



The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and  
Secular Student Societies

*How to Start and  
Run a Student  
Society*

1 Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD  
<http://www.ahsstudents.org.uk>

# Contents

Your Society and the AHS.....	4
Introduction .....	5
Why start a society?.....	5
Purposes of a society .....	6
What should you call your society? .....	6
Popular terms.....	8
Designing a logo .....	8
Promoting your society.....	10
Promotion around campus .....	11
Posters.....	11
Flyers .....	11
Freshers' fair .....	11
Student media.....	12
Promotion online .....	12
Facebook.....	12
Twitter.....	12
Mailing list.....	13
Website .....	13
Through your University and Student Union .....	14
Through other societies .....	14
First event .....	15
What needs to be covered.....	15
Should you form a committee? .....	15

Getting a committee .....	16
Executive .....	16
Other roles .....	17
Membership fees .....	18
Constitution .....	19
Affiliating to your University and Student Union.....	19
Joining the AHS .....	20
Full membership .....	21
Associate membership.....	22
Applying for membership .....	22
Affiliating to the British Humanist Association .....	23
Any questions? .....	24
What next?.....	24
Event ideas .....	24
Meet up with local groups .....	27
Reason Week .....	28

## *Your Society and the AHS*

The AHS is the **National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies**. We are the umbrella organisation for all non-religious student societies in institutes of higher education across the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

The AHS's vision is

*“A thriving atheist, humanist or secular student society in every institute of Higher Education in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, networked together, with a shared voice in public life, whose members can contribute to and be part of the wider national and international movement”*

The AHS was founded precisely to give support and assistance to student groups catering for agnostics, atheists, freethinkers, Humanists, non-theists, rationalists, secularists and skeptics. If you want to set up a new group, we are here to help! Our Head of Membership is your first point of contact. Should you need any further assistance beyond what is in this guide, they will help you through the AHS membership application process. We have dedicated Regional Development Officers whose job it is to be in touch with you and other universities in your area. They will organise regional social and networking activities to put you in touch with other societies near you. As a member of the AHS you will have the opportunity to become part of not only a national movement but an international movement. We look forward to welcoming you to the AHS.

[membership@ahsstudents.org.uk](mailto:membership@ahsstudents.org.uk)

## Introduction

Setting up a student society can be somewhat daunting, and you may not be sure how to go about it. But actually, none of it is that difficult – it will require some sustained effort to get things going, but the results will be well worth it.

This guide aims to walk you through that process. If you have any questions, or find anything in this guide is not as clear as you'd like, don't hesitate to email our Head of Membership at [membership@ahsstudents.org.uk](mailto:membership@ahsstudents.org.uk).

And for those already running a society, we hope this guide will provide you with some great tips to make your society better :)

## Why start a society?

Many people don't see the point of atheist, humanist and secular student societies. At freshers' fair you'll get asked such questions as

*"So does an atheist society just sit about all day and discuss how God doesn't exist?"*

and

*"Aren't you just a negative group set up to attack the religious groups?"*

The answer to both, of course, is **not at all**.

Whilst there is not much to atheism in itself, there are a lot of beliefs that atheists, humanists and secularists tend to share in common that others do not subscribe to:

*"Whilst we start from the simple position that God probably doesn't exist, this opens up a whole range of topics to discussion and debate. We have speakers in to talk about all sorts of things, including science, philosophy, history, politics, and yes, religion."*



Oxford Atheist Society's  
former logo was an a in an O

Freshers' fair pitch of a former President of Oxford Atheist Society

## PURPOSES OF A SOCIETY

Purposes of a society include:

- To provide representation to atheist, humanist and secularist students on campus
- To campaign on humanist and secularist issues
- To provide a forum for discussion and debate
- To balance religious influence in student politics or on campus
- To promote or celebrate science and rational thinking
- To learn!
- To meet like-minded people!
- To have fun!

