



Running events at your university

Why run an event?

Before you get ahead and start to plan an event think deeply about the reason you want to hold an event and **have a clear aim in mind**. As a student society much of what you do is already social. Do you want to gain more members of for your society? Is it about bringing in an interesting speaker who will get your society noticed a bit more and stir up intellectual debate? Is simply because you aren't sure if other students know what Humanists do and you want to give them more information? It might be a mixture of all of these things but make sure you know before you start planning your event. A event without a clear aim in mind often falls flat or doesn't engage with a prospective audience.

Types of events Humanist Student Societies have run

Most humanist societies exist to bring together non-religious students and promote humanism, some societies will focus more on being sociable, or campaigning, or engaging in dialogue. This means that society events often fall into discrete categories. Depending on what your event involves you'll need to plan it in different ways.

If you're running social events for instance these will need minimal planning and minimal promotion. If you're doing anything larger you'll have to think about how much time you can put into planning and how much time your committee have. If your event involves an external speaker you need to think about how long it might take to get them to agree to do the event and what the incentives are for them to take part.

Frequency of events. Consider how frequently you'd want to hold events. Larger speakers events will take longer to plan and you will need to plan further in advance. Whereas smaller socials or book groups won't take much planning and you can hold these every week. Look at your academic year and think about the pinch points for you and your committee and try to plan larger events where you can be sure you'll have enough time.

External speaker events: (lectures, seminars, panels)

Bringing in external speakers can be a great way to stimulate debate about an issue and attract more people to join your society. Think about the issue you want to focus your event on carefully while some social issues may always be relevant topics to discuss and debate the best attended events will always be events that are responding to something topical.

It's a good idea to plan the themes you want to run an event on with your committee at the beginning of the term. If you're planning bigger events delegate them out to different members of the committee, unless you have a designated events officer/manager role.



Once you've got your themes in place it's time to start thinking about the speakers you want. For instance if you want to do an event around a contentious issue do you want a panel of speakers to represent different views on the topic. If your event is responding to current affairs do you want just one speaker who will speak knowledgeably on a specific subject.

Remember some speakers attract a fee and it's unlikely that your society will be able to pay it so think carefully about what you can provide. Usually you can attract a good standard of speaker simply by giving them exposure to wide range of people and offering expenses. However, it is worth remembering that popular speakers are going to want a lot of notice to be able to speak. Some are very busy and will need to be booked months in advance. Give at least a month's notice, if possible.

If you want to get started you might want to look at Humanists UK's [Patron list](#), or the Humanists UK [staff list](#). Remember though that the more famous the speaker is, the busier they will be

Dialogue events:

Dialogue events usually take place with one or more societies who may have opposing views on certain subjects. This might be obvious but a dialogue event isn't about winning the argument or convincing others that your way is the most rational. The goal of a dialogue event is to bring about constructive common ground for both the participants and the audience involved. While there may be room for difficult probing questions, this shouldn't be the focus on the entire event.

Humanist societies usually hold these events with one or more faith based societies on campus. Sometimes these events can be interfaith or multi-faith/belief events with the sole purpose of creating dialogue across all belief systems more often they are focused on a topical issue. Collaborative events can be useful both in terms of building bridges with those who hold different values or viewpoints but can also encourage critical analysis and engagement.

If you're thinking of running a dialogue event check Humanist Students' guidance on engaging in [dialogue first](#), as this has many useful tips to create a positive environment at these events.

Socials:

Lots of societies hold pub socials, these are usually informal events designed to help people get to know each other, they are really useful when you have lots of new members in a society. Socials can be as structured as you want them to be. You could hold a quiz or 'think and drink' presenting an issue you'll discuss and debate over drinks. At Exeter Humanist Students they've run 'Cards Against Humanism' where they get together to card games and board games.

Some people won't be comfortable going to the pub. For instance some apostates might not feel comfortable getting together in a pub especially if they have recently left a religion. As an alternative think about holding a Humanist Students Brunch, finding a family friendly restaurant you can invite members of your society and members of a local Humanist group in your area (if there is one). If



you're in touch with local residents you can invite them along too to learn about humanism in a casual informal way over food and drinks.

Discussion Groups:

Lots of societies hold these sorts of events. Usually this means finding some stimulus such as a book or film and coming together to discuss this, sometimes framed around a particular topic. Discussion groups can be fun but they aren't always the best events to keep people engaged so use them sparingly, or run them as a specific book group, film night, and so on.

Event checklist

For every larger event you run you'll need a brief plan to make sure your event runs smoothly and that your event is well attended. The checklist won't be useful for every event but it will help you to think through the steps towards a successful event.

Event checklist	
Have you decided on the overall purpose of your event?	
Have you created a brief description of your event for any speakers you want to invite?	
Have you identified a shortlist of speakers you want to invite?	
If you have a speaker have you briefed them and provided logistical information?	
Have you identified your target audience for the event?	
Have you written a provisional agenda or 'runplan' for the event?	
Have you thought about the type of venue you'll need for the event and researched possible venues?	
Have you thought about catering for your event, if longer than 90 minutes?	
Have you thought about the access requirements of your attendees? I.e wheelchair access	
Have you thought about what materials or equipment you might need i.e. laptop, projector, microphones?	
Have you created social media posts advertising your event?	
Is the event listed on your website/Facebook/Eventbrite?	
If you're doing an event in the local community, have you thought of where you might advertise the event to local residents? Have you contacted the local Humanist Group for support?	
Have you shared the event with Humanist Students so we can advertise your event too?	
Have you requested any Humanists UK promotional materials needed i.e. sign up forms	
Have you confirmed roles on the day of your event?	
Have you thought about how you'll evaluate the success of the event?	