



UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX STUDENTS\* UNION

# SOCIETIES

# TERMS OF REFERENCE

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**Approved by:** Rachel Waddon & VP Student Experience

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## UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX STUDENTS' UNION SOCIETIES TERMS OF REFERENCE

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Purpose
3. Membership of SU Societies
4. Recognised Societies
5. Representation
6. General Meetings
7. Election of Societies Committee Members of Recognised Societies
8. Conflicts & Disputes
9. Finances
10. Closure of Societies

## ARTICLE 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 These Terms of Reference shall apply to all University of Essex Students' Union societies, hereafter referred to as 'societies', and all such societies shall be subject to its provisions

## ARTICLE 2 PURPOSE

### Purpose

2.1 The purpose of any and all societies shall be the facilitation of student-led activities by groups of like-minded individuals, whose purpose shall be as stated in the societies start up application or societies constitution but shall exclude

- a) any purpose which is so similar to the aims, objectives or purpose of any existing society or club, or any area of the University of Essex Students' Union, that it would result in duplication; and
- b) any purpose which is contrary to the University of Essex Students' Union Societies Terms of Reference, or the University of Essex Students' Union' Articles of Governance, or its Code of Conduct, or its Byelaws, or any of its policies.

2.2 The Students' Union will support these societies through:

- a) the Recognition of Societies, subject to the provisions of this Terms of Reference;
- b) the organisation of Recognised Societies with similar aims and objectives into seven categories, as follows:

- Activities
- Arts
- Cultural
- Departmental
- Musical
- Political and Representation
- Religious

- c) representation of the interests of Members of all Recognised Societies and of Recognised Societies at all appropriate bodies;
- d) provision of appropriate support and training for Members SU Societies, including but not limited to Executive Committee Members of Recognised Societies;
- e) establishment of links with relevant external bodies at local, national and international level;
- f) involvement and participation in social and charitable events.

2.3 These aims and objectives shall be pursued without regard to age, colour, disability, ethnic origin, gender, sex, marital status, nationality, parental status, family commitments, race, sexual orientation or identity, religious or political beliefs or affiliation, HIV/AIDS status and trade union activity, except where it is a requirement of competition eligibility.

### **ARTICLE 3 MEMBERSHIP OF SU SOCIETIES**

- 3.1 Membership of SU Societies is open to any individual wishing to join on payment of any relevant Societies Membership Fees, subject to the provision that at no time shall an SU recognised society be

comprised of less than eighty percent University of Essex student members.

- 3.2 Any Member of an SU Society shall be subject to disciplinary action, including but not limited to suspension or withdrawal of Membership of their Society, following a decision by a qualified majority decision of a Societies 'Panel of Peers' agree that a Member has contravened the provisions either of this Terms of Reference or of the Societies Code of Conduct.
- 3.3 Any Member of Societies who is the subject of disciplinary action under Article 3.2 of this Terms if Reference shall have a right of appeal to the VP Student Experience, whose decision shall be final.
- 3.4 Any disciplinary action taken with regard to any Member of an SU Society will be in line with the University of Essex Students' Union General Membership Policy, Articles of Governance, and the appeal procedure shall follow the University of Essex Students' Union Articles of Governance.
- 3.5 Membership of any recognised SU Society shall entitle Members to full participation in the services as set out in this Terms of Reference; however, no Member of any SU Society who is not a full Member of the University of Essex Students' Union shall be entitled either to:
  - a) vote in any General Meeting of SU Societies; or
  - b) submit items for the Agenda of any General Meeting of Societies;  
or

- c) vote in any Societies election or stand as a candidate in such an election; or
- d) call an Emergency General Meeting of SU Societies; or
- e) appeal any decision by the Societies 'Panel of Peers';
- f) submit any suggestions to the Societies policy or procedures including but not limited this terms of reference.

3.6 A list of current Members of each SU Recognised Society shall be retained by the Student Activities Department of the University of Essex Students' Union.

3.7 The Executive Committee Members of Recognised Societies shall have access to the Membership of their own Society through the use of the University of Essex Students' Union registered website.