So we hope you're convinced! What now? Before you announce your society to the world and start recruiting, you need a name and a logo. (These can always be changed later!)

*What should you call your society?*

Before you can choose a name, you'll need to think about why you are setting up the society. What is your main aim and who or what do you want to represent? Different terms mean different things...

- **Agnostic** – The position that it is impossible to know whether God exists
- **Atheist** – Without a belief in a God; Weak atheists say, "God is so improbable, we may as well live our lives as if he does not exist"

- **Freethinker** – Thinking for oneself rather than accepting tradition or authority
- **Humanist** – Having the world view or life stance which bases morality on reason and human nature rather than superstition
- **Rationalist** – Prioritising reason in understanding the world, rather than subscribing to faith based beliefs
- **Secularist** – Atheists and religious people of the opinion that the state should be neutral on and not influenced by religion. Sometimes simply labelled “secular” e.g. “Sussex University Secular Society”
- **Skeptic** – Doubts the truth of knowledge claims including the religious and supernatural that are made without evidence
- The aims and objectives of your society will also dictate your society’s name. If your society just wants to campaign towards political ends, then “secularist” and “humanist” are most appropriate. If your society is more to be about discussing science and philosophy, then “atheist” and “humanist” make sense. If your society wants to include religious secularists, then “secularist” works best.

*Top Tip – Why not atheist, humanist AND secularist?*

Many groups have decided it is more inclusive to have several of the different terms within their name. As of writing, more than half have done this, and it is especially common amongst newer societies.

Think very carefully: Is your name inclusive to everyone you might want to reach? Just because a term does not appeal to you, is it likely to appeal to others?

“Atheist” is more familiar to everyone, which makes marketing easier, but “humanist” and “secularist” are more descriptive, so specify better what your society will do.

Make sure your society is easy to find on Facebook! Abbreviated names may sound cool, but don't tend to work well with their search algorithms.

## POPULAR TERMS

Currently, the most popular terms are:

Atheist – 19 societies

Skeptic – 2 societies

Humanist – 15 societies

Rationalist – 1 society

Secular – 10 societies

Evolution – 1 society

Agnostic – 6 societies

Science – 1 society

## *Designing a logo*



University of Liverpool Atheist Society have a very eye-catching logo!

So you've come up with a name, and now you want a logo.

The first thing to remember is that you don't have to be a graphic designer or great artist to create a successful logo that is an asset to your society, rather than a liability. (Though of course, if you have a designer available, do use them!)

The main piece of advice for any sort of design is **KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid**. Complex logos won't resize well, won't be instantly recognisable, and will be difficult to understand. While it might seem like a good idea to communicate many different ideas in one design, it normally isn't the best option,



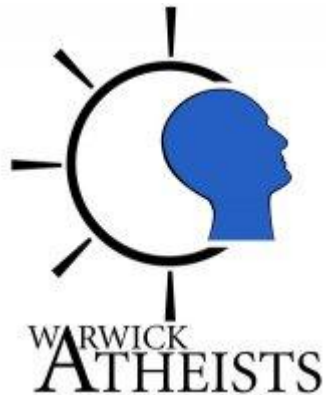
Oxford Secular Society's logo was very simple yet professionally designed

resulting in a confusing design which communicates little to the viewer, and won't be remembered.

A good way of doing this is to limit colours to a maximum of 3 or 4, but ensuring that your logo works well in just black and white – it's the idea and the design itself that matter, and the lack of colour will make that easier to judge. Sticking to flat

colours is also a good idea rather than having photos, gradients, etc. As well as looking better, it's actually cheaper – you can print in black and white without too much loss of quality, and printers for hoodies, t-shirts, etc. often charge per colour, or charge more for images made up of things other than flat colours.

