



The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and  
Secular Student Societies

*How to Run a  
Successful  
Freshers' Week*

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<http://www.ahsstudents.org.uk>

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## *Booking Your Freshers' Fair Stall*

Every university runs freshers' fair differently, so your first priority should be to contact your students' union to find out how things are done. If you are unsure about who to contact, have a look on your student union's website for the committee and contact the most relevant member. They should be able to tell you what you need to know.

### **WHEN**

Most universities run freshers' fair the last two or three days of freshers' week. Some universities may have every society there every day, whereas others may have specific days for specific societies, so you need to find out when your society will be able to attend.

(Note: if your society is signed up to attend on a day for religious societies, you might want to point out that your prospective members, by default, are not very likely to attend that day!)

### **WHERE**

Societies will typically be divided into sections, and often an atheist society will end up in the religious section. You may want to think about whether this is the best place for your society.

### **ALSO...**

You may be able to set up a stall outside the fair, on campus, and run this for a longer period than the fair itself. For example, Leeds Atheists have a stall on campus all week, and cite this as a source of many of their members.

*Top Tip - Book early and find the best place!*

Book your stall nice and early, and if you have a choice where to have it, opt for near or facing the door. The more traffic you have passing your stall, the more sign ups!

## RESOURCES AVAILABLE

You need to find out what will be provided by the university, so that you can make appropriate adjustments to the plans for your stall. Ask about:

- Where and how you can put up posters. Usually some sort of board will be provided, but this may cost extra, and they may be fussy about what type of materials you're allowed to use on them (for example, at Bristol they get very stressed if you use anything other than the Velcro they provide!)
- Ask if you have access to an electrical socket for laptops.



*University of Liverpool Atheist Society  
monkey denies the existence of Kong*

# Manning Your Stall

It's important to have a good group of people manning your society's stall. These people will be the first point of contact for most of your society's new members!

## YOUR STAFF

There may be a limit to the number of people you're allowed to have on your stall at any given time, but you'll need at least two or three people there all of the time.

- Encourage eager non-committee members to help.
- Encourage a good gender balance of stallholders.
- Make sure you have people on the stall who are able to talk clearly, audibly and non-stop for a good few hours!

## TIMETABLE

Make a timetable a week or so in advance. Have 2-3 hour time slots that people can sign up for. Remind people a day or so beforehand of what hours they're signed up for, and have backups ready in case anyone cancels.

## HAVE A SPEECH PREPARED

It's a good idea to prepare a short statement so that you're ready when someone asks about your society. Get everyone on the stall to memorise a few lines about the society's aims and what it has planned for the coming term. For example, the following was prepared for Oxford's freshers' fair:

"The Oxford Atheist Society starts from the position that there is no God, then explores the consequences of this. From here, things are opened up to a whole range of subjects of discussion: science, philosophy, morality and ethics, history, politics, psychology and religion. [brings out term card] So

during a term we typically have 4-5 speakers, and then the rest of the events are film showings, debates or socials."

Though try not to sound too rehearsed!

## **KEEP THE STALLHOLDERS ENTERTAINED!**

Saying the same thing hundreds times over for hours on end can get a bit tiresome, so come up with creative ways to keep everyone entertained. For example:

- Have a competition to see who can sign up the most new members.
- Keep a tally of how people react to your stall (e.g. the number of people who walk past and laugh, or try to start an argument).
- Have interactive games that attract people to your stall. More on these later!



*Leeds Atheist Society with a very well-manned and well-resourced stall!*

# *How to Make Your Stall Appealing*

In order to attract as many people as possible, you want your stall to be both professional looking and eye catching!

