**HOW TO…. BE A SOCIETY SECRETARY!**

Congratulations! Being a Society Executive is one of the most rewarding things you can do whilst at University. You have to be dedicated, organised and most importantly of all - really believe in what your society does. The role of Secretary exemplifies all this and more. You are about to undertake very exciting, but demanding role!

The purpose of this guide is to help you get clear about exactly what being a Society Secretary involves. It includes:

* Overview of Exec roles
* Key areas of responsibility
* The skills needed to do a good job
* Trouble-shooting common challenges
* What makes a strong society
* Where to find further support

By undertaking this role you are enabling your fellow students get the most out of their membership. Simultaneously, you also have the chance to really boost your skills and make a big difference to the Union community.

**Society Exec roles**

Warwick Students’ Union has over 230 student Societies. Each one is run by a student Executive Committee. At the head of this committee is the Society President who is responsible for the overall running of the Society.

By taking on this leadership role, you’ll be responsible for providing great opportunities for your members. Thankfully, you do not have to do this alone!

There are **three essential ‘Executive’ roles** on every Committee:

**1. President**

The President is the figurehead and leader the society. Responsible for setting goals and objectives, managing the Exec team and overseeing all corresponding activity.

**2. Secretary**

The Secretary is ‘organiser’ of your Society and ensures that things run smoothly. They organise meetings, book rooms, write minutes and communicate what’s going on to your members, so they stay interested and involved.

**3. Treasurer**

It is the Secretary’s responsibility to handle the money. However, they must also have their eye on the bigger picture. They need to know exactly where your finances stand and be able to plan accordingly.

A Society can operate successfully with only a President, Secretary and Treasurer. If your aim is to make your Society even stronger you may want to expand your Committee.

Popular **optional roles** include:

**Social Secretary**

The key function of a ‘Social Sec’ is to organise well run, fun social events. Their role is important because socials allow your members to get to know each other better, enjoy themselves more…and ultimately build greater commitment to your Society.

**Publicity Officer**

Every Society needs publicity – from ball tickets to hoodies. Having someone focus on doing this effectively is a great way to recruit more members, network with other Societies and create a real buzz around your activities.

**Fundraising Officer**

If your Society is serious about raising money for charity or to further your own activities, then this role is highly recommended! The Fundraising Officer is dedicated to managing and developing new and existing fundraising opportunities.

**Secretary - Key areas of responsibility**

The Secretary is the backbone a Society and ensures that everything runs smoothly. Without you, you Exec would struggle to communicate consistently. Meetings would be chaos, rooms would be double booked (if booked at all) and activities would be disorganised! You hold the Society together and ensure your members stay interested and stay involved.

Here is a breakdown of what your main responsibilities will involve:

**Record keeping**

Be sure to keep accurate records of Society minutes, financial data, photos and any publicity for future Society use.

*Specific tasks:*

Completing Society paperwork

* Maintain up to date membership records
* Liaise with the President about submitting the Exec Officer Record Sheet when there is a change of Exec <http://www.warwicksu.com/execresources/forms/>
* Assist the President to complete SocsPlan by devising your Society’s yearly goals.
* Don’t forget to also pass on good contacts like sponsors, speakers and venues to the new Exec.

**Organising meetings and booking rooms or venues**

Meetings are important to running an efficient society. They allow for an examination of upcoming events, the generating of new ideas and making important decisions.

*Specific tasks:*

Writing an agenda

* The President provides main points for discussion, but the Secretary then writes up the agenda
* You are also responsible for booking meeting rooms, informing members of meetings, taking the minutes and emailing them to everyone afterwards

*Meeting tips* ***(Create visual)***

* Hold meetings at the same time each week
* Schedule meetings at regular intervals
* Book meeting rooms well in advance
* Always have an agenda

**Understanding broader picture**

Helping the President to plan the year is another key aspect of the role. This involves being aware of your Society’s key objectives, organising activities accordingly and working within Union policy and procedures.

