



Welcome Rituals (Initiations) & Social Activities

Introduction

UEASU, UEA Sport, UEA's Student Support Service and BUCS are working together to make the student experience as inclusive and accessible as possible. We want all students to feel able to participate, enjoy and excel in their chosen activities.

UEASU and UEA Policy

UEASU and the University of East Anglia has a zero-tolerance approach to all activities defined as 'welcome rituals' (definition below). However, both the Students' Union and UEA recognise they must work continuously and proactively to educate and empower students to deliver positive welcome and group bonding activities.

Welcome Rituals - Definition

There is an agreed definition of initiation at UEA:

"A welcome ritual is an event or set of actions in which members (often new members but not exclusive) of a group are expected to perform a task or tasks as a means of gaining credibility, status or entry within that student group."

"This may involve peer pressure (though not explicitly) exerted on students and may compromise a person's inherent dignity or mental stability as a person by expecting, forcing, or requiring an individual to drink alcohol, eat mixtures of various food stuffs, nudity and behaviour that may be deemed humiliating. This may happen at any point during the year, and in any place including trips and tours"

All such events/activities may but not exhaustive to include:

- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Substance misuse
- Bullying, harassment, and power inequality, often used as means to coerce participation in challenges and other risky behaviours designed to humiliate
- Sexualised behaviour

There are several elements to draw out and clarify:

- **Initiations do not have to involve "forcing."** For example, you may say to everyone "you can opt out if you want to", but if a general atmosphere is created that could be interpreted as expecting a student to take part in an activity "because most other people are," this will count.
- **They often (but do not have to) involve challenges and forfeits.** If you organise an event where people are set dangerous or embarrassing challenges this would count. And if they receive a reward or a punishment, this will count too.
- **Warning people and giving them the choice does not count.** If you say to a student "X or Y will happen, but you don't have to come," that will still count as an initiation ceremony.
- The key thing to remember is that the research suggests that to demonstrate their willingness to belong and commit to a group, students will put themselves in a position where their consent thresholds are lower than in normal life.
- **They do not have to happen at the start of the year.** This type of activity can happen at any point in the year and may happen at any student group social.
- **These activities can happen anywhere.** Please note that if these activities happen on campus, off campus or even in a different country, the rules and guidance count here.

Socials Definition

'When the membership or number of memberships of a student group, meet to undertake an activity that isn't defined as a core function of that group. It will be organised by the committee or on occasion members in a defined date, location, time and communicated to the membership/s.'

Where the core function or constitution states that the student group hold socials, all meetings will be defined as a social.'

Socials that include similar actions or activities as outlined above in the welcome ritual's definition would also be in breach of regulation.

Your role and responsibility as a committee member:

At this point we must remind all committee members, that as a Union and UEA Sport, we devolve a duty of care to all committee members for the activities in which they organise to be done safely, within the law and for the enjoyment of their members. Therefore, activity organised in breach of the above definition would be in breach of your duty of care and therefore all committee jointly and severally liable for its activities.

But I took part in one and I was OK why are they even banned??

Many students over the years have taken part in initiation ceremonies and have come to no harm. But there have been hundreds of cases of students taking part and being harmed physically. The unfortunate death of ED Farmer from Newcastle University due to a consequence of a society initiation in 2018 has also highlighted the issue in higher education and focuses UEA on creating a safe space for all students and [following guidance](#) from Universities UK.

A further survey undertaken at UEA in 2017 suggested:

- 63% of students suggested it wastes sporting talent due to the fear of joining the club and being required to do an initiation.
- 67% believed it humiliated freshers.

Further guidance issued to the university and Union suggest:

- Universities UK guidance sheet outlines the measures required of higher education institutions.
- BUCS has declared a zero tolerance approach to bullying and anti social behaviour and outline their approach for sport in their [Inclusion strategy](#).

Reporting an initiation

As an individual/s if the event is in progress - we would actively encourage reporting any welcome ritual or problematic behaviour at a student group social activity swiftly to reduce any further harm. To any nearby security, venue staff or latterly to staff in the Union or UEA Sport.

As an individual/s post event - All students are actively encouraged to report any experience of this via the [report and support website](#) at UEA by selecting Bullying and Harassment and providing further details. This can be done **anonymously** if you wish.

If you wish to complain about a student group undertaking this type of activity to the Union then please email union.info@uea.ac.uk giving as much detail as you are willing to provide. You can also request to remain **anonymous** in this process should you wish in line with the UEASU complaints procedure [here](#).

How do the rules work at UEA in relation if an alleged initiation took place?