## **DECORATIONS**

- Bright colours are usually a good idea, but limit it to two or three.
- Make sure your society's name and logo are big and clear.
- If you have the funds, or an inexpensive way of making one, a banner will attract plenty of attention.
- Have a table cloth on your stall.
- Have photos of society events.
- If your society's name is, for example, "Atheist Society" find some way to make it clear that you cater to agnostics, secularists, skeptics, freethinkers, humanists, rationalists and so on.
- Also make it clear that you are open to people from all backgrounds.
- Don't make your stall too busy or try to cram too much information in to a small amount of space.
- Get your committee matching hoodies or t-shirts! This helps to make your society look more organised and more visible, as well as aiding committee bonding.

## PROPS

- Books are another good way to draw peoples' attention. If they spot a title they've read, or something controversial, they may be enticed to come and ask questions.
- Southampton Atheist Society have a "Complaints Form", which you can reuse, and can be found at the end of this guide.
- In the past, Warwick have made a model of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, had a "Hairdryer of Reason" with which to debaptise people, and made "godless cards":



*"Godless?" "Me too. [www.warwickatheists.co.uk](http://www.warwickatheists.co.uk)"*

## INTERACTIVE GAMES

Come up with some fun and interactive games to get people talking. Some examples of things that have worked in the past are:

- "The God Game" - Roll three dice at the start of the fair. During the day get people to come along and pray to "their" god, be it a celebrity, a fictional character, or whoever. Then get them to roll the dice, and if they match the original seven numbers, their god wins and they get a bar of chocolate.

- “Design Your Own God” - Get people to draw pictures of their own God creation, or better yet have cardboard boxes, paints and glue for some real arts and crafts. Have a competition for the most creative.

## FREE STUFF!

If all else fails, the promise of free goodies will always draw students in!

- A tin of sweets is a good cost effective choice.
- Home made goods always go down well, but it’s a good idea to check with your union first to make sure you’re allowed to bring in food.
- At Bristol they bribe people with delicious home made brownies, only for those who sign up and pay their membership fee on the day!
- You might consider making up “goodie bags” with a pen, some sweets, and your term card.

## LEAFLETS FROM THE AHS

The AHS has a leaflet giving an overview of what we do, that [can be viewed online](#). These are available to both member and non-member student groups. Simply email [president@ahsstudents.org.uk](mailto:president@ahsstudents.org.uk) with your address and how many you’d like – you can have as many as you want!

## LEAFLETS FROM THE BHA AND NSS

The **British Humanist Association** have leaflets on “What is Humanism?”, about the BHA, about their campaigns work, and on joining the BHA, as well as pens, available to both affiliated and non-affiliated student groups. These are available by emailing [info@humanism.org.uk](mailto:info@humanism.org.uk) with your address and how many sets you want – the BHA have plenty, so all reasonable requests will be met.

The **National Secular Society** have leaflets, badges and posters free for all student groups to use for Fresher's week, and beyond. Their eight issue-based leaflets are a good starting point for debates, for example. If you'd like to stock up, contact Tessa Kendall at [admin@secularism.org.uk](mailto:admin@secularism.org.uk) with your address and how many sets you want.

## *Literature*

With so many societies and so much information being thrown at students in one go, it's important to have something on your stall that people can take away and read in their own time.

An example leaflet from Oxford Atheist Society's 2008 stall can be seen at the end of this guide.

Make sure you have plenty of leaflets, or capacity to easily print more if you find there is sufficient demand. A well-run stall could shift over 600!

## **ABOUT YOUR SOCIETY**

Make a leaflet with a few short paragraphs telling people what your society is about, its aims, current issues and campaigns.

People like to see that a society is regularly active before they commit to it, and so having a term card with events mapped out, or advertising a regular day for weekly meetings can be very beneficial to encouraging new members to join. People are less likely to get involved in a society if they think there's a possibility it will let them down by only holding events irregularly.

### *Top Tip - Hand out Term Cards*

If your society has planned enough events ahead of time, prepare a term card or programme of events to hand out during the fair. Make sure to include dates, times and locations so that everyone knows where to find you!

## *Signing Up New Members*

Some universities will already have a well-structured system in place for collecting the details and money of new members, but for those of us less fortunate, here are some suggestions!

