Societies

JMSU OPPORTUNITIES & DEVELOPMENT:

DEVELOPING AN ACADEMIC SOCIETY IN YOUR DEPARTMENT

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John Moores Students' Union are committed to working in partnership with academic departments where possible to ensure the student experience is the best it can be for every student studying at the institution.

This toolkit is designed to:

- Support staff in academic departments to understand how academic societies work.
- Encourage more students to join and/or set up new academic societies.
- Promote and celebrate the excellent work of current student led societies.

What are academic societies?

Academic societies are set up and managed by students with the aim to enhance both their learning and student experience at the university. The societies receive financial and administrative support who ensure the health and safety of students is upheld at all times where appropriately possible and ensure the activities are as inclusive, accessible and beneficial to all who take part. Any student can join any academic society even if the society is not reflective of their course of study.

Why are academic societies important?

Research from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) suggests that at the heart of student retention and success is a strong sense of belonging to the academic and wider university community. This sense of belonging is most effectively nurtured through student participation in mainstream activities spread across academic and social spheres of the student experience such as academic societies. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons why students leave, or choose to stay in higher education as it is often a multitude of contributing factors but we do know that the more engaged a student is the happier they are and therefore the more likely they are to stay and succeed in higher education.

With this, research from the National Union of Students (NUS) suggests that academic societies play a significant role in driving student satisfaction measured through mechanisms such as the National Student Survey in that institutions with the highest overall satisfaction correlate with having a high number of well-supported societies.

We also know from observing our academic societies over the years, the invaluable experiences and peer support students have experienced empowers them to stay in higher education but graduate with a multitude of skills for employability, knowledge for use in wider society and friends to last a lifetime.

Benefits of developing and embedding academic societies across the University

Academic societies encompass an abundance of benefits for students, staff and the institution:

Benefits to students

• Students are supported and encouraged to explore their individual talents and passions with peers who share a common interest.

• Students have the opportunity to explore their academic field of study further outside of the classroom.

• Students have the opportunity to develop knowledge, confidence and identity as individuals within a broader learning community.

• Students grow part of an established, supportive peer group

• Students can expect to develop key employability skills for the future benefits to Staff.

• Academic societies support students' learning outside of contact time

• Staff have the opportunity to engage with students within a social setting while exploring the academic field of study further.

• Academic societies are a great to engage with for student voice matters e.g. issues with support mechanisms.

• Academic societies are a unique selling point for the department when recruiting prospective students.