*Specific tasks:*

Responding to Union communication

* The Secretary must read and action relevant emails from the Societies Federation, Societies Officer or Pam, Indy or Gerard in the Student Activities team. They contain crucial information that is only sent out to help your Society. Don’t forget to also collect weekly post or packages from The Resources Room or your pigeon hole in the Lounge in SUHQ.

Reviewing activities & events

* An effective Secretary is always mindful of what works and what needs improving. **You should never keep doing something just because you have always done it.**

Completing SocsPlan

* A successful Society is very clear about its aims and objectives. You are responsible for helping the President to define goals for the coming year via SocsPlan <http://www.warwicksu.com/execresources/socsplan/>

Attending training

* The Secretary must attend the relevant training as advised by the President. All essential training courses for Exec members are advertised in Exec Resources on the Societies webpage. <http://www.warwicksu.com/execresources/training/> Please make a note of which members will be attending the relevant sessions.

Scheduling

* The Secretary must know when major events e.g. balls, large socials and conferences will be held; working with President and Treasurer to seek fundraising, sponsorship, equipment, transport and speakers on time.

Organising AGM

* As Secretary you will lead on organising an Annual General Meeting. This is an important opportunity to provide your society with a brief end of year report, reflect on the year’s activities and select the new Exec. You need to ensure you collate all relevant documentation such as, the Treasurer’s end of year budget and President report. Don’t forget about paperwork for elections!

Record keeping

* Be sure to keep records and photos for future Society use e.g. any publicity, the goals you’ve outlined in SocsPlan. Don’t forget to also pass on good contacts like sponsors, speakers and venues to the new Exec.

*Broader Picture tips*

* Schedule time with the rest of your Exec to complete SocsPlan
* Work backwards from event dates to identify all tasks and deadlines
* Use a diary so deadlines aren’t missed
* Avoid repeating mistakes - keep track of what works/doesn’t
* Prepare a handover for your new Exec top include top tips
* Refer new Execs to the relevant How To.. Role Guides!

**TOP TIP: Don’t be afraid to ask for advice!** The Student Activities team are always more than happy to provide guidance with society management, event and activity planning, committee issues or membership queries. If we don’t know the answer we will put you in contact with the right person!

**Communicating regularly with your members**

As Secretary, you have to let your membership know what’s going on! The success of your Society depends on how well you keep people engaged throughout the year.

*Specific tasks:*

Disseminate Society news

* Work closely with your Publicity Officer and Social Secretary to share news about upcoming events and activities.

**Secretary – Key skills**

The diagram below shows the key skills a Society Secretary requires. Don’t worry if you feel you don’t possess them all! They can be learnt and developed as you go along.

**Skills required** *(use a visual representation e.g. spidergram/mind map)*

* Communication
* Organisation
* Time management
* Decision making
* Team work
* Motivation
* Strategic thinking
* Problem solving

It should now be clear that being a Society Secretary is a brilliant learning curve and a fun role too. Warwick Students’ Union is working very closely with Careers & Skills to ensure you get the support you need during your time in this role. Why not sign up for free workshops like public speaking and time management being offered throughout the year? See here for more information: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/>

We can also help you learn how to effectively show off the skills you have acquired to future employers! See ‘Being a Secretary and your CV’ on page 6.

**Challenges & how to solve them…**

Time management

* Plan meetings, activities and events well in advance
* Write a timeline, delegate and don’t leaving things to the last minute

Balancing degree workload with being Secretary

* Your team may also be experiencing this so try to support each other
* Propose sharing tasks when someone has a quieter spell and vice versa
* Speak to us if you’re struggling! Ultimately, as a student your degree comes first
* Diarise your time so you can be better organised
* It *is* possible to manage your academic work with extra-curricular activities. See below for a real-life successful example of a busy student’s timetable!