While the ideas or themes you're trying to communicate may be instantly obvious to you and your committee, they are unlikely to be to the average viewer. Maybe two ideas is probably best – when 2010-11 AHS Press Officer Emma Bryce designed a sample logo for a humanist organisation in Yorkshire, she used the idea of the Yorkshire rose, and the “Happy Human” humanist symbol to create the logo, showing what the society does, and who it involves:



Warwick Atheists' simple, inspiring logo has proved to have real staying power



Humanist Society  
of West Yorkshire

*Top Tip - Or just ask Emma!*

Emma is happy to design logos for student societies for free, if she has the time, and so long as she's credited. She designed the one above. You can email her at [emma.bryce@gmail.com](mailto:emma.bryce@gmail.com).



As an example here, we can take the [British Humanist Association's](#) Happy Human, which is simple and instantly recognisable, forming an H for Humanism, showing a focus on people and humanity, and suggesting a dynamic organisation through the human's posture (arms up).

To conclude... what if you don't own vector design software? It's important to use a vector based program for designs that you want to enlarge later on like logos, so Paint or similar aren't the best option. Instead, try [Inkscape](#), which is a free and legal alternative to Illustrator or Draw, and pretty easy to learn the basics of.

### *Top Tip - Or just use ours!*

If you're a student society, you're welcome to use the AHS's name and branding. Just please ask permission before you do – email us at [membership@ahsstudents.org.uk](mailto:membership@ahsstudents.org.uk).

## *Promoting your society*

Okay, so you have a name for your society, and a logo – at the very least, something temporary for while you get set up. You're now ready to start promoting your society, getting the word out that you exist, as well as details on when your first event is going to be!

You likely won't want to do everything mentioned here, but try and get as much promotion as possible before the launch, as a well-publicised first event is crucial to the future success of the society!

## PROMOTION AROUND CAMPUS

There are several ways you can promote your society around your University, and this will be vital every week – but especially before the first event.

### *Posters*

Design an eye-catching poster to go with your eye-catching logo. Announce the launch of your society, with time and location of the first event. Use big writing so it's easy for passers-by to digest. Put it up everywhere – halls, departments, your SU, and anywhere else you can think of! The only caveat is some Universities and SUs might require you to affiliate before you're allowed to do this, and fine those that break the rules, so be sure to check.

### *Flyers*

Flyers can have more information on them, but should still be simple and appealing. Whilst posters are stuck in one place, just hanging on the wall, you can stand in prominent locations on campus (for example, outside your SU) and hand out flyers to everyone who passes by. (Again, check it's allowed first!) A time-consuming, but much more direct approach.

### *Freshers' fair*

If you time your launch right, you could try and start off with a stall at freshers' fair, then quickly rope in a committee from there. Be aware though that many Student Unions only let affiliated societies have stalls, and to get affiliated often requires a certain number of members already. In other words, you can't launch at the fair. Find this out before trying this approach!

*Top Tip - Use the AHS's guide*

If you are trying to launch a society at freshers' fair, you may find the AHS's guide, [How to Run a Successful Freshers' Week](#), useful.

## *Student media*

Your student papers, radio and TV may be happy to cover the launch of your society, interviewing you about the society's aims and objectives, and giving you a chance to plug the launch event.

## **PROMOTION ONLINE**

### *Facebook*

Facebook is the **most vital** place for your society, and will provide the hub of all your activities over time. Set up a group or page (both have their advantages but a group is probably better), invite all your friends who might be interested, create an event for the launch, and use this as a tool in all future promotion.

You can then place a link to your Facebook group/page on the walls of other relevant societies, and your SU's Facebook page.

Make sure you make a Facebook event each time you do something, as opposed to just sending out a message. This way, when you've existed for a while, prospective members can look at your past events and get a good idea of how active your society is, and the kind of things you get up to.

Similarly, be sure to put up lots of pictures, and post links to the wall!