All clubs and societies are covered by the SU Code of Conduct, the UEA Sport Behaviour Standards and the University's General Regulations on Student Behaviour. This means:

- A code conduct or student behaviour investigation would start led by the Union or University Student Services Team
- This may include request of interviews, reviewing of evidence or group meetings
- Depending on the outcome of the investigation, this could result in a variety of outcomes:
 - Disciplinary action may be taken by the Union/University based on breach of [Union code of conduct](#) and [university regulation](#) on individual/s
 - Action may also be taken against the student group as a whole, which could include but not exclusive to being disbanded, revoking of student group privileges or fines

How can I get advice and training as a committee member on welcome rituals?

UEA Sport and SU Opportunities teams are always on hand to offer advice on running safe activity that won't fall foul of the rules.

All social secretaries are required to attend training run by the students union, outlining your role and responsibility. This will be run throughout the year and we will provide resources on the UEASU website [committee hub](#) on how to run safe socials.

Should you wish to ask further questions, please feel welcome to email union.opportunities@uea.ac.uk this is an email address to ask questions and clarifications. There will be no judgement cast on any question, just a response on hints and tips to ensure your social can be done in a safe, fun and enjoyable manner!

Further work being done at UEA

We have also partnered with Chester University to deliver the CHANGES programme to all presidents and social secretaries of student groups, so there is a greater understanding on why UEA is concerned about initiations and socials.

We will work to educate members and staff on what an initiation looks like and encourage active reporting. UEASU and UEA are members of the NUS Drug and alcohol impact scheme to undertake work to prevent student harm. We will also endeavour to be a sector leader in the implementation of UUK guidance on initiations.

Some guidance on socials:

To have the best possible socials UEASU suggest you abide by and follow the social standards set below:

uea(su) Social Standards

- All socials should be well planned and delivered to a high standard, with the safety of their participants at its core, both physically and mentally
- All socials should provide a positive and unforgettable experience for their members, with social interaction at its core
- All socials should be welcoming and inclusive to all, and an environment that is free from harassment and hate
- All socials should be held in appropriate and accessible venues
- All socials will be free from welcome rituals, initiations, harmful challenges or forfeits
- All socials held by a student group at UEA must have a risk assessment submitted a minimum of 72 hours before the social begins and must outline the true nature of the event for effective risk mitigation
- All socials should encourage responsible drinking and not include 'forced drinking' or use of harmful substances
- All socials have a minimum of one sober student per 30 members, this person should be equipped to deal with emergencies and be aware of where support can be sought.

The ingredients for an amazing social...



Here is a handy checklist on all the elements you should think about when organising a social:

The socials checklist:

Checklist to consider:	Who is doing it?	Is it done?
Have I invited everyone? And circulated clear information		
Have I got a true picture of how many people will come?		
Have I considered the needs and requirements for all my members?		
Have I done a risk assessment?		
Have I done the things I said I'd do on my risk assessment?		
Have you told everyone how to keep safe and the expectations of behaviour on the social?		
Have you considered non-alcoholic options for your social?		
Have you built in breaks for rehydration or food?		
Will my social offend anyone else?		
Has my social got an element designed to get people talking and having a good time?		
Who are my responsible people on the social to assume control?		

Who are my sober people we should have one per 30 members?		
Have you thought about what to do if something went wrong?		
Do you have taxi numbers on your phone?		
Have you decided when and where the social will end?		

Socials in Halls

Student groups are prohibited in student halls; Residential settings are not suitable for large gatherings or socials and shouldn't be used to do so. We want to ensure that everyone feels safe and secure in their home on campus and not be in breach of their accommodation agreement as a large gathering would be in breach of this and health and safety arrangements particularly in the case of a fire.

Socials in private residences

Please note that organised socials in private residence are not suitable. You may put yourself at risk of breaching your letting agreement and causing a disturbance to local community. We recognise many students all in the same club or society may live together in a private residence, therefore we would refer to the socials definition above to determine if a club or society held a social or just a social gathering of friends in any investigation.

Where can we go?

The SU provide fully licensed venues on campus and will cater for groups that wish to hold socials, they will also offer exclusive deals. The SU blue bar can host small booth-based socials and larger socials. You can book via the opportunities team. We encourage all socials with alcohol to be done in a licensed venue, this way we can mitigate the risk burdened on committee members, the SU and UEA Sport.

We also encourage you to utilise venues around the city such as local attractions and entertainment establishments.

Further training and support

For further support and information on running a great social or event please head to the [SU committee hub](#).

For further information on the above document please email union.opportunities@uea.ac.uk or studentsport@uea.ac.uk