# Being an effective club or society

## Involving and Retaining Members

# Contents

# Session planning

**Skills Covered**
Team working
Problem solving

# Session Planning

## Aims of the session

This should be a popular session with clubs and societies officers. You may wish to offer it several times a year. This session aims to get officers thinking about their relationship with their members.  In particular, it looks at how increased involvement and responsibility encourages people to stay active.

## Learning objectives

By the end of this session participants will be able to:

- Clarify what is meant by involvement
- Identify barriers to getting involved in Clubs & Societies
- Explain actions to take to aid the retention of members

## Method

The exercise will involve a short introduction in plenary, followed by a brainstorm, a tutor talk and group work. This is debriefed and followed by another brainstorm, group work and another debrief.

## Resources required

- Flipchart paper & pens (at least 5)

## Suggested timings

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction | 5 mins |
| Brainstorm | 5 mins |
| Tutor talk | 10 mins |
| Group work | 10 mins |
| Debrief | 15 mins |
| Brainstorm | 5 mins |
| Group work | 15 mins |
| Debrief | 10 mins |
| Summary | 5 mins |

**Total running time = 1 hour 20 minutes**

# Running the session

# Running the session

## Introduction

1. Start by outlining the aims and learning objectives of the exercise. Explain how the session will run, i.e. the methods you will use and what skills you will be developing.

2. Be positive/enthusiastic and emphasise the importance of this session to all clubs and societies - whatever their present size, there is always the potential to grow. Unless clubs & societies involve their members there is a danger of them becoming cliquey or out of touch.

## Group work

3. Ask the participants to spend a minute thinking about the word `involvement' in relation to clubs and societies and write this in the middle of a piece of flipchart paper.

4. Ask them to call out their thoughts and record abbreviated versions on the paper. Check that you are correctly summarising their statements. Conclude by drawing attention to the fact that there are very different levels of involvement - from membership to serving on the committee / attending every game or event.

5. Stick the flipchart paper with the group's thoughts on involvement to a wall nearby.

## Tutor talk

6. Tell the group you are going to spend a few minutes talking about the relationship between involvement and apathy. Let them know whether you wish to answer questions as you go along or at the end.

7. Write the word `Apathy' near the top of the piece of paper (prepare this before if possible) and start by covering the following points:
   - Many club & society committees often complain about the apathy of students and their members

- Students who sign up early in the year are often never seen at meetings/practice again
- There can be a tendency to accept this and put it down to `apathetic students'
- Actually, while there is a small group of students who have little interest in activities outside their course, many students would welcome the chance to get more involved but fail to do so for a number of reasons
- When their initial experience in a club or society is an enjoyable one, offering real involvement, a virtuous circle is encouraged. Meaningful involvement and being made to feel part of the group leads to students wanting to repeat the experience and seek a deeper level of involvement.

8. Put a line through the word `Apathy' and write the words `Involvement', `Motivation' and `Empowerment' below it.
   Continue by making the following points:
   - People are **motivated** by different desires. For first year students attending a new college the desire to become part of a social group and make friends is obviously a strong one. Clubs and societies need to ensure that new members are quickly made to feel welcome by older students. People are also commonly motivated by a sense of achievement and by receiving responsibility.
   - Clubs and societies which actively encourage their members to participate in the making of key decisions - **empowering** them - tend to have a more active membership. Students feel they have a stake in what has been decided, hence they will value it more.

You may wish to expand on any one of the themes - if you can add the example of a successful club or society at your college then even better.

See if anyone wants clarification of anything said.

## Group work

9. Tell the group you would like them to consider the various barriers to involvement clubs and societies commonly put between new students and themselves.

10. Split the group into smaller groups of between 4 and 6. Hand out a piece of flipchart paper and pens to each group and emphasise that each group will need a reporter to give feedback on the group's ideas. Tell them they have ten minutes for the task.

   Allow the groups a few minutes to get settled, then visit to check they are underway. Before the end of the group work, revisit the groups to remind them to choose someone to give feedback and to ensure they are aware of the time.

## Debrief/Discussion

In order to facilitate discussion, ask one group to present their ideas on barriers to involvement. Ask the other groups if they agree or disagree and to follow by presenting their own ideas.

Make sure you thank each group for their contributions.

Below are suggestions of how the groups may respond in order that you can formulate your own ideas to generate discussion.
Barriers to involvement may include:
- Club or society seen as too "cliquey"
- Insufficient information about the club or society
- Club or society seen as being for experts only
- Club or society seen as requiring specialist/ expensive equipment
- Club or society seen as being for drinkers only
- Club or society seen as being for young people only
- Club or society only based on one site (if you are multi-site)

- Club or society seen as only catering for a particular group of students.
- Student has never tried the activity of the particular club or society (e.g. Tai Chi, Sailing etc.)

To encourage discussion, after all the groups have all presented, pick out one or two or the key barriers identified and ask the group to discuss ways in which they could remove these barriers.

Ideally they may suggest:
- Better publicity / information
- Targeted recruitment of under-represented groups (e.g. beginners, mature students, students from another site.)
- Sampler days (e.g. for Tai Chi or sailing etc.)
- Joint social events with another club or society

11. Move on to the next part of the session, which is about increasing their memberships and retaining students throughout their years at college/university.

Ask the group "Why is it preferable to have students with a range of different backgrounds and experience in your club or society?"

There may be a variety of responses - the key is that the more varied the membership the more interesting and fun it will tend to be.

Clubs and societies are vital in ensuring students from different countries, areas of Britain, study backgrounds, halls, sites, of different age, sex, religion, ability etc. have the opportunity to mix.

## Ideas Storm

12. Turn to the flipchart and run an idea storm on "The benefits of retaining members from year to year". You will only need to write "Benefits of retaining" on the paper.

13. Ask participants to shout out their ideas.

The key point to refer to at the end is that experienced members make better clubs and

societies officers.  Only with long term involvement will you ensure continuity from year to year.

You can also add any other ideas about why you think it's good to retain members.

## Group work

14. Tell the group you would now like them to spend some time thinking of ways in which they can encourage wider (and increased) membership and lower drop-out rates.

Ask the group to get back into their smaller groups of 4 - 6.  Hand out a piece of flipchart paper and pens to each group and ask them to write "wider / increased membership" and "lower drop-out rate" in the centre of the page.

Ask them to use pictures instead of words (whenever possible) to symbolise things they would do to achieve their aims.  Re-assure them that you're not expecting works of art!

Announce that these will be put up around the room at the end and that they have 15 minutes for the task.

Allow the groups a few minutes to get settled, then visit to check they are underway.

## Debrief/Discussion

After 15 minutes, stop the groups and stick the pictures up along one wall.  Try and ensure that the group which spoke last in the first debrief is the leading picture.

Look at the pictures one by one with the rest of the group and ask for clarification if necessary. This should be fairly light-hearted - you can gently tease them about the quality of the drawings.

Conclude the debrief by thanking the group for their suggestions and making the following points:
- everyone can learn from the good practices of other clubs and societies
- there is no magic, foolproof measure of increasing membership and preventing dropout

- recognising achievement and/or hard work by members is crucial
- identifying and removing any barriers to involvement will help
- clubs and societies need a strong and varied social side
- given adequate support, most students will respond well to responsibility
- some dropout is obviously inevitable

## Summary & Review

Take five minutes at the end to recap on the main points of the session. Review the learning objectives, hand out and collect completed evaluation forms and close the session.