### *Twitter*

Twitter is becoming increasingly popular amongst students. You could promote your society using hash-tags:



**SecularOU** SecularOU Students

A [#Secular](#) minded Student with the [#OpenUniversity?](#)  
Why not join [@SecularOU](#) [#SecularStudents](#) [#Secularism](#) [#Atheists](#)  
[#Atheism](#) [#Humanism](#)

Tweet at other people to get them to also promote your society:



**SecularOU** SecularOU Students

@[ahsstudents](#) @[BHAnews](#) Could you RT? @[SecularOU](#) is the new society for atheists, humanists and secular minded students within the Open Uni.

### *Top Tip - Support the AHS*

You can **like the AHS on Facebook**: <http://www.facebook.com/the.ahs/>

And **follow us on Twitter**: <http://www.twitter.com/ahsstudents/>

We'd be happy to tweet about your new society, or post a message on our Facebook wall about you!

### *Mailing list*

Ultimately, you'll want a mailing list, as emailing supporters once a week with details of your events is a great way to drive attendance. Look out for opportunities throughout to plug the list, including mentioning it on Facebook, and on your website. Come freshers' fair, you will sign up loads of people – for example, Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists got 510 at their 2009 fair!

If possible, also have a tickbox giving people the chance to sign up to the AHS Newsletter!

### *Website*

You may not be ready for a website yet, but a well-designed site can provide another chance to show off your society, and promote your events. A site can also provide a creative outlet for your members, with many societies (such as [Aston Humanist Society](#)) running successful op/ed blogs.

At the very least, a [Blogger](#) or [WordPress](#) blog is not hard to set up, and domains are very cheap - £7 for two years is typical for a “.org.uk” domain from [123-reg](#).

### *Top Tip - Free hosting from the BHA*

Once your society is affiliated to the AHS (more on that later!), you can also affiliate to the [British Humanist Association](#) (BHA) for free. One of the things the BHA provides to their affiliated groups is free web hosting!

### *Through your University and Student Union*

Your University may have a method of allowing you to email all the other students at your University. For example, at Oxford, you can email an event to your Common Room secretary, who passes it on to all the other Common Room secretaries, who in turn tell the students at their college.

You may also be able to get some departments, for example the politics department (in the case of secular societies), or the religion and philosophy departments (in the case of atheist and humanist societies), to plug your society to their students and staff.

Your SU could promote your society on their website, their Facebook page, their Twitter feed, and maybe in an email to the students.

### *Through other societies*

Other societies, for example the philosophy society, LGBT society, feminist society, Amnesty society, debating society, science societies, political societies and religious societies may be willing to promote your societies' launch to their members (as well as any future relevant events you hold).

## *First event*

Okay, so you've got your society, it has a name and logo, and you've promoted a first event. But wait... what should that first event be, exactly?

The first meeting should have a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere, so that people have a chance to mingle and make friends, but there are also several important things you need to get through. This means a quietish pub would be suitable, or perhaps a room in the SU so you can then move on to the bar.

### **WHAT NEEDS TO BE COVERED**

In the first meeting, you need to:

- Introduce atheism, humanism and secularism as terms
- Introduce the aims and objectives of your society
- Give examples of the types of events you are likely to hold
- Address common questions people are likely to have
- Detail where you plan to go from here – initially more pub socials, film showings and forming a committee. Eventually, inviting speakers...?
- Allow time for questions you didn't anticipate
- Tell people about how a committee will be formed, and get people to express an interest
- Give people the opportunity to sign up to your mailing list!
- And then go have fun!

### *Should you form a committee?*

You don't actually need to form a committee in the first meeting, and getting down to things like committee roles and a constitution risks bogging things down. Some people may not be interested in this part of the day.

Try to determine in the meeting whether this would be an appropriate thing to do, and if not, just take expressions of interest at this time. However, if you don't form a committee straight off the bat, make sure you quickly have a follow-up meeting to do just that, or else people may lose interest.

## *Getting a committee*

So your society has successfully launched, and you want to quickly capitalise on peoples' enthusiasm to form a committee. What roles do you need?

Many Universities require you to have a **President, Secretary and Treasurer**, and some may also need a Webmaster and Senior member. Other options include Vice President, Press and Publicity Officer, Social Secretary, Membership Secretary, Events Coordinator, Welfare Rep, Equality and Diversity Officer, Campaigns Officer, Interfaith Coordinator, Education Officer, Librarian...

If you affiliate to the AHS, you need an **AHS Rep**, and this must be someone other than the President (though it is fairly typical for them to hold another committee role, as opposed to being their only role).

## EXECUTIVE

- The **President** should lead the society, chair meetings, set the agenda and coordinate everybody else. They should be in charge of planning upcoming events
- The **Secretary** handles administration internal and external to the society, and may also be in charge of the weekly mail out
- The **Treasurer** takes care of the bank account, budget and membership fees. They will typically be seen signing people up at events

## OTHER ROLES

- **Vice President** – supports the President and substitutes for them when they are busy. May also have another role such as Treasurer or Events Coordinator
- **Webmaster** – also known as the IT Rep, builds and maintains the website!
- **Senior Member** – or member of staff, sometimes required by the University before a group can affiliate
- **Press and Publicity Officer** – a very common and important role, this officer is in charge of designing posters, flyers and other promotional material, and coordinating efforts to put things up around campus. Could also be in charge of the society's magazine
- **Social Secretary** – organises social events
- **Membership Secretary** – in charge of collecting membership fees and maintaining the records of members. Practically speaking, you're not likely to have enough members to need a separate role here
- **Events Coordinator** – in charge of booking rooms etc. for specific events. A somewhat unglamorous and so unpopular role (unless they get to invite the speakers...)! Maybe best merged with something important like Vice President
- **Welfare Rep** – could also be a Humanist chaplain. In charge of looking after the welfare of students around campus. Could establish a relationship with the University and SU
- **Equality and Diversity Officer** – in charge of ensuring events are accessible and open to all

- **Campaigns Officer** – if the society decides to run campaigns, or proactively support the campaigns of the AHS, British Humanist Association, National Secular Society, Humanist Society of Scotland and Humanist Association of Ireland
- **Interfaith Coordinator** – organises events with religious groups, and participates in other interfaith activities on campus. Whilst you will not be a faith group, you may still find it beneficial to take part in such events!
- **Education Officer** – you may want someone in charge of developing resources for the society. For example, Bristol Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Society like to run [pub discussions](#), and the education officer is in charge of those
- **Librarian** – you may decide to build up a library that members can borrow books from. The librarian would run that
- **AHS Rep** – all AHS-affiliated societies have one. Together with the President, the AHS rep acts as liaison between the society and the AHS

Your committee will immediately need to do several things – agree a name and logo (if that’s still up for discussion!), agree upon membership fees, write a constitution, and affiliate your society to your University or student union.

## *Membership fees*

The membership fees a society decides to charge will have a huge impact upon the types of events it is able to run. But for many societies, they don’t have a huge amount of choice in the matter.

Different Universities have very different attitudes towards society membership fees. For example, Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists charge the high rate of £5 for a year or £10 for life, and then charge non-

members £2 for events. These are fairly standard rates for societies at Oxford. At the other end of the scale, student societies in Southampton are typically free, and so Southampton Atheist Society can't charge anything! At other Unis still, the Student Union may mandate some minimum fee – for example, at UCL, societies must charge at least £2.

The amount a society charges has a big impact on the events it can hold. If you charge more fees, you can afford to pay for speakers to travel to your University for talks, and to pay to take them out for a meal beforehand. Some speakers will be willing to do events for free, but others can't afford to, so it'll increase the range of speakers your society can afford!

Would higher fees put people off joining? If you're the only society charging higher fees, then yes. If everyone does it, then no!

You could also consider the Skeptics in the Pub model of sending round a donation bucket at events.

## *Constitution*

The next step is to write a constitution, specifying the name of your society, its aims, the structure of the committee, the electoral procedures, how the finances are managed, and what the fees are.