*(INSERT SCREEN GRAB – COSMO’S OUTLOOK CALENDAR FROM LAST YEAR?! - SILKIE)*

Sustaining commitment throughout the year

* Encourage ownership by involving your Exec in planning and decision making
* Hold regular bonding sessions
* Share successes
* Plan meetings focusing on reviewing achievements and flagging up concerns
* Handle any issues promptly

Keeping aims on track

* Focus on activities that are in line with your Society’s original aims and objectives

Ensure you input into your Societies SocsPlan as early as possible

<http://www.warwicksu.com/execresources/socsplan/>

* Review how you’re progressing with your goals at the end of each term

Committee members aren’t pulling their weight

* Stop and think: is this personal or professional? Always back observations up with evidence
* Look at their role description to assess their specific duties
* Be clear – are they not fulfilling *their role* or what *you expect* of them
* Put yourself in their shoes; think about why they are not fulfilling their role; Personal reasons? Duties too big to be practical for one person?
* Arrange to speak with your President who will follow the matter up

*(Create a visual representation e.g. colourful flow chart!)*

**Creating a strong Society**

There are two main elements to creating a strong Society:

* Your **overall aims** and reason for being (as outlined within your constitution)
* The **steps you take** to reach your aims

For example: A Society must have a solid membership base of students engaged in your unique offer. To achieve this aim, your Society mustprovide a range of well-run activities/events.

**Strength check-list**

The following are characteristics of a strong Society. This has been provided to inspire you to be the best you can be. Any gaps may be indicators of where you could improve and are a good basis for identifying your goals for the year in SocsPlan.

<http://www.warwicksu.com/execresources/socsplan/>

See how many apply to your Society right now! *(Create a shopping list/check list graphic)*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1.** | **Open and inclusive:** | Is aware of equal opportunities and is open to anyone who wishes to join |
| **2.** | **Unique:** | Offers members something **distinctive** and **sustainable** to secure a strong foundation |
| **3.** | **Solid membership base:** | Of at least 30 members – so that you’re giving your time to a cause or activity that people want to participate in! If your membership numbers drop, come and have a chat to us for some tips and guidance |
| **4.** | **Provides a range of well-run**  **activities/events:** | Your Society should show variety to members so that you cater for different needs |
| **5.** | **Conducts safe and responsible activities:** | You have to ensure your Society abides by the Warwick Students’ Union Members Code of Conduct <http://www.warwicksu.com/pageassets/democracy/documents/By-Law-12-App-1-Members-Code-of-Conduct-Final-16-10-12.pdf>. It is a legal requirement that all events and activities are safe and legally compliant - that includes no trading and other ultra vires activity! We can help you comply through training and other support. |
| **6.** | **Provides value for money:** | Are you in a good financial position? Are you able to put on activities that benefit all your members? |
| **7.** | **Works in cooperation:** | A strong Society is based on working together to meet common goals |
| **8.** | **Is goal orientated:** | The team works throughout the year to achieve clear aims and objectives |
| **9.** | **Encourages involvement:** | Do you actively reach out to members and support them in having a say in how the Society is run and what activities it provides |
| **10.** | **Is friendly, approachable** **and professional**: | Whatever activities you undertake you are ambassadors for your Society, the Union and the University! |

**Being a Secretary and your CV**

As a Secretary of a Society, you are already fulfilling elements of awards like Warwick Skills Leadership Scheme <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/skills/leadership/> and Warwick Advantage <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/skills/awards/advantage/>) offered by the University of Warwick Careers and Skills.

This means that by taking on this role you are automatically improving your chances of finding employment after you leave Warwick! All these programmes are designed to help boost your employability, by helping you reflect on and articulate your experiences of being a Society Exec. For more information visit: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/skills/>

**Further support**

If you want more information about any aspect of the Secretary’s role, require support with

conflict resolution, training or advice about any element of running your Society, please do come into the Student Resources room anytime Monday-Friday 8.30am-4.30pm or email

[societies@warwicksu.com](mailto:societies@warwicksu.com)