#### **ARTICLE 4 RECOGNISED SOCIETIES**

4.1 Recognition of a Society by the Students' Union shall be through completion of the following requirements.

- a) the agreement SU Student Activities Department that the Aims and Objectives of the Society seeking Recognition are not so similar to those of any other Recognised Society or of any other area of the University of Essex Students' Union that Recognition would lead to a duplication of those Aims and Objectives; and

- b) prior receipt by the SU Student Activities Department of a completed 'Society Start-Up Form' stating the Aims and Objectives of the Society seeking Recognition together with the names, PRID Numbers, and email addresses or telephone numbers of at least twenty current full members of the University of Essex Students' Union who would like to join the Society seeking Recognition; and
- c) receipt and subsequent approval by the SU Student Activities Department of the Constitution of the Society seeking Recognition; and
- d) receipt and subsequent approval by the SU Student Activities Department of the Code of Conduct for the Society seeking Recognition; and
- e) receipt by the SU Student Activities Department of any required signed agreement which is appropriate to the specific Convene within which the Society would be organised.
- f) acknowledgement and agreement of any relevant SU policy.

4.2 Should the SU Student Activities Department reject the application for the new society on the basis that it does not meet the requirements of 4.1a then the proposers may appeal the decisions by;

- a) Clarifying the aims and objectives of the society to show a clear distinction to any groups currently in existence.
- b) Meet with a representative from the SU Student Activities Department and the group that they are similar to, to discuss opportunities for collaboration or clear distinctions set between the two separate groups.

- 4.3 If an agreement cannot be reached between the proposers, the SU Student Activities department and/or the group that the proposed society is similar too then the proposer has the option to have their proposal go up for online ratification by Members of the University of Essex Students' Union being provided with:
- a) five working days' notice in term time that a vote is due to take place, followed by a voting period of three working days in term time;
  - b) access to a published written statement from the proposer(s) of the new society which shall state the aims and objectives of the new society together with any other relevant information including an outcome from the appeal, which shall be made available throughout the notice and voting periods;
  - c) access to published written questions directed to the proposer(s) of the new society by Members of the Students' Union and also to their answers; and
  - d) a minimum of 50 Members of the Students' Union must vote in the online ratification.
- 4.4 The Constitution of any Recognised Society must include
- a) the stated Aims and Objectives of the Recognised Society, which Aims and Objectives must not be contrary the SU Societies Term

of Reference; the SU Societies Code of Conduct or to those of the University of Essex Students' Union; and

b) the Society Membership fee, which shall be

- (i) decided by the executive of the Society on an annual basis. There is no minimum or maximum amount that a Society may charge for membership; however a society must generate sufficient income for the Society both to meet its stated Aims and Objectives.

c) provisions for the election of an Executive Committee, which provisions must not be contrary to those stated in Article 8 of the SU Societies Terms of Reference; and

d) a description of the responsibilities of the Executive Committee and its Members; and

- 1. detailed provisions for the financial control of the Recognised Society, which provisions must not be contrary to the University of Essex Students' Union's Financial Policies and Procedures for Clubs and Societies;

and the Constitution of any Recognised Society may not be contrary to the SU Societies Terms of Reference or the SU Societies Code of Conduct or to the Students Union's General Membership Policy, Articles of Governance, or its Byelaws, or any of its policies, and any part of any Constitution which does so conflict shall be invalid.

- 4.4 No amendment to the Constitution or Code of Conduct of any Recognised Society shall be valid unless approved by the SU Student Activities Department, which must receive written notification of such amendment within 7 days of the amendment being made, and the SU Student Activities Department shall reserve the right to refuse to approve such amendment.

- 4.5 The Code of Conduct of any Recognised Society must not be contrary to the SU Societies Code of Conduct.
- 4.6 Recognition of a Society by the Students' Union may be suspended or withdrawn if the Students' Union is satisfied that
- a) the Society has acted outside its Constitution or Code of Conduct, or the SU Societies Terms of Reference or Code of Conduct, or the University of Essex Students' Union's Articles of Governance, its Byelaws, or any of its Policies; or
  - b) the Society is no longer active; or
  - c) mismanagement of the Society has taken place, including but not limited to
    - i. financial mismanagement; and/or
    - ii. failure to comply with any Supplementary Regulation established by the SU Student Activities Department within this Terms or Reference, where suspension or withdrawal of Recognition is the established consequence of such failure to comply;

and any Society in respect of which Recognition is so withdrawn may not re-apply for Recognition until the commencement of the following academic year.