Many Universities or Student Unions will mandate you use their “pro forma” constitution before affiliating to them – this is obviously the first thing to check! But if you find you need to write your own, then the AHS's separate guide, [How to Write a Constitution](#), should prove helpful.

## *Affiliating to your University and Student Union*

Almost there! Next up comes affiliating to your University or Student Union. Typically, societies will only affiliate to one or the other – either the SU is in charge of managing the student societies, or the University is.

There can be all sorts of requirements you must fill before affiliating. You may need:

- A certain number of members signed up already
- A committee, or perhaps an executive
- A supporting member of staff (“senior member”)
- Membership fees
- A constitution, possibly matching the one they provide

Things gained from affiliation may include:

- Ability to have a stall at freshers’ fair – this is really important!
- Permission to put posters up around campus – again, really important!
- Listing on the SU/University website, as well as ability to advertise there
- Cheap or free room bookings – also very, very useful
- Financial support, or ability to apply for grants
- Ability to use the SU or University’s name (e.g. at UCL, you can’t call yourself “UCL Union” until you are affiliated to the SU – just “UCL”. And at Oxford, you can’t call yourself “University of Oxford” until you are affiliated to the University – just “Oxford”).

What you need to have sorted before affiliation, and what affiliating lets you do, varies massively from University to University. Check with your SU and University early on so you can get to work on it.

## *Joining the AHS*

The AHS’s members are its societies, and membership of the AHS is free! And there are two types of membership for UK and ROI student societies – full membership, for societies already up and going, and associate membership, for societies in the process of setting up. The sooner you can join, the sooner we can start helping you.

UK members can also separately affiliate to the British Humanist Association for free.

## FULL MEMBERSHIP

Full membership is for constituted university societies within the UK and Republic of Ireland of an agnostic, atheist, freethinker, Humanist, non-theist, rationalist, secularist, or skeptic philosophy. A society must earn full membership by demonstrating they are a genuine society. This is at the discretion of the Executive of the AHS, who will take the following into consideration:

1. Whether the society has a constitution;
2. Whether the society has a committee;
3. Whether the society is holding regular events.

Full members get all the benefits of joining. Benefits include:

- access to the full range of our society running guides
- access to the AHS Speakers Directory
- listing on our website
- events listed in our weekly newsletter
- rights to attend the AHS AGM
- invites to AHS events and training workshops
- free society affiliation to the British Humanist Association (including public liability insurance, web hosting, copies of publications and much more - see below)
- your members can join the British Humanist Association for £10 instead of £20
- right to apply for grants for major events
- receipt of personnel help at major events
- two votes on the AHS Caucus
- support of a Regional Development Officer
- free hugs from the AHS President.

## ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Associate membership is for non-constituted, non-UK/ROI or non-student societies of an agnostic, atheist, freethinker, Humanist, non-theist, rationalist, secularist, or skeptic philosophy.

Associate members only get some of the benefits of joining. They are eligible for the same benefits as full members, but **may not be eligible for** access to the AHS Speakers Directory; members can join the British Humanist Association for £10 instead of £20; right to apply for grants for major events; receipt of personnel help at major events; or two votes on the AHS Caucus. Eligibility on these points is at discretion of the AHS Executive.

Ideally, newly forming societies will be eligible for Associate membership as soon as they start to be set up. Associate member societies should graduate to Full member societies once they meet the requirements.

## APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP

Applications can be made at

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

Once you have applied, the procedure for becoming a member is as follows (as quoted from the [constitution](#)):

*"All applications that are accepted by the Executive shall be deemed to be ratified by the Caucus in the absence of objections following seven days' notice of the accepted application by email. In the event of objection, the application must be ratified by simple majority of the Caucus."*

If you're not sure whether to go for full or associate membership, don't hesitate to get in touch with our Head of Membership at [membership@ahsstudents.org.uk](mailto:membership@ahsstudents.org.uk).

