. While many of them may have no relevance to your society, there are some that it will be important to communicate regularly with and others that it might be interesting to try and work together with on a particular event or campaign.

The positive thing about having an annual turnover of exec members in university societies is that even if collaboration with another group is a flop one year, it's always worth giving a good idea another try the following year. A new set of exec members with different priorities and personalities opens up all kinds of possibilities.

Other Christian societies

Whatever Christian society you are involved in, whether it is a denominational chaplaincy group e.g. Methsoc, Angsoc... or a an independent, ecumenical group, regular communication with the other Christian groups and chaplaincy staff on your campus is a must. Think what message it gives to outsiders or new students if different Christian societies don't know anything about each other's activities or hold meetings and events at the same time. What does it say about Christian unity?

The relationship between SCM affiliated groups and their Christian Union or related groups e.g. SPEAK varies from campus to campus but is often a difficult one. Though some CU's are more flexible, many insist on you signing up to UCCF's doctrinal basis before considering any co-operation. You may decide that close co-operation is impossible because of theological differences but this doesn't mean that you have to rule out any communication – keeping in touch is better than nothing.

Practical tips

- At many universities, the Chaplaincy denominational societies (this rarely includes the Cathsocs who prefer to remain independent) have merged to become ecumenical societies. This is a positive thing, especially as most students are not bothered about belonging to a particular denomination. Why not tentatively speak to people about this idea on your campus?
- What about suggesting the setting up of an ecumenical committee with a representative from each Christian society that ideally meets face to face, and maybe organises an ecumenical event each term. If this is impossible perhaps set up an online discussion board.

Contact SCM's Links Worker if you would find it helpful to discuss either of these ideas in more details. That's what they are there for!

- Make the most of your chaplain. They are there to support you and are usually happy to help with all kinds of matters whether you are looking for a speaker, need some help in sorting out a problem within the group, or anything else!
- If difficulties arise between your society and the Christian Union that you are not sure how to deal with, remember you can contact the SCM office. The Co-ordinator meets once a term with a UCCF member of staff and has the opportunity to discuss any concerns that have arisen since the last meeting.
- Whether you agree with the ethos of the other Christian societies or not, try to create an atmosphere in which you all value what the other is providing even if it's not your cup of tea. Though this is often easier said than done it's better than falling into a habit of continually bickering about each other.

Other faith or secular societies

More and more chaplaincy centres are becoming multi-faith centres making meeting with students of other faiths even easier than it was in the past. You might think it sounds like too much hassle to get in touch with other societies and look at working together on something but have you thought about the pluses?

- You may want to get in touch simply to ask for practical help – ideas for speakers or resources on an issue that your group is keen to explore e.g. People and Planet about environmental issues, or other faith groups if you want to look at other religions or interfaith issues. Other faith groups or their chaplains might be able to help you arrange a visit to a local mosque or synagogue.
- If you are considering holding an event or working on an awareness raising campaign on an issue that would be of interest to another society then why not explore working together? You would need to be careful that both societies agree on the same goal but by pooling what resources you each have, the work load could be much lighter with more hands on deck. For example an event or campaign on sexuality could be jointly organised by your own group and the LGB society.

Students' Union

Most of the societies you are involved in are probably registered with your Students' Union because you need to be registered in order to get a grant, a freshers stall, notice board space etc.

But it is also worth getting some basic understanding of how your SU works so that you know what other resources are available to societies. Get what information you can from last year's exec or people you know in other societies. There may be some kind of "Societies Handbook" which will contain all kinds of useful info. Find out if such a thing exists on your campus and get hold of it. Make contact with the Clubs and Societies Officer.



Remember you may need to register your society each year to make sure you don't miss out on your grant!

Other questions to ask your SU:

- How does the SU communicate with societies - pigeonholes and email? What are the deadlines for any SU publications so that you can advertise your society events?
- What are the grant application procedures? Are there any opportunities for making further applications later in the year?
- What other resources are there on offer – access to telephones, faxes, computers and postage? What about tv's and videos to hire?
- Are there any rooms that can be used free of charge apart from the chaplaincy?