Starting a Progressio society at your university

Introduction:

This is a guide to how to start a new society at your university. Each student’s union or guild of students is slightly different so you might have to adapt these instructions, but the principles should remain the same.

In theory, it’s really easy, it won’t take you long, and you could leave a lasting legacy at University – imagine coming back here in 20 years to see your society thriving!

What is a society?

A University society is a group of people who share a common interest, passion and get together to partake in it.

Who do you need to talk to?

Most universities will have a student activities officer or similar role who is in charge of all things student society. They should exist to help you get your society up and running and are your first point of call for questions. Seek them out early and talk to them about Progressio and why you want to set up a society, if there are any issues or special hoops you need to jump through they should be able to explain. The student activities officer will probably be based in the Sabbatical Office of your union or guild and they should have an easy to find email address on your union or guild website.

When can you become a new society?

You can start the conversation with the student activities officer anytime, but your union or guild might have specific windows in which new societies are officially recognised. Check these out online but you commonly find that there will be in one window in each term, Autumn, Spring and Summer.

Are there forms involved?

Probably, yes! But don’t let this put you off. A standard form will ask you about your society, what it will do, what the main aims are, what the student demand is and what finances, resources and support you will require to run your society.

We can support you with as much or as little of this as you would like. If you have a vision, run with it! But if you want to check it to work out some key aims and objectives just give us a call. Aims that sound like, raise awareness and increase support for Progressio on campus sound good to us!

The form and the answers you put will be used usually by a committee to decide whether you should become an official society or not, so try and be as detailed as possible. If you’ve got big plans for teaming up with other societies to run debates or holding a community fundraiser to raise money for Progressio, put this in.

What do I call the society?

If we have loads of groups throughout the country, all calling themselves ‘Progressio’ things could get a little confusing. If, for example, you're at the University of Birmingham you can call your society ‘The Birmingham Progressio student society’, adapt this to wherever you’re at.

So who makes the decision?

Usually a body of people need to come together to approve the new society. This is sometimes called the societies committee but it might have a different name at your university. It’s essentially a committee, made up of students, who have been elected to represent societies. They will allocate funding, support and coordinate work of societies. They also step in to resolve disputed if necessary and help societies to collaborate on large scale events.

The committee will probably have regular meetings where they will discuss your application and study your application form.

You may have to answer some of the following questions:

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| **Requirement** | **Questions** |
| **Compliant** | You must be able to answer **yes** to the follow questions:  Can the activity be covered under the Students’ Union public liability insurance?  Are the society’s aims and objectives in line with the Code of Conduct and Equal Opportunities?  Does the University and Union/Guild have sufficient facilities (including storage) form the society to run successfully? e.g. space  You must be able to answer **no** to the follow questions:  Does the society aim provide counselling, advice or advocacy, or is the society a support group?  Does the society have the potential to bring the Students’ Union/University into disrepute? |
| **Exclusive from other areas of Union** | You must be able to answer **no** to the follow questions:  Will the society conflict or disadvantage any other areas of the Union? (RAG, Volunteering, Campaigns etc.) |
| **Unique Demand** | You must be able to answer **no** to the follow questions:  Does a society with similar aims and objectives already exist?  Does a society already attract a similar target membership?  Is the society a sport (this includes a sport recognised by BUCS, a martial art, and/or a sport with a National Governing Body)?  Is the society's primary aim to charitably fundraise? (Fundraising should be fine as an activity, it just can’t be the primary aim.) |
| **Inclusive** | You must be able to answer **yes** to the follow questions:  Is the society inclusive? i.e. is it open and accessible to all students? |
| **Development of and Benefit to members** | You must be able to answer **yes** to the follow questions:  Does the society have the potential to develop its members?  Does it demonstrate a benefit to the Student Body?  You must be able to answer **no** to the follow questions:  Does the society have a purely social purpose? |
| **Sustainable** | You must be able to answer **yes** to the follow questions:  Does the society display sustainability? i.e. Is it likely to attract and retain members.  Does the society want to hold multiple events and meeting per year? |
| **Financially Viable** | You must be able to answer **yes** to the follow questions:  Is it financially viable and sustainable? |
| **Welfare and Health & Safety Approved** | You must be able to answer **no** to the follow questions:  Are there any health and safety, or welfare concerns or implications over the ratification of this society? |

Once the committee have looked over your application they will then vote on whether your society can become ratified. Fingers crossed there will be no hiccups! And then you will be able to affiliate yourselves to the university and apply for grants and financial support from the union/guild.

What should the union/guild do for you?

Your union or guild is there to support you. It’s a not for profit institution that serves and listens to students. They should be able to help you with:

• Transactions and Administration• Funding

• Representation

• Space to meet

• Advertising to students

I’m worried that….

**My society won’t get ratified**

Most unions or guilds encourage new societies to be set up so if there were any major problems the student activities officer would have more than likely already have spotted it so don’t worry! If you do have anything you think may stop your society from being ratified, then speak to the student activities officer. You can also speak to other students! You might have friends who have also set societies up so pick their brains for tips if you can.

**Running the society will be too much work**

Try and get students to be extra committee members in your society to share your work load. Societies normally have a Chair (probably you), a secretary and a treasurer at the minimum. You’ll then have society members, between 10 and 30 can be a really good number. The society can take as much time as you like to run, but obviously the more time you put into the society, the better the society will be.

Facebook and google docs are both amazing online platforms that should make all things organisation easier! Utilise them.

**Nobody will join**

There will be thousands of students at your University so there surely will be other students with the same interest as you. Hopefully with the advertising the union or guild can suggest to you then you’ll build up numbers. There are probably regular society fairs you can go to in order to gather sign ups!

What will Progressio do to help me?

Progressio will support you as much as possible from HQ. We can send you materials and supplies for your regular meetings and inspiration for events and collaboration with other societies.

We’d love to see your society put on 2 major events a year. 1 could be a collaboration event, for example you could ask the debating society to host a joint event where you debate aid vs trade or the issue of ‘voluntourism’. The second event should be something that ideally has a fundraising slant to it, so a film night, quiz night or even a gig event that you can charge (a small amount) for people to attend and then the content should highlight Progressio’s work and the impact we’re making. If you’ve been overseas with Progressio you can use any platform to talk about your experience and inspire others to either take a campaign action, donate to Progressio or go on a Progressio ICS placement.

As you may know we run youth led activity around 6 international days a year:

8 March: International Women’s Day

5 June: World Environment Day

12 August: International Youth Day

15 October: International Day of Rural Woman

25 November: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

1 December: World Aids Day

We would love for your society to engage with our activities on as many of these days as possible and to spread awareness to the wider student population.

What happens when I’m successful and I start a society?

You can be in contact with us throughout the application process but when your society is formally recognised we can come and meet you to discuss your year plans and equip you with all the resources you need.

Let us know as soon as you become a society and we can set up a time to visit.