## AFFILIATING TO THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

When applying to join the AHS, or once already a member, UK societies can also affiliate to the [British Humanist Association](#) for free. The benefits of doing so include:



Resources:

- free web hosting from the BHA
- ten or more free copies of each bi-monthly issue of *BHA News*
- other information and campaigns resources in your bi-monthly pack
- the Groups Network newsletter by email
- a free copy of each new BHA publication

Publicity:

- listing on the BHA website Groups pages
- listing on the public BHA Groups' Google Map
- inclusion in material sent to all new BHA members
- your website or website news feed on our Netvibes page
- promotion of local humanism on BHA forms and publications
- being able to state affiliation to the national humanist organisation on your headed paper and other materials
- use of the 'Happy Human' affiliated group images

Other support:

- cover under BHA Public Liability Insurance for your meetings and events
- discounts on bulk orders of publications and other products from our shop
- advice and support from the BHA as appropriate

- we can work with you to send occasional mailings of your group's material to BHA members and supporters in your area by arrangement

Groups also have the right the right to submit motions to general meetings of the BHA.

If you want to affiliate to the BHA, you can do so when you fill in your AHS membership form, or by emailing BHA Head of Membership and Promotion Bob Churchill, at [groups@humanism.org.uk](mailto:groups@humanism.org.uk).

## ANY QUESTIONS?

Not quite sure where you are in the process? The AHS aims to help newly forming societies to get off the ground. Please contact us at [membership@ahsstudents.org.uk](mailto:membership@ahsstudents.org.uk).

*What next?*

So! Your society is up and going, and ready to start holding events. Where do you go from here?

## EVENT IDEAS

Here are some of the different types of events that student societies hold...

- **Guest speakers** – Big name speakers are a staple event for many a society, and reliably the most popular. The AHS [Speakers Directory](#), available to member societies only, lists speakers who are happy to talk to students, and can be filtered by subject and location. Each entry gives a bio and the speakers' contact details.
- **Student talks** – You can run your own talks! The [Talk Directory](#) gives subjects that students have done talks on with their society before – to both serve as inspiration, and also we can hopefully put you in

touch with them about providing you with the material they used for the talk.

- **Debates** – The AHS’s [Debates Directory](#) gives suggested subjects for debates that societies have run before. You could have a debate within your society membership, get in speakers to represent different points of view, or organise a debate with another society, such as the debating society, or a religious society. Try and get a neutral chair!
- **Film showing** – The AHS’s [Film Directory](#) gives a list of film suggestions, and the guide [Top Tips on Running a Successful Film Night](#) tells you how to go about it.
- **Socials** – Anything from quiet drinks in the pub or SU bar to club nights and karaoke.
- **Meals** - Food is the one thing that unites all non-believers!
- **“Think and Drink”** – Bristol are famous for their discussions in the pub, which Durham have christened “Think and Drink”. Bristol’s structured discussion sheets are available in the AHS’s [Discussion Directory](#). Pick a topic, appoint a chair and get discussing!
- **“Ask an Atheist”** – As first done at Warwick, take a couple of committee members and put them up for questioning. This can be general, or on a specific topic. Can be very popular, especially for building bridges with the religious societies, who are often very receptive to this type of event.
- **Interfaith events** – There are a whole raft of events you can hold with religious organisations. The AHS’s [A Guide to Interfaith](#) explores this area in greater depth.
- **Charity and volunteering** – These make great events, show the world that atheists do give to charity and are lots of fun. Pick a secular

charity and a way to raise money. The AHS has a guide, [A Guide to Charity and Volunteering](#), which should come in handy.