## ARTICLE 5 REPRESENTATION

- 5.1 Societies will be represented within the Students' Union through the following
- a) Students' Union Vice President of Experience
  - b) 3 elected representatives for societies at Parliament. These representatives must be a member of a society and will be elected in accordance with the Students' Union Articles of Governance.
- 5.2 The VP Student Experience's responsibilities include the representation of society members. They can be held accountable by the membership if it is felt they are not representing the members of societies properly as detailed in the Articles of Governance
- 5.3 The elected SU Societies Parliament Representatives will be required to ensure that the concerns of society members are appropriately represented to the Students' Union via Parliament. They will be required to actively reach out to members of societies to ensure that their views are appropriately represented. In addition they will regularly meet with the VP Student Experience and SU Student Activities Department to ensure any concerns from the membership are raised appropriately.
- 5.4 In addition, members of Societies may set up informal committees in accordance with the needs of societies as a collective.
- a) These committees are not recognised in a formal structure and can be formed and closed in line with student need.
  - b) These committees may be formed in any of the following ways
    - (i) The VP Student Experience setting up a committee
    - (ii) The SU Student Activities Team circulating a sign up opportunity

(iii) A member of any society may propose a committee to the VP Student Experience and/or the SU Student Activities Team. Following a discussion about the proposed committee the VP Student Experience/SU Student Activities Team will then circulate the sign up opportunity.

(iv) Members of societies may wish to work autonomously and come together to form groups to work in projects.

c) The committees created will not hold any rights to represent or hold any authority over members of societies.

## **ARTICLE 6 GENERAL MEETINGS**

- 6.1 General Meetings of Societies shall be called by the VP Student Experience or the SU Student Activities Team. These will be called as and when necessary.
- 6.2 The Chair shall be responsible for keeping all General Meetings of Students' Union Societies in order and shall be heard in silence.
- 6.3 All Members of Students' Union Societies shall show respect towards all others present at any General Meeting of Students' Union Societies and allow them to be heard in silence so as to not distract them or dissuade them from raising points.
- 6.4 Any Member of a Students' Union Society wishing to speak at any General Meeting of Students' Union Societies shall indicate to the Chair, who shall call upon speakers in the order that they see them.
- 6.5 Speakers at any General Meeting of Students' Union Societies shall abide by the Equal Opportunities, Safe Space and Zero Tolerance Policies of the University of Essex Students' Union at all times and the Chair may order any speaker who breaches any of these policies to immediately cease.

- 6.6 No Member of any Students' Union Society shall behave in an abusive manner in the course of any General Meeting of Students' Union Societies, and in the event of their doing so the Chair shall ask them to desist and apologise, and if the Member fails to comply with this request, the Chair shall have the power to exclude that Member from any General Meeting of Students' Union Societies and also future General Meetings of Students' Union Societies if the Chair believes this is in the interests of student welfare.
- 6.7 Members can appeal against a decision by the Chair to exclude them from any Students' Union Societies General Meetings by communicating this in writing to the President of the University of Essex Students' Union.
- 6.8 All Members of Students' Union Societies who are full Members of the University of Essex Students' Union shall have the right to vote at any General Meeting of Students' Union Societies and shall have one vote each, save that the Chair may only exercise their vote in the event of a tied vote, and the Chair shall conduct the vote in the manner they see fit unless a Secret Ballot is requested as detailed in the Articles of Governance..

## **ARTICLE 7 ELECTION OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF RECOGNISED SOCIETIES**

- 7.1 Executive Committee elections shall take place during the second term of each academic year.
- 7.2 Only fully registered members of the Students' Union are eligible to stand in an election for core executive committee positions – President, Secretary, Treasurer and Welfare Officer.