- A laptop with a spreadsheet for people to fill in name, e-mail, subject, college, etc. is probably the easiest way to collect student's information.
- For those who don't have access to an electrical socket, good old fashioned pen and paper will do.
- If people are hand writing their information, try to find a way to have them write down their e-mail address twice, thus giving you more of a chance with illegible handwriting. So, for example, if e-mail addresses at your university are of the form [firstname.surname@subject.uni.ac.uk](mailto:firstname.surname@subject.uni.ac.uk) have columns for name and subject as well as e-mail address!
- It is important to discuss your membership fees in advance, as this is the primary source of income for most societies. If you are allowed to collect money on the day, encourage as many people as possible to pay when they sign up.
- You could consider having a freshers' week discount for new members. This is likely to increase numbers joining.
- If you are collecting money, make sure you have plenty of change on hand! Some student unions will provide cash floats for the fair.
- Please consider having a box that people can tick if they want to join the AHS's Newsletter!

## Promotion Outside of the Fair

Wider promotion of your society outside of freshers' fair is very important. For example, have some sort of general poster for your society, saying something like "come find us at freshers' fair!" or advertising your first event of the term. Post it up all over the university, including halls of residence, departmental hallways and common rooms, and the student union.

Warwick had a very successful "guerrilla" postering campaign where they put up A4 size posters with light-hearted slogans such as: "No God? No Problem", "Sex before marriage? Yes please!" and "O ye of little faith", with their society's logo at the bottom.



*University of Edinburgh Humanist Society's stall features books from prominent authors, and is careful to make clear that atheists, agnostics, rationalists, freethinkers and skeptics are included under "Humanist".*

## Costs

Set a reasonable budget and stick to it! The following are all things to consider in working out the cost of freshers' fair:

- The stall itself
- Supplies for decorating (paper, pens, glue, etc.)
- Food/sweets
- Printing leaflets
- Membership cards



*Oxford Secular Society stallholders with name badges and society t-shirts.  
Note also the banner in the background. A well-presented stall!*

## *Introductory Event(s)*

At most universities the first one or two weeks are devoted primarily to student groups and activities. There is always a lot going on during this time, so it's important that your society gets involved!

- Try to hold the first society event within 7 to 10 days of freshers' fair – an introductory social.
- You can lure people to the event with promise of free food and drink. For example, last year Oxford Atheists had free wine and brownies!
- If you are using a university room for the event, make sure you book it well in advance, as these tend to get booked up quite quickly.
- If it's in a pub, make sure your group is highly visible. If you have t-shirts or hoodies, get society members to wear them!
- Be mindful of other events when planning yours. Try not to organise it at the same time as other big events, and if possible, consult other societies that you are likely to have members in common with.
- Where possible, take along literature and a sign-up sheet, in case anyone missed out at freshers' fair. Also take membership cards and some change so that people can join at these events.

# Complaint form

Please tick the boxes where appropriate to complete the form, and place it in the bin box provided.

I

- object to
- am offended by
- don't understand
- am scared of

- the existence of atheists
- the theory of evolution
- the aggressive tone of the non-religious
- homosexuals
- Richard Dawkins
- the presumption that I'm an irrational cretin
- science
- reality

and wish to

- lodge a formal complaint.
- have a good moan.
- waste everyone's time.

Furthermore, I think that

- atheists
- Richard Dawkins
- the non-religious
- anyone who doesn't believe exactly the same backwards nonsense as me

should

- be less mean.
- shut the hell up.
- not be allowed to have a society at this University.
- not be allowed the same freedom of speech as the religious

Also,

- atheists have no morality.
- religion is responsible for everything good that ever happened.
- God is really awesome.
- Jesus still loves you.
- I know in my heart that God(s) are real.
- Richard Dawkins, Richard Dawkins, Richard Dawkins, Richard Dawkins.
- science can't explain love, can it?
- Hitler was an atheist.

