

Managing conflict and complaints

All of us face difficult situations or conflict at different times in our lives, with different people and for different reasons. The conflicts may be small or large, but the ability to deal with them effectively – and respond favourably – is a crucial interpersonal skill to have. Being able to manage conflict when it arises helps us not just in our personal lives, but it allows us to deal with problem situations while being part of a Society Committee.

What could cause conflict?

- Committee members with different aims and ideas for the society
- Committee members not fulfilling their roles or agreed actions from meetings
- Inappropriate conduct in meetings or group chats

How can you prevent conflicts and challenging situations?

- Ensure everyone has a say in creating your Annual Action Plan
 - This will help you identify what you all want to achieve
 - You will also establish how you will work together to do this
 - You should refer to this throughout the year to help maintain focus on achieving your society's aims
- You may also want to create a Code of Conduct for your society to establish agreed and expected behaviour
- When conflict or difficult situations arise, it's important that you address them as soon as possible
 - This will stop it from becoming worse and preventing actions from happening
 - It also means you can easily and quickly move forward in a productive and positive way, keeping on track of what you are trying to achieve



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How should you deal with conflict and challenging situations?

Our first recommendation is always to contact the Students' Union to ask for our guidance and support.

Sometimes it's not possible to prevent issues from escalating. People may become frustrated or angry with an issue. The important thing is the desire to improve the situation, no-one will benefit in the long term if the difficulty continues. There are several things that you might want to think about doing if conflict does arise between society members.

This could apply to a situation involving yourself, or can be your plan to help other members resolve their differences:

- Meet with the other person – even though you might be tempted to moan or talk about the other person, you need to tell them. They can't adapt their behaviour if they don't know how it upsets you. Make time and space for this – somewhere comfortable and neutral
- Clarify the purpose of the meeting – make sure that you both are aware of why you are meeting – i.e. to resolve the difficulties. This may help to initiate the process of thinking about a resolution
- State very specifically what the problem is – be clear about why you are angry / upset
- Don't blame – work at moving on – If the other person finds this difficult, explain that you don't want to dwell on the issue, but you'd like to move forward and encourage them to do the same. Very few people when asked if they want to carry on with the conflict will say "yes"
- Stick to the subject and take one issue at a time – Issues will be missed if they are all stated at the same time. As soon as an issue or situation arises that you are uncomfortable with, speak up about it as soon as you can
- Use feedback – always talk about the other person's behaviour not their character – do not make it personal. For example, say "When you arrive late every day, it means that I cannot do" rather than "you are useless with time". Also, talk about the way that the behaviour makes you feel
- Reach agreement on future action – what can you and/or the other person do to prevent disagreements in the future, this is an important step to close off the disagreement and move forward in a positive way

The Student's Union Complaints Procedure

If you would like to make an informal or formal complaint about any member of any Society, you can contact the Union who will provide support and assistance in dealing with and resolving complaints. All the details for our Complaints Procedure is available at: <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/advice/complaints/>