- 7.3 Partly-registered Students' Union members can stand in an election for non-core officer roles – this includes Alumni and intermitting students
- 7.4 If a student who wins an election for a core officer role for the next academic year then subsequently decides to intermit, they will automatically be removed from their position.
- 7.5 The core executive positions of each society must be elected online via [essexstudent.com](http://essexstudent.com). These positions are;
- (i) President
  - (ii) Secretary
  - (iii) Treasurer
- 7.6 Every society must elect an executive that is responsible for fulfilling the duties of a Welfare Officer. This may either be as a standalone Welfare Officer or their duties must be incorporated into the role description of one of the other core officer positions.
- 7.7 In addition to the annual elections of the core Executive Committee the society may wish to elect other members into the Executive Committee. This may be done in the following ways;
- (a) Via [essexstudent.com](http://essexstudent.com) at the same time as the core Executive Committee elections are held.
  - (b) At a General Meeting of the Society. This should be called with at least 5 working days' notice. During the meeting, candidates would be able to present their capability for the position to the membership. An anonymous paper ballot will be held and counted and verified by 2 different members of the society. Any member may request to witness the vote count.
  - (c) A society may wish to interview members for the non-core Executive Positions of the society if it requires a specific skillset. In

these situations, the interviews must be conducted fairly by ensuring the following criteria is met

- All members of the society are able to interview for the role.
- A set of questions must be created in advance and the same questions must be asked to each candidate.
- Every answer will be scored out of 5 ranging from 1 being a 'very poor answer' to 5 being an 'excellent answer'.
- Only members of the society that are full members of the University of Essex Students' Union may conduct the interviews
- There must be a minimum of 2 interviewers for each interview. These must be the same for every interview for each Executive Committee Position.

7.8 In addition to the annual elections an Executive Committee election shall take place either:

- a) immediately following the resignation of any President, Treasurer or Secretary of any Recognised Society, in order to fill the vacancy created; or
- b) at any time at the request of the President of any Recognised Society to fill any vacancy on the Executive Committee of that Recognised Society; or
- c) immediately following the removal of the Executive Committee of any Recognised Society under the provisions set out in this terms of reference.

7.9 In respect of any Executive Committee election, if the Society wishes to hold the election via [essexstudent.com](http://essexstudent.com) Members of the Recognised Society in question must:

- a) be provided with at least one week's notice via [essexstudent.com](http://essexstudent.com) of the intention to hold such an election; and
- b) be provided with at least 60 hours (2.5 days) to nominate themselves and at least 36 hours (1.5 days) to vote.
- c) Provide the SU Student Activities Team with the role descriptions for the roles ahead of the deadline for the monthly elections.

7.10 Any full Member of the University of Essex Students' Union who is a full member of a Recognised Society may stand for election to the Executive Committee of that Recognised Society.

7.11 Only members of a Recognised Society who are full members of the University of Essex Students' Union may vote in the elections for the Executive Committee of that Society.

7.12 The quorum for the purposes of any election for any Core Executive Positions of a Recognised Society shall be twenty-five percent of that Society's voting membership or 30 voting members, whichever number is smaller.

7.13 Societies are required to inform the SU Student Activities Department about any newly elected exec members and to provide the paper ballots or interview questions and answers upon request.

7.14 All Executive Members will be required to attend and complete appropriate training and set out by the SU Student Activities Department.

## ARTICLE 8 CONFLICTS & DISPUTES

*Please see the end of this document for our template on how to handle society disputes.*

- 8.1 If there is a dispute either within or between societies that cannot be resolved amicably between the members then disputes will be resolved in the following ways.
- 8.2 In the first instance the members of the society should work with members of their executive team to mediate a conversation to find a resolution.
- 8.3 If the executives of the society are unable to support the members to resolve their conflict then those members should contact the SU Student Activities Department who will either assist the society to mediate between the conflicting parties or mediate between the conflicting parties themselves.
- 8.4 If the SU Student Activities Department is unable to assist the conflicting parties to resolve their conflict then it will be escalated to a society's panel of peers. The Panel of Peers will be put together by the VP Student Experience and include 8 Society Core Executives of a range of societies.
- 8.5 Any Society Core Executive can be called to be on a Panel of Peers at any point in the academic year.
- 8.6 If called to sit on a Panel of Peers but unavailable to sit on the panel they can decline with a valid reason on 2 occasions.
- 8.7 If called to sit on a Panel of Peers then the Core Executive will be required to declare any conflicts of interest.
- 8.8 The Panel of Peers will consist of 8 Societies Core Executive Members and the VP Student Experience. The VP Student Experience will chair the meeting. Members of the SU Student Activities Department may be made available to provide additional information but have no voting rights in the decision.

