Starting a Society

If your University doesn’t currently have a War on Want Society, why not start one of your own? Gain experience of campaigning against global injustice and inequality and get an insider’s perspective beyond what you learn in the lecture theatre.

Don’t replicate
Before you start, check that you are not repeating the work of another society or group on campus – if you share a common goal, it is worthwhile not to be exclusive – work together and your campaigns will be stronger.

Committee members and roles

‘Committee members’ are the people who will be running your society (i.e. you) – Check with your Student Union about whether there are any restrictions on this – you may need to have a certain number of people or have them fulfill certain roles.

A common example would be to have three members: a president – who makes the major decisions, secretary – who deals with correspondence, and treasurer – who handles the finances.

You can assign these however you choose, they only important thing is to make it clear which tasks each person is responsible for, so that you can delegate easily and work together. This is written up and becomes a part of your society’s constitution:

Writing a constitution

Your constitution sets out the aims of your society and makes it clear to members exactly what they are committing to when they join. It should include information on the membership fee (if you have one), structure of the committee, what sort of activities you will do as a group and what your objectives are. You might want to start with an introduction to War on Want, like the Sussex group has:

“Sussex War on Want is affiliated with the UK based NGO War on Want which ‘fights poverty in developing countries in partnership and solidarity with people affected by globalisation. [They] campaign for workers’ rights and against the root causes of global poverty, inequality and injustice.’ Sussex War on Want Society brings together like-minded
students to get involved with political activism in the UK and bring about social justice in the global south – poverty is political!"

Add information about when and where you meet (if you choose to have regular meetings) and how members can join. You could also choose one of War on Want’s campaigns or focus on a few. Check with your Student Union about their specific requirements.

**Make the most of your Student Union**

Your first step will be to find out from your Student Union all of the specifics about running a society at your University.

- Where can you store any materials your society may accumulate?
- Do you have access to any equipment (audio/visual/computers etc)?
- Where can you put posters on campus?
- What funding is available and how do you apply?
- Are there any similar societies you might be able to network with?
- What are the key dates for your diary (Freshers’ week, green week etc)?
- Will you be provided with a web page?
- What training and assistance will be available?

**Setting up a contact email**

Your Student Union may be able to help you set up an email address (e.g. waronwant@studentsunion.com) – if not, set one up using another service provider such as googlemail or hotmail.

Once you have a mailing list of supporters, add them as contacts ASAP so that you can begin to update them regularly.

**Communication**

The most important step is to regularly update your members – this could be using a social networking site such as Facebook, or a mailing list - where you can communicate with your members and let them know what is coming up and where you need input or participation.

**PR and publicity**

Social media is also a great way to promote events, films nights, and anything you’re doing. Don’t forget that the local news (including your University’s newspaper) may be interested in your events, especially if they are attention grabbing! Be sure to write press releases
which cover the 5 W’s of journalism (Who, Where, What, Why, and How?) and send them with enough time for press to attend/cover the event.

If you are promoting an event, meeting, or action yourself, be sure to use all the means available to you – online, word of mouth and handing out flyers. Double and triple check that your flyers contain all the right information, and allow plenty of time to design and have them printed and handed out in advance of the event.