Benefits to the University

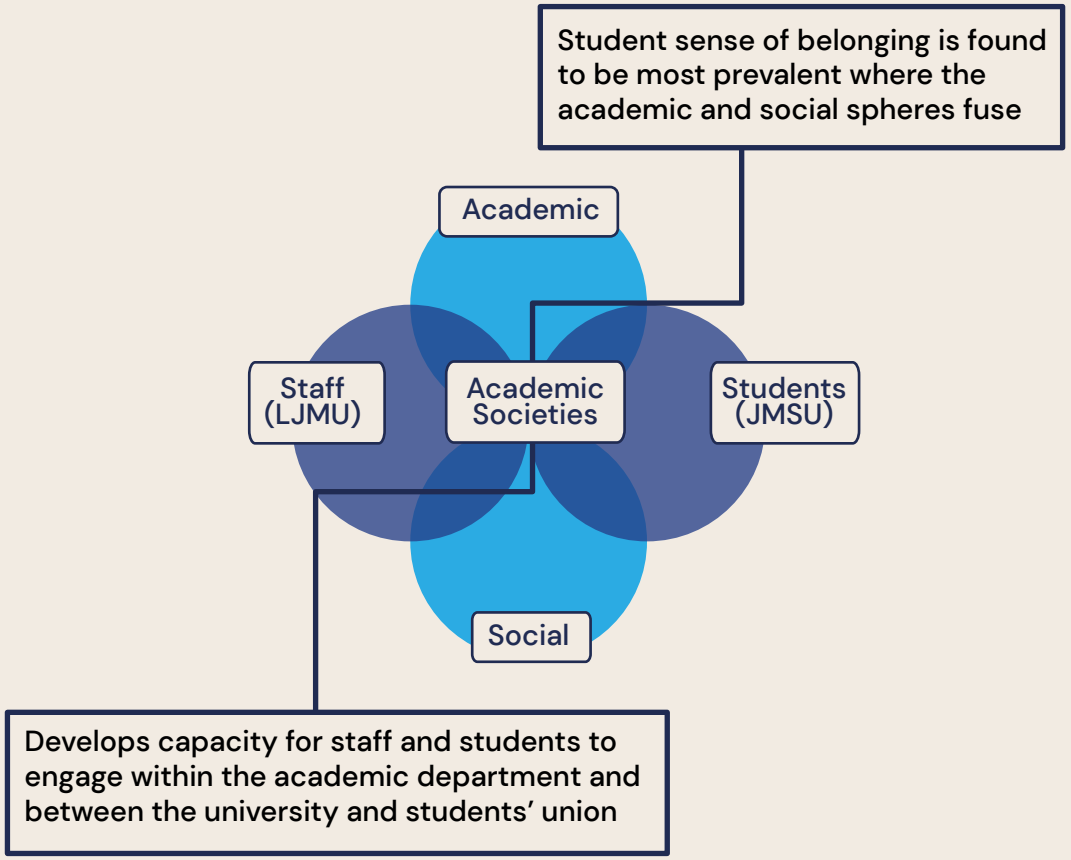
• Academic societies contribute to the university's commitment to provide a distinctive, inclusive learning environment for all.

• Academic societies contribute positively to enhance students' sense of belonging and success.

• Academic societies often engage in activities in the community, contributing to the positive influence of the University and JMSU in the wider world.

Enhancing Student Engagement & Belonging through Academic Societies.

The model for engaging with students in their academic and social communities places academic societies at the heart of the student experience.



Setting up an academic society

1. Getting started:

Students interested in setting up a new society must complete the New Sport and Societies Form and have at least two signatures of support from peers. The form can be accessed here: www.jmsu.co.uk/startyourown

Once the form has been handed into the Opportunities & Development Team in the Students' Union, or emailed to: studentgroups@ljmu.ac.uk the application will be reviewed by the Sabbatical Officers and a decision will be returned to the applicant within 10 days.

2. Developing the society:

If successful, the applicant will be invited to have a meeting with the Opportunities & Development Team to assist in setting up and developing the society. The discussion will explain, in depth the rules and regulations group must adhere to, governance, health and safety and finance they can expect to receive.

3. Delivering the student-led activity:

Students will be supported throughout the academic year by JMSU to organise events, meetings, trips, fundraisers and activities in the community, and academic societies will be encouraged to engage with their department at relevant points.

Joining an academic society

At present, there are 18 academic societies with over 600 members therefore your students may not want, or need to set up a new academic society for the department. To join any sport or society, students can simply find out when the sport or society meets and take part in two sessions for free before having to pay for membership which is there to cover health and safety and the cost varies depending on the activity.

Students can contact the President/Chair or Captain of the sport or activity through: www.jmsu.co.uk//new-website-home/get-involved-home/ student-groups/student-groups-home

Example of Academic Societies at LJMU:

- Law
- Engineering
- Biology
- Midwifery
- Paramedics

(A full List can be found on the JMSU website or alternatively email the JMSU contacts.)

5 Ways to engage with an academic society

Is there already an academic society in your department but not sure how to engage with them? Here's some top tips on how to engage with the society for the benefit of you, your students and the institution.

1. Presence in the department

There is no better way to increase participation in, and with an academic society than making the student groups feel like a meaningful part of the department. If possible, dedicate a noticeboard to the society and actively encourage the committee to send updates to all students via email and social media.