- 8.9 Anything discussed at the Panel of Peers would be deemed confidential. If anyone sitting on this panel breaches the confidentiality then they may face disciplinary action.
- 8.10 The Society Panel of Peers may also be called when a society has acted inappropriately and outside the Societies Code of Conduct and/or the SU Societies Terms of Reference.
- 8.11 If a dispute is regarding a protected characteristic or is considered bullying or harassment then it will be dealt with via the University's Disciplinary Procedures or via the Report and Support Network.
- 8.12 If at any point, it is clear that a law has been broken such as but not limited to a hate crime, then in this instance the person putting in the complaint will be encourage to contact the Police or relevant service about their complaint.
- 8.13 Members of a society can bring a vote of no-confidence against any executive member provided on the basis that the points 8.14, 8.15, 8.16, 8.17, 8.18, 8.19 and 8.20 are adhered to correctly.
- 8.14 At least 25% of a society's membership or 30 members (whichever number is lower) are in agreement with the proposal of a vote of no-confidence. This quota must be evident within a form/email that is sent to the Student Activities Staff.
- 8.15 The member who the vote is against is informed by email with the Student Activities Staff CC'd into the email ([susocs@essex.ac.uk](mailto:susocs@essex.ac.uk)) **before** the official no-confidence vote is held.
- 8.16 The member who the no-confidence vote is against is given notice of at least 5 working days ahead of the meeting where the vote will be held.
- 8.17 The member who the no-confidence vote is against is provided within 5 working days' notice ahead of the meeting with all reasons and evidence as to why the vote has been brought against them.

- 8.18 The party bringing forward the vote of no-confidence has only one speaking representative at the meeting, and gives equal opportunity to the member who the vote is against to speak.
- 8.19 The vote is held by a confidential paper ballot at the meeting, with this being monitored by one executive member and a non-executive member.
- 8.20 The results are accessible to all, with a re-count being given if asked for.
- 8.21 If the vote of no-confidence has been successfully passed, a member of the executive team must inform the Societies staff with the exact result.

#### **ARTICLE 9 – FINANCES**

- 9.1 Societies accounts will be managed by the Students' Union
- 9.2 Societies may choose to charge a membership fee but any expenses that are claimed from the income generated by the membership fee must relate to the aims and objectives of the society and must benefit the society.
- 9.3 The Treasurer and President will have the main responsibility for the finances of the society and will be required to adhere to any policy or regulations set out by the University of Essex Students' Union.
- 9.4 Any member of a society has the right to request to view the weekly finance report by putting a request in writing to either the President or Treasurer of their society.
- 9.5 No Society will have a payment approved if the funds are not available in their accounts.
- 9.6 If a society requires additional funding to what is available in their accounts they should
  - i) Fundraise, either via fundraising activities or through the University of Essex Click Funding.

ii) Seek donations – this must be given freely without any expectations in return including but not limited to publicising the organisation/company making the donation.

iii) Seek sponsorship – this must be approved by the SU Student Activities Department who must sign the agreement. Sponsorship can be goods or monies with expectations for something in return including but not limited to publicising the organisation/company offering the sponsorship.

iv) In the case that a society has exhausted the ways to generate income but is unable to generate sufficient funds for an activity that meets then they can apply for a small grant from the SU Student Activities Team. This will be granted at the discretion of the VP Student Experience and/or a representative from the SU Student Activities Department and depends on the funds being available from a pot of money generated by closed society accounts as stated in article 10.3.

## **ARTICLE 10 – CLOSURE OF SOCIETIES**

7.6 In the event that a society is closed, they will need to reapply to be a society. There may be circumstances that the SU Student Activities Department and/or the VP Student Experience may choose to not accept this application until the following academic year. A society may appeal this decision via article 4.3 of these terms of reference.

7.7 If any society is closed for more than 1 entire academic year, any monies in their account will be in the first instance transferred to any societies with similar aims and objectives. If there are no suitable societies to transfer the funds to then the funds will be transferred into a societies development fund to support societies that have exhausted all funding options.

## **ARTICLE 11 – INTERPRETATION**

11.1 Reference to any bodies and persons in these Terms of Reference includes any duly appointed or elected successors.

Any matters not specifically covered by this Terms of Reference shall be referred to the VP Student Experience who shall make a ruling.

## **ARTICLE 12 – REVOCATION**

12.1 By approving these terms of reference the Societies Guild Constitution will be revoked.