So there!



atheist society  
university of southampton

# Termcard

## Week 1 – Welcome Drinks

...for prospective members, in St Catherine's College PDR, at 7.30 pm on Thursday.

## Week 2 – Film Showing

We will be showing the short film "Here Be Dragons", an introduction to sceptical thinking and common fallacious arguments

## Week 3 – Adrian Moore, Suffering Debate

Adrian Moore is chairing a debate on how dissuasive suffering is to belief in a benevolent God. Tuesday.

## Week 4 – Tim Mawson

Oxford Theologist Tim Mawson will be giving a talk on "Praying to Stop Being an Atheist". Monday.

## Week 5 – Pubs and Club Social

A chance to have fun with your new Atheist pals.

## Week 6 – Edward Canfor-Dumas

Edward Canfor-Dumas will talk about how Buddhists believe atheism, spirituality and Buddhist philosophy work together. Tuesday.

## Week 7 – End of Term Meal

All members are welcome to join us for a festive meal celebrating the 13,730,000,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Universe.

## Week 8 – Marilyn McCord Adams

Regius Professor of Divinity Adams is going to be discussing why, for her, horrendous evil is a reason for believing in God. Monday.



Oxford Atheist  
Society

[www.oxfordatheists.org.uk](http://www.oxfordatheists.org.uk)

# About Us

The Oxford Atheist Society is a brand new society, having only been founded last term. The Society aims to promote an open, questioning arena in which people can discuss almost any issue they wish to do with Atheism, whether it is philosophical, political, social or ethical. The only stance the Society itself takes is that it does not believe in God, and apart from this everything is up for debate, with all other opinions coming from individual members and speakers.

# Joining

Joining the society costs £5 for a year, or £10 for life. This fee is to cover costs such as meals and transport for speakers.

You can join by pigging a cheque for the appropriate amount, made payable to the "Oxford Atheist Society", to Rosemary Hinton at St Catherine's College, together with:

- Your name,
- Your college,
- Your preferred email address,
- And your year of graduation.

Alternatively, you can join at any of our meetings.

# Welcome Drinks

Our free welcome drinks event for prospective members will be held in St Catherine's College PDR on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> Week at 7.30

# Speakers

Speakers we have lined up this term (in what many are billing as the "religious term"):

- **Professor Adrian Moore** – Oxford philosopher of religion and specialist in Kant and Wittgenstein.
- **Dr Tim Mawson** – Oxford theologian and current Secretary to the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion.
- **Edward Canfor-Dumas** – Former writer of *Not the Nine O'Clock News*, *The Bill* and *Kavanagh QC*, as well as having written *Pompeii: The Last Day* and *Supervolcano*, Eddy has also written two books on the subject of Buddhism.
- **The Reverend Canon Professor Marilyn McCord Adams** – Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford and former Horace Tracy Pitkin Professor of Historical Theology at Yale.

And looking further afield, we so far have confirmed:

- **Professor Kenan Malik** – writer, lecturer, broadcaster and Humanist, philosopher of biology.
- **Dr Julian Baggini** – Philosopher, author, contributor to The Guardian, The Independent, The Observer, and the BBC.
- **Professor Peter Atkins** – professor of chemistry, author of several leading textbooks and popular science writer.
- **Dr Olivera Petrovich** – Oxford psychologist who specialises in the nature and development of religious belief.
- **Dr Peter Kail** – Our senior member, philosopher and an expert on David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche.
- **David Boulton** – author, writer, broadcaster, Quaker and Humanist, has also researched historical Jesus.
- **Professor John Hedley Brooke** – former Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion, will be talking about Darwin's beliefs on religion as well as complexity thesis.
- **Professor Steven Rose** – author, newspaper columnist, Humanist and critic of evolutionary psychology.

*Good luck and have fun!*

Written by Natasha Barrett

with contributions from  
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