

New societies – all you need to know

Queen Mary Students' Union
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 Queen Mary Students' Union (QMSU)



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Want to start a new society? Or has your society recently been affiliated to the Students' Union? If so, this guide is for you!

Running a society is easy and takes as much or as little time as you and your fellow committee members would like to give to it. Running a group is a great way to develop your skills and share your passion for your activity/interest with other students. Your group could run social events, competitions, training, talks and debates, and much more!

The Students' Union will give you all the information you need to get started and we'll offer you a wide range of resources and support once your society is affiliated with the Students' Union.

This guide will give you an overview of the things you need to know when you want to start a new society. The first few sections will cover the things you need to do before you can be affiliated. If you've already been affiliated, you may want to skip the first few sections and go straight to the heading called *Congratulations! You've been affiliated.*

If you have any questions, you're always welcome to email su-societies@qmul.ac.uk or come to one of our drop-ins.

I want to start a new society – what do I do?

It's great to hear you want to start a new society. Societies are a great way for students to make friends, learn skills and meet people with similar interests.

In this handbook, we'll take you through the process of starting a new society step-by-step, so by the end of this handbook, you'll know exactly what you need to do to get started!

1. Check if there's a need for your society

We already have more than 200 societies, so the first thing you want to do is to check whether there's a society that already covers the area you want to focus on. You can find the lists of existing societies on our website: <https://www.qmsu.org/societies/findme/> (Mile End campus based societies) and <https://www.qmsu.org/societies/findbl/> (Barts and The London societies who are for Medical and Dental school-based students).

If there's a society that sounds very similar to your idea, we'd suggest you reach out to them. Maybe your idea can be incorporated into their society, so you don't have to start your society from scratch.

We also have some societies that are still set-up on our system but need a committee to run them: <https://www.qmsu.org/societies/start/>. This is a faster process to become a leader of a society. You can

If you can't find the society you're looking for or think we're missing something on our list of societies, don't worry – it's easy to set up your own society!

2. Get your team together

Running a society is a team effort. All societies, as a minimum, must have two Principal Officers, a President and a Treasurer, whose roles are outlined below.

Principle Officers are the lead students involved in running societies. Societies are welcome to have more than two Principal Officers. Principal Officers need to be elected every year and have to attend mandatory

training. Societies can also choose to have other committee members – these are members of the committee who can be appointed rather than elected. All committee members must be current Queen Mary students.

The responsibilities of the President include:

- Being the figurehead of the society.
- Ensuring that the society operates in accordance the Students' Union's Articles of Association, bye-laws and policies and procedures.
- Attending Students' Union training sessions as appropriate.
- Calling General Meetings of the society.
- Organising fair and transparent elections for the following year's committee in accordance with the Student Group bye-law and relevant affiliation procedure.
- Being the point of contact between the Students' Union and the society members. The President is mandated to keep in regular contact with the appropriate staff member and relevant elected officer(s).
- Authorising the withdrawal of expenditure from the society account.

The responsibilities of the Treasurer include:

- Keeping current accurate financial information of the society's activities.
- Ensuring the student group's financial transactions are conducted in accordance with the Student Group bye-law and guidance provided.
- Authorising the withdrawal of expenditure from the society account.
- Attending Students' Union training sessions as appropriate.
- Ensuring that all relevant financial documents are retrieved from the previous Treasurer and passed on to the next Treasurer.

To start your society, you need to decide who is going to be President and who is going to be Treasurer. If you know that you want other positions on your committee (for example a Vice President or an Events Officer), it's a good idea to find out who will fill those positions.

3. Write and submit your application to become a society

To apply to become a society, you must complete an application form. You can find the form on our website: <https://www.qmsu.org/societies/start/>

You can submit your application at any point in the academic year, but a decisions will not be available until Societies Board meet to decide. In the table below, you can see the dates in which Societies Board will be meeting to discuss applications for the 2020-21 academic year.

Please note that dates may change depending on availability, and other alterations.

Board Meeting	Outcomes Circulated By
8 th Sept	10 th Sep
2 nd – 6 th Nov	11 th Nov
1 st – 5 th Feb	2 rd Feb
22 nd – 26 th Mar	31 st March

It's really important that you put some time and effort into completing the form. If the form is incomplete, your application is unlikely to be approved.

