

Constitutions

Creating constitutions for student groups

This resource will explain why it is useful for student groups to have a constitution. The guidance also explains the elements of a good constitution.

Introduction

Students' unions are democratic organisations and must have a constitution to outline the activities and procedures of the organisation.

The students' union constitution is designed to:

- Provide a framework for the running of the union
- Outlines where and how union members can raise concerns
- Shows how the executive committee can act on behalf of members
- Defines what the union can and cannot do

Although not compulsory, it's a good idea to encourage your clubs and societies to have a constitution or similar document. It will help the club/society to identify their governance procedures and encourage democratic processes. A constitution also highlights that the society/club committee are accountable to their membership.

Elements of a constitution

The constitution of your students' union is a useful starting point as it should give you a good idea of the structure and contents of a this type of document.

A typical constitution will contain at:

- Articles – what people can and cannot do, the aims and objectives of the union

- Schedules – rules covering particular areas, typically more operational
- Appendices – rules that the membership cannot directly change

For example, the Articles will state that elections will take place at a certain time for certain posts. The Schedules will contain the rules and regulations of the election. The Appendices may contain the union opt-out procedure.

These may not be ordered Articles, Schedules and Appendices, but they will be present in some way within the constitution.

For clubs and societies, the constitution doesn't need to be particularly long or detailed. It can be a brief document that covers just the fundamental rules and procedures. It is however important to encourage your club and society committees to understand why they need a constitution and to encourage them to spend time thinking about what is needed in theirs.

Creating a club or society constitution

There are different ways of doing this:

1. Create a generic constitution for all clubs and societies where they simply amend the 'Name' and the 'Aims & Objectives' for their own constitution.
2. Create a generic constitution where committees *must* amend a number of

elements, not just name, aims and objectives.

3. Provide a guidance document that tells them what must be included, but ask them to write their own constitution.

This can be done in paper format, but it doesn't need to be. Perhaps consider either a digital constitution that is saved as a pdf or word file, or maybe there's a way you can create an online constitution.

The content will depend on a few things. We've identified some questions to consider:

- Which are the compulsory elements of the main students' union constitution that must be included in the club/society constitution?
- Is there any extra information or rules that should be included in the clubs/societies constitution?
- How much do we want the club/society committees to amend in their constitution?
- If you run both sports clubs and non-sporting societies: will their constitutions be the same or different?

Making it official

When you have decided what your club/society constitutions will look like and how the committees will create theirs, you need to ensure that this is approved by the students' union.

The essential elements of your club/society constitution will need to be ratified by the trustees or governors of your students' union.

The proposed document may also need to be passed by your union council or executive committee. This will depend upon the rules identified in the main students' union constitution. If this is unclear then ensure you encourage the trustees of your union to clarify such processes.

Implementing a new constitution

Once the document has been approved you can then introduce the clubs and societies to the

new constitutional process. Think about how you do this, as they will only benefit from having a constitution if they understand the purpose of the document.

Avoid just sending the constitution out and asking for a completed version returned. Try to find time to talk committees through the process, even if you're only asking them to amend the name, aims and objectives.

Contents

If you have any questions about this guide or would like to suggest any amends please contact studentopportunities@nus.org.uk

