

Amnesty International Introduction



Setting up an Amnesty International Student Group



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Amnesty International Introduction



The role of student groups in Amnesty International

Student Groups play an important role in campaigning for Amnesty International. They are often our most active members, meeting every week and showing an amazing amount of creativity and enthusiasm in all that they do. Student group members participate in every one of our major campaigns and actions, raising awareness of human rights issues among the student populations and the wider community. Their commitment and hard work is highly valued by the movement as they are the next generation of human rights activists.

Student groups depend upon people like you who are prepared to set up groups in their own college or university. Freshers' Fairs are the ideal place to meet like-minded people who also want to get involved with Amnesty International and help start up a group. Don't worry however, if you've missed the Freshers' Fair, there are other ways to start a group as this guide shows.

How does an Amnesty International student group work?

All Student groups/clubs/societies are usually funded and resourced by their student unions. Student Groups also affiliate to Amnesty International UK. They are then supplied with resources and information about Amnesty and its current campaigns.

Student Groups meet regularly and are very active. The student environment is an ideal campaigning ground and every group makes a lasting contribution to the work of Amnesty International.

The Student Action Network

There are over 100 student groups in universities and colleges across the UK. They make up the Student Action Network (STAN). Each year there is a STAN conference where all of the student groups across the UK come together to swap ideas and meet like-minded people. A new STAN committee is elected and they help to direct and shape the work of Amnesty's Education & Student Team.

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Step 1



Get started - Info from your Student Union

Getting information from your Student Union on how to set up a society is the most important first step of all.

Contact your Student Union and ask to speak to whoever is responsible for societies. Explain to them that you want to set up an Amnesty International Group, and ask for an up-to-date version of the 'societies handbook' or whatever they produce for new societies.

This will contain information about how many members you need to get, how much to charge them, what positions you're supposed to have on your committee and so on, in order to become an official society and to be allocated a budget by the Student Union (there is a chance you may not be given a budget in your first year as a group, but you can run a society by fundraising and asking for a membership fee).

The Student Union normally requires each society to have a Chair (or President), Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. The role of the Chair is to organise the rest of the committee and run meetings, as well as serving as a point of contact for Amnesty International's Education and Student office. The Vice-Chair can share some of these roles. You can also add responsibilities to these two positions. The Treasurer needs to set up a bank account and keep track of all money going in and out of the account, taking charge of the society cheque book and union account. Remember, if the accounts are badly kept your union may be reluctant to give your society money the following year. Finally, the Secretary should be responsible for taking and distributing minutes of committee meetings and emailing all members to let them know about events.

You can also add more positions to the committee as more people become involved such as:

- Publicity coordinator
- Letter-writing coordinator
- Press officer
- Coordinators for different campaigns
- Social secretary

Don't worry if it's only you at present, hopefully after your stall and first meeting, more people will want to get involved.

You should also find out: if you have a pigeon hole at the union, if you can book rooms for meetings each week, if you have a notice-board and whether you are allowed to put posters up around the union.

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Step 2



Get Members: Freshers' Fair Stall

The Freshers' Fair is an ideal time to get members and to set your group up as an official society. We can send you a pack of materials designed to be used at your freshers stall containing posters, leaflets, stickers, balloons etc. If you are few in number - or on your own - you might be able to get help from your local Amnesty International group (details of how to contact them on pg 7) or the Freshers Team (contact the Education and Student office for details).

TOP TIP: The most effective way of getting a student group started is to hold your first meeting within 10 days of the Freshers' Fair. If you have a room booked in advance you can tell everyone at the fair when and where the first meeting will be held. This means that you will need to organise the meeting room at the same time as the Freshers' Fair stall.

Missed the Fair?

If you've missed the Freshers' Fair and you're worried about how to attract members to your budding group, don't despair. Do one of the following:

- Organise a stall in a public place in the college or Student Union - e.g. next to a coffee room or canteen where lots of people will be coming past.
- Organise a 'First Meeting', and make sure that you plaster your Student Union and University campus with posters advertising it (see notes below on 'First Meeting').
- If you're feeling more ambitious, you can screen a human rights related movie (e.g. Blood Diamond or Hotel Rwanda) and sign up interested students afterwards.