The first bit of the application form is basic information about your society. What's the name of the society? Are you based at Mile End or are you a Barts and The London society? If you are submitting an application to

'restart' a society, then most of this information will already be in place. You can access information on inactive societies, such as their aims, through this page: <https://www.qmsu.org/societies/start/>

You also need to tell us what kind of society it is. We have a few different categories you can choose from:

- Academic: Societies linked with their school, course or department. (For Barts – Those societies linked to a medical speciality)
- Arts, Music & Performance: Societies involved with Art, Dance, Performance and Music
- Campaigning & Political: Working in an organised or active way towards a goal and relating to the ideas or strategies of a particular party, group in politics or an ideology
- Cultural: Societies celebrating the ideas and customs of a particular people or nationality
- Educational, Employability & Enterprising: Other academic, developmental or careers / skills building societies
- Faith: Societies celebrating the beliefs of a particular religion
- Recreational: Activity or hobby based societies
- Social: Societies bringing people together over a common interest

You'll also need to provide a short description of the society. Tell us a bit about your plans – what kind of society is it? Are you trying to bring people from a certain culture together? Or people that share a common interest?

Next up, you need to think about the aims of the society. What is the society trying to achieve?

Take a bit of time to think about your aims. Society aims stay the same year on year, as default. You can change them at a later point, but you'll have to hold a General Meeting with your members to do so, so try to come up with some lasting aims. Remember, your society's aims cannot duplicate those of another society. Societies aims can also not duplicate any service already offered by the Students' Union and societies cannot have fundraising for charity as a main aim.

Not sure what an aim could look like? Let's use the Tea Appreciation Society as an example:

1. To allow members to share their appreciation of tea with other tea lovers.
2. To introduce members to new types of tea by organising tea tastings.
3. To raise awareness of rare types of tea.

You will need to provide the following information if you are applying to start a new society, and also if you are applying to restart an inactive society.

In addition to the aims, you'll also need some objectives. Your objectives are short-term goals for the society – the things you want to achieve in this academic year. You will need to provide objectives if you are applying to 'restart' a society.

If we think about the Tea Appreciation Society, objectives for 2020/21 could be:

1. Raise awareness about the society and get at least 25 members.
2. Organise three tea-tasting events.
3. Organise two joint events with other societies.

You'll need to decide on the membership fee. The minimum is £1 per year, but you may want to charge more. It can be tempting to set a high fee, so you can organise lots of cool events, but remember that potential

members are looking for value for money. In addition to your standard 1-year membership, you can also choose to offer other types of memberships (e.g. membership limited to term 1 or 2, virtual memberships). If you want alumni, staff and students from other universities to be able to join the society, you'll need to add this as a membership option (we call this *Associate Membership*). We advise you to set the fee for Associate Membership a bit higher than the normal fee, because your main target group is Queen Mary students. Please note that you are not able to change your membership fee mid-year.

If you are planning to affiliate to an external organisation, you should also indicate this in your application. You don't need to list sponsors in the application form (there's a separate procedure for sponsorships, which we'll tell you about in training). An example of an affiliation could be that the Tea Appreciation Society wants to affiliate to the National Union of Tea Appreciation Societies. Most societies aren't affiliated to an external organisation, so feel free to leave this part of the form blank if you don't think it applies to you.

The final section of the application form is about your committee. We'll need the full details for everyone on the committee.

4. Wait to hear back about the outcome of your application

Societies Board will review your application and make a decision about the outcome of your application. Societies Board is made up of the Mile End Societies Officer and the Barts and The London Societies Officer, as well as three elected representatives from Queen Mary societies and three elected representatives from Barts and The London societies. For timescales of when outcomes of applications will be circulated see the table in the 'write and submit your application' section.

My society application hasn't been approved – what do I do now?

We understand that it can be really disappointing to put a lot of work into the application and then not get approved, but there's a few things you can do:

- Look at the feedback from the Societies Board. There's usually a reason why the society didn't get approved.
- If your idea was too similar to an already existing society, it's a good idea to get in touch with them to see if you can incorporate your idea into their society. Otherwise, you'll have to think about how you can adjust your aims to ensure there's no overlap with existing societies.
- If the feedback says something about *ultra vires*, you should contact the Societies Team at su-societies@qmul.ac.uk. Because the Students' Union is a charity, we have to follow the Charity Laws. Ultra Vires means that your society idea goes against the laws we have to follow. The Societies Team can give you advice and help you adjust your idea to make sure it's aligned with the rules.
- Sometimes, the application gets rejected if it wasn't clear enough what your society is going to do. Get some feedback from the Societies Team on how to improve the application.
- Please don't resubmit the exact same application – if it didn't get approved in the first place, it's unlikely to get approved without changes.

Congratulations! You've been affiliated

When you've received confirmation that you've been affiliated, it's time to get to work!

1. Get the basics sorted

There are a few things you need to do as soon as possible (aim for 2-4 weeks) after you've been affiliated:

- Attend training. We'll invite you (and all other Principal Officers) to our **compulsory** training. The training will prepare you to run your society within the rules of the Students' Union. We will also let you know about our start-up grant process, which could help you with getting started!
- Complete your society's annual risk assessment. A risk assessment is a document that helps you understand what health and safety issues may happen during society activities. It'll help you think about the ways you can keep yourself and your members safe and avoid accidents. There's guidance about risk assessments on our website and they are covered in training, so we're not going to say a lot about them here. Have a look at the guidance here: <https://www.qmsu.org/societies/committeeshub/healthandsafety/>
- Read through the resources in the Committees Hub: <https://www.qmsu.org/societies/committeeshub/> The Committees Hub is going to be your most visited website, so you may as well add it to your favourites straight away... Can't remember what you learned in societies training? Where's the template for sponsorship contracts? You'll find the answers to these and many other questions in the Committees Hub.
- Pay your membership – everyone involved in the society should pay for membership. This includes the committee members. Memberships can be purchased online on your mini site on the website or at the Students' Union Hub/BLSA reception. New societies will be expected to have a certain number of paid members within a certain time after being affiliated. You may have to wait until your financial information is confirmed and your membership is set up by us. We will let you know when it is ready.
- Update your mini site on the website. We provide you with a mini site on our website, where you can tell potential members about your society. You can also add links to social media if your society has a Facebook page or Instagram account. We will let you know when your site has been set-up, and when you have access to edit the page.

While you're sorting all of these things, the Societies Team will also be working hard to get you set up:

- We'll invite you to training.
- We'll create a bank account for you within the Students' Union (please DO NOT set up your own bank account for your society).
- We'll set up your membership.
- We'll create your mini site on the website.

2. A note on training

We've already mentioned training, but training is very close to our hearts, so we thought it deserves its own heading.

If you think we seem a little bit obsessed about training, you're kind of right. The Students' Union supports more than 200 societies, so we need to prepare you to run your society in compliance with our internal rules and charity law. Our experience is that once you've attended training, you are less likely to break the rules and more likely to run successful events. We think that's good for us *and* for you. So please attend training. Think of it as an investment in your society – you're going to put a lot of time and effort into running your society, and by spending a few hours on training, you'll be able to blast through finance forms, governance and events planning.

Our training sessions are compulsory for the President and Treasurer of each society, and all other committee members are strongly encouraged to take part.

We understand that you may have a busy schedule that doesn't allow you to attend the next training session, but if this is the case, you must contact us on su-societies@qmul.ac.uk, so we can sign you up for another training session that suits your schedule.

See you at training! 😊

3. Grow your society

When your society is up and running, your next priority should be to grow the society.

The best way to get new members and grow is to hold engaging and fun activities. Ask yourself: What could you offer that would make students want to pay for membership?

The activities you organise will of course depend on your society's aims, but here are some ideas:

- Socials – informal events where members can meet and make new friends
- Activity-based events – board games, sports day, museum trip, guest lecture, quiz
- Joint events – team up with another society and organise a collaborative event
- Campaigns-based event – get involved in a Students' Union campaign, such as Black History Month

Remember to talk to your members about their needs and ideas. If many of your members don't drink alcohol, you're probably wasting your time if you organise a pub crawl...

As you'll have learned in training, there's much more information about events on the Committees Hub: <https://www.qmsu.org/societies/committeeshub/events/>

4. Looking ahead

When you've held your first few events, it's time to look ahead and begin to prepare the society for the next academic year. It may seem a bit early to start thinking about this when you've just started your society, but our experience is that good planning will ensure your society stays successful long after you've left.

Every year, all societies go through a handover process. If a society fails to go through all the steps in the handover, the society will automatically be closed at the end of the academic year, so it's a good idea to familiarise yourself with the handover requirements as early as possible.

For a society to remain open next academic year, you must:

- Have at least ten members that have paid their subs (this includes the Principal Officers, who must pay subs to be on the committee)
- A credited bank account (in plain English that means you can't be in debt)
- Hold elections for new Principal Officers (we'll send you more information about this in February, March and April)
- Complete an annual risk assessment (just like you did when you started the society)
- Complete a handover with your new committee

We'll send you more information about all of this, when it's time to get started on the handover process, so don't worry too much about it now.

The most important thing for you to take note of at this point is the requirement to have ten subs paying members and keeping track of your spending, so you don't go into debt.

Anything else?

If you have any questions – now or after you've submitted your application, you can contact the Societies Team on su-societies@qmul.ac.uk. As mentioned, we support a lot of societies, so it may take us a few days to get back to you.

Good luck with your application!