2. Get involved

Academic societies organise a range of weird and wonderful activities through the academic year from Student v Lecturer events to sponsored sleep outs, bake offs and field trips. Attendance and participation is often appreciated and contributes to strengthening staff student relationships.

3. Student Voice

Engaging with academic societies gives you a great insight into how happy students are within the department outside of formal student voice mechanisms such as SSLMs and surveys. You could ask the Chair or President of the society if you could access a society meeting in order to share ideas and solve problems together for enhancement purposes.

4. Study Skills

Are there particular areas of the course students find particularly problematic, or need further guidance with? Academic societies are useful in developing strong peer mentoring and support connections between levels of study.

5. Providing Opportunities

The society provides opportunities to share any incoming opportunities such as internships mentoring, training and networking events. This will make sure students get to do the things they're passionate about.

6. Celebrate

Academic societies bring vibrancy and creativity to departments and should be duly rewarded. Some departments and their societies hold end of year events to celebrate the work of the students within and outside of the course. You could also consider nominating students from the society or members of staff who have gone the extra mile to support the student group for a JMSU ATA's award.

CASE STUDY: Paramedics

Paramedics Society was set up in 2017/18 to support all student paramedics, nursing and allied health professionals. The society organises and delivers talks, lectures and interactive activities that help expand the knowledge and understanding of all students

The society offers an in house mentoring scheme. All new and continuing students at LJMU receive a 'buddy' who will act as a point of contact should they face any concerns. The 'buddy' scheme aims to ensure students feel welcome and as though they have a friend they can always rely on.

- Cailin Douherty, President

Liverpool John Moores Paramedic Society is an academic society that works closely with all paramedic cohorts, as well as those with a general interest in first aid and emergency care. Made up predominantly of paramedic students, we all have one aim and that is to graduate and receive registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

A requirement of the HCPC is continuous learning through CPD. Within the Paramedic Society we strive to prep our students by organising engaging CPD events on various areas such as trauma care, maternity, paediatrics and many more.

"The Paramedic Society has helped me develop my learning through the various CPD events they have held this year, they have also allowed me to meet friends and feel like I'm a part of something special."

- Quote from Member

We are very much an inclusive society and rely on our committee, as well as members, to help us bring about excellent social events, charity fundraisers and wellbeing activities. We work closely with our academic tutors who provide great help and direction.

"I took part in the 500k steps for NWAS event, walking a total of 50k steps myself! It was great to feel part of a community and a team despite being separated throughout the Covid-19 pandemic."

- Quote from Member

We encourage friendships across all cohorts and love to see our members forming strong bonds and relationships with others. We can face many difficulties throughout our paramedic degree, whether it be on placement or with university work. Having that support network of friends and family is crucial and it is something we strongly advocate for.

The academic team are incredibly supportive, they supported and assisted many decisions this year such as our name change. They had an input in our new logo also. We know with any struggles we may face they'll do their utmost best to help us out. The tutors contribute ideas that they believe will benefit our society.

We are so grateful to be a part of and have this platform whilst at university. University can be a daunting experience and to have the Paramedic Society supporting all through their journey is amazing!

KEY CONTACTS

For more information on setting up an Academic Society, contact:

Student Development Co-ordinator (Societies)
jmsusocieties@ljmu.ac.uk

Clarissa Frigerio
Student-Led Change Coordinator (Academic)
c.frigerio@ljmu.ac.uk

Vice President Activities
vpactivities@ljmu.ac.uk

Vice President Academic
vpacademic@ljmu.ac.uk

We have seen thousands of students engaging in various activities as detailed below. For further information of these opportunities please contact the relevant member of staff.

Sports - jmsusport@ljmu.ac.uk

Volunteering - jmsuvolunteering@ljmu.ac.uk

Societies - jmsusocieties@ljmu.ac.uk

Course Reps - Clarissa Frigerio | c.frigerio@ljmu.ac.uk Academic
Societies - jmsusocieties@ljmu.ac.uk