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Step 3



Get organised – the First Meeting

If possible, as you are booking the Freshers' Fair stall, try to book a room in your Student Union at the same time for a date within 10 days of the Freshers' Fair. This way you can advertise your first meeting at the Fair, as well as in the following week. It might be an idea to ask the Education & Student Team for an About Amnesty DVD and some general Amnesty materials so you have an idea of what to talk about in your first meeting (to do this simply email: student@amnesty.org.uk with your request).

TOP TIP:

The first meeting is the best time to talk about the roles required in your group by the union... and hopefully a few extra roles to concentrate on campaigning!! However, don't hold elections for committee members at the first meeting. You may scare people off and / or end up electing people who are less than committed to your group.

We recommend that you cover the following points:

- An introduction to Amnesty International
- An introduction to the latest campaigns
- Setting up a student group
- An action to get the group started!!

What you will need...

Below is a list of items you may need to assist you in the meeting:

- Flipchart paper (some prepared with the text, some blank for brainstorming)
- Marker pens
- Pens and paper for the brainstorming groups to write their ideas on
- A letter-writing action, including envelopes and stamps
- A pub nearby to go for a drink after the meeting

Example Agenda

1. Brief introductions and an icebreaker..... (5mins)
2. Introduction to Amnesty International..... (10mins)
3. Short introduction to the latest campaigns (10mins)
4. Getting started (break into small groups and brainstorm ideas of what you would like to work on and kinds of action to take) (15mins)
5. All then get back together to feedback and get volunteers for roles (10mins)
6. Letter-writing action..... (5mins)

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Step 4



Get active – activities

Amnesty International student groups take part in lots of activities such as:

- Regular letter writing
- Lobbying MPs
- Holding stalls to collect signatures for a petition, or to sign letters for a current campaign.
- Holding meetings with a video or a speaker to be publicised around your Union and/or college
- Organising comedy and band nights to fundraise
- Creating an imaginative poster campaign to raise awareness around your Union
- Attending the Student Conference in November
- Screening movies which touch on human rights issues
- Organising debates, often with other societies
- Working with local Amnesty groups and other organisations in your community
- Using the student and local press

You should plan the first few activities of your group at the first meeting. The main focus of your activities could be one of the current 'big' Amnesty International Campaigns or you can choose to campaign for an individual at risk. A pack of current campaign materials, including suggestions of events and actions, is available from the Student Office.

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Step 5



Get Connected – Affiliating to Amnesty International UK

Affiliation costs £21. The form you need to fill in is on our website: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/student/> or you can get a copy from the Education and Student Office.

Once your group has joined AIUK, you will receive:

- a start-up pack with lots of useful materials and information to help run your group, including how to order a student speakers list so you can choose who to invite to talk at your meetings.
- Monthly mailings during term time outlining each of AI's current campaigns. These mailings include background information on the campaign, ideas for actions and letter writing, leaflets and posters.
- The annual student paper, plus our Groups Newsletter, the Amnesty Magazine and Amnesty Action, all of which include up-to-date information on human rights and letter writing actions.

Additional resources are available from the Education and Student Team (see back page for contact details).

Amnesty International Support



Support Available

You're not on your own! There are various sources of help and advice available as well as a range of support materials produced especially for student groups by the Education and Student Office.

The Education & Student Team

...is here to help you to play an active and important role in Amnesty International's campaigns. As well as advice on how to set up your group we have loads of resources that you can use for your campaigns. You can contact the Education and Student Office by e-mail at: student@amnesty.org.uk or by phone: 020 7033 1596. Full contact details are given below.

Your regional STAN Committee contact

...is an active student, and will be in touch with other AI student societies in your region. The STAN committee is elected at the National Student conference and the six members represent regions of the UK – Scotland & Northern Ireland, North, Midlands, South West & Wales, London and the South East. They are there to help your group so please invite them to visit your university. They also represent the Student Action Network within AIUK's decision-making bodies. You can get contact details for the STAN committee from the Education and Student Office.

Your Local Group contact

...may be a good source of advice and information during the period of setting up your group. They may also be able to provide you with a speaker on AI's work. You can find out details of your local group on our website at www.amnesty.org.uk/localgroups.

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