- **Campaigns** – You can arrange your society to hold a protest or otherwise do some activism in support of a campaign.
- **Blood drive** – Collect as many members as possible and take them to the local blood donation centre or site. Race on who can bleed the fastest (not advisable), enjoy the free cakes, biscuits and then go down to the pub for the cheapest night ever! (also not advisable)
- **Comedy nights** – Lots of comedians love pointing out funny things about theists. This always goes down well with members, but it does not have to be based around atheism.
- **Quiz night** – Many societies like holding skeptical quizzes!
- **Darwin Day** – Celebrate the birth of our favourite man with a beard, Charles Darwin, by taking part in [Darwin Day](#). It is held on 12<sup>th</sup> February. Traditionally this is celebrated by going to a pub wearing beards, or perhaps simply holding an evolutionary themed event...
- **Book group** – Quite a few AHS societies have their own library, but do they have a book group? Meet up once a week to discuss a book.
- **Make Your Own God** – this is where you provide members with the materials to physically make their own idols – plastic milk bottles, old clothes, coloured paper, glue, sticky tape, scissors, etc. Give your God a name and you can even tell people why your God is better than theirs. Just do not tell anyone you plan to worship them later.
- **Sport** – Meet up, play the sport of your choice or even have your own ladder. Oxford Secular Society used to organise a very successful interfaith football tournament each year.

- **Trips** – You could visit museums, zoos, the cinema, places of worship and even have weekends away.
- **Video games** – Geeky society? You could just meet up to play video games...
- **Annual General Meeting** – Not fun, but has to be done! Make sure you elect a new committee once a year.

*Top Tip - get a good balance*

Most societies hold one event per week and a mixture of different events work well. So over a twelve week term, you may want to have 4 speakers, 1 debate, 1 film showing, a trip, an “Ask an Atheist” and 3 socials.

## MEET UP WITH LOCAL GROUPS

Something that you could do quite early on, and is very worthwhile, is to get in contact with local groups that share similar aims and interests to yours. You could attend and promote each other’s events, and ultimately may look to hold joint events.

The network with the closest aims to the AHS is that of the local Humanist groups. The AHS has in the past had contact with every BHA-affiliated local Humanist group. Many are enthusiastic about helping AHS member societies. Some are at Freshers’ Fairs each September/October helping set up new student societies.

But local Humanist groups aren’t by any means the only network of non-student groups that may be of interest to students – there are also the Skeptics in the Pub, Café Scientifique and Sea of Faith Network groups.

- [British Humanist Association-affiliated local Humanist groups](#) and [Humanist Society of Scotland local groups](#) typically have a mixture of

socials and guest speakers – much like student groups – and meet at least twice a month.

- [Skeptics in the Pub groups](#) meet once a month, in a pub, almost always with a guest speaker.
- [Café Scientifique groups](#) meet once a month in bars and cafés, with a guest speaker, and discuss science!
- [Sea of Faith Network groups](#) aim to explore religious faith as a human creation, and groups typically meet once a month.

It's well worth getting in touch with other local groups. When your group first forms, you may find them very useful in giving advice and support – as well as promoting your society round campus. As your student group ages, you may find their stable presence helps provide stability to your society as well, should it ever need it.

## REASON WEEK

The biggest type of event you could hold is a Reason Week! A Reason Week (also known as Awareness Week, Rationalist Week or Think Week) is an intense week of events which seeks to expose the type of discussion and debate that atheist, Humanist and secular student societies offer to a wider audience and raise the profile of the issues involved. They can serve to raise awareness of social, political and moral issues, recruit and retain members to the society, and generate publicity for the society or for their campaigns. The week-long events tend to involve a combination of lectures, debates, panel discussions, workshops, performances, and film showings. Events are usually free of charge, open to the public, and include catered elements.

The bigger societies typically hold one Reason Week a year, and it is certainly not something to try until your society is well established – if at all, until year two. For more, see the AHS's guide, [How to Run a Reason Week](#).

If your society reaches the point of holding a successful Reason Week, then congratulations on a job well done!

*Good luck and have fun!*

Written by Richy Thompson, Jenna Catley,  
Emma Bryce and Nicola Young Jackson

Copyright AHS 2011