Organising your Humanist Students Society

There are a variety of tools that can aid in the running of your society. Being well organised is critical to a successful society and it relies on a few basics. Knowing who is responsible for what, meeting as a committee regularly to update and plan society activities, communicating to members, and advertising the activities the society does.

Committee meetings

Why have committee meetings?

Even if you're organised already having committee meetings is useful for all the members of your society. Meeting face to face means you can be more creative in planning your society's events and activities and be more efficient in your planning process. For instance committee meetings make it easier to track your progress, delegate tasks and hold each other accountable. Some of your committee members might think that there isn't much point in have meetings and that you achieve little more than talking about your upcoming plans rather than executing them. That's why you'll need to have a clear structure in place which you stick to at every meeting.

How to organise meetings

You should aim to meet at the very least every other week. If you're in a larger society which holds frequent socials, lectures or discussions you'll definitely find it useful to meet every week. Your meetings don't need to be overly long, dull or meticulously recorded but do make sure you have recorded the meeting in some way as this will help you to consider whether you're on track and what further actions need to be taken. Think about the following to make sure you're as efficient as possible.

Make sure the meeting is booked in on the same day every week (or however frequently you're holding your meetings) so your committee members know when exactly when they need to turn up. If you can make sure the meeting is in the same location and takes up the same length of time every week this will make it more likely your committee will be happy to turn up.

You should agree when this meeting is taking place at the start of term once everyone has their timetables, there's no use in booking in committee meeting if the rest of your committee are definitely going to be in lectures or seminars. Make sure you use a tool like Google Calendar or Doodle so your committee are reminded to attend.

Always prepare an agenda for the meeting. You should aim to start and finish meetings on time every time, if your meetings are constantly running over time then something is going wrong. That's where your agendas should help. A good agenda is about getting people to focus on a specific issue. Make sure when you are creating agendas you itemise everything and designate whether it's a topic for discussion, a decision your committee need to make or an update on an issue for the committee. If there are documents you want your committee to look at make sure these are circulated with the agenda before the meeting. The last thing you want to do is waste time which could be used for other items on the agenda. The discussion taking place for each item should be recorded and where relevant an action must be identified.

Every committee meeting should have a chair who sets the agenda and calls round for agenda items amongst the committee. The chair should set the direction of the meeting, making sure each agenda item is covered, that each member has enough time to speak and that the meeting runs on time. A good chair allows enough time for discussion but makes sure that as an item comes to a close a clear course of action has been identified. The chair of the meeting doesn't have to the president of your society and can be anyone on the committee. If you all want experience of chairing a meeting you could try a system of rolling chairs, changing the chair at every meeting.

You'll also need to designate a minute taker, again this doesn't have to be the same person at every meeting but make sure whoever it is is fairly meticulous in recording what was said. Before the meeting the minute taker and the chair should briefly discuss the agenda items and where there are likely to be actions points which need to be recorded. In the meeting the minute taker should record only a precis of what was discussed with relevant actions points, there is no need to write an essay. If at any point discussions are becoming difficult to follow the minute taker should ask the chair to slow down the discussion and summarise the key points in order that the minute taker can catch up. The chair should also identified where actions should be minuted.

Roles and responsibilities
Generally you'll need 3 - 5 committee members to form your society. The roles that are usually compulsory are President, Secretary and Treasurer. The President is the leader of the society and sets your direction every year. Your secretary looks after the society's administration and membership and your treasurer looks after the finances of the society including any of the funding you've been given by your students' union. Other committee roles are really up to you and dependent on what you want your society to achieve. For instance if you want to run a lot of socials or larger lecture style events it's a good idea to have a committee members whose sole focus is planning those events. Similarly if you want to reach out to faith based societies and run activities or events with them it's worth having a dialogue officer.

Tracking progress and project management

There are lots of project management tools out there for you to experiment. Choosing the right one can be difficult and in general you should look at something which is simple to use and can be updated by a range of people. A tool popular in lots of organisation and amongst smaller projects is Trello. Trello allows you to prioritise using a colour coded board system. It's useful for when you have multiple projects on the go and need a way to track several sets of actions at a time.

Communicating with your committee and members

Slack

Whilst platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp are useful for some society communication, if you're looking for a more formal system of communication, a site like **Slack** might be helpful. Slack is essentially an organisational messaging site, working similarly to Facebook messenger but avoiding important things getting lost in all your other conversations- essentially you can have all things society-related in one place. If you have a big enough society it might be an idea to use Slack for your committee to communicate, although be sure to communicating with your team to find out what platforms work best for them.

Slack works via 'teams'- you set up a team, adding any members from your committee or wider society that you want. You will then have a string of 'channels' on the left-hand side of the screen- essentially every person in the team will appear here and you just click on the name to start a conversation. You can have channels made up of multiple team members too. The search bar in the top right also makes it a lot easier to search conversations for files or chunks of convo than it would be via Facebook messenger. You can pin items to make them easier to find and quickly look at any files shared in a certain channel on the right below the search bar too.

Keeping up with Slack can be tricky- in the settings section you can sign up to email alerts that will let you know every time you've been mentioned (you can mention people by putting an '@' in front of their username) and when someone has said something new in a certain channel too.

Email lists

MailChimp is an excellent tool for creating attractive and easily-constructed emails or newsletters, and sending them out to mailing lists. It's also free to use!

You can keep things simple and use a drag-and-drop template to create a newsletter. Select pictures, captions, and text blocks, and then fill them in as you please. If you're advertising an event, or including a link to an article, you can quickly add hyperlinks to your text. Once you've added links to your social

media pages and made sure you're happy with the message, you can save it as a template. This allows you to replicate it (e.g. allowing you to keep a standard format for your newsletter), or to send it.

When sending your MailChimp campaign, you can choose which of your mailing lists to send the message to. You can also preview what it will look like on various devices, and decide whether to auto-tweet or auto-post your mailing. Once you've sent it, you can monitor how many people have opened the message, clicked on the links, and how this pattern develops over time.

You can also share a link to the mailing so that non-subscribers can read it, as well as giving people the option of signing up for future updates from you.

Polls and surveys
From time to time gauging the opinion of your members can be important. Most Students' Unions should have an online system for running formal election, but if you want to simply choose a time for a meeting, as mentioned, Doodle is a really simple way of doing this.

For a more detailed survey on members opinions, there are a variety of different useful and free tools, such as SurveyMonkey (there are plenty of others) or even just Google Forms. (Google Forms has the added advantage of allowing you to download results directly onto an Excel spreadsheet so you can easily go through and analyse the data).

Surveying your members every now and then on what campaigns you should be running, what events you should be putting on or even how they'd prefer to be contacted is important to make sure you're being member-led. Of course, discussing these sorts of things in meetings is important too, but not all members are always able to make it to these.

Once you've started getting data in, most tools will present you your results in a variety of ways, with percentages, raw totals and graphs too. Think about how your data will appear in this section when forming your questions and choosing how to ask them (most surveys will have a variety of question types- open-ended, multiple choice, score out of 5)- which ways of asking the question will be easiest for you to gauge your member's preferences from?

Advertising the activities of the society
Don't keep all the knowledge about your events and activities to yourselves! Make sure you are telling your members, and the wider community about what you are doing, what they can do to get involved, and the events you are running, to which they might want to come. See the running events guide and social media guide to look at specific activities you might want to do.