

Initiation and Hazing & Social Activities

Introduction

UONSU, UON Sport and UON are working together to make your student experience as inclusive and accessible as possible. We want every student to **feel able to get involved, thrive and achieve their potential** in their interests and activities.

There is a **zero-tolerance approach** to activities defined as ‘initiation and hazing’ (see definition below). However, both the Students’ Union and the University understand how important it is to keep learning, working together, and empowering one another to make sure group-bonding activities are enjoyable, welcoming, and respectful for everyone.

Initiation and Hazing – Definition

Initiations, sometimes known as hazing, are events organised by student groups, societies or sports teams. They are activities such as rituals, challenges, and other activities that humiliate, degrade, abuse or endanger participants (regardless of their willingness to take part) which are expected of someone joining or being part of a group.

The University and SU define initiation or hazing activities as any activity or behaviour which:

- Is expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers them, regardless of their willingness to participate.
- Involves taking improper advantage of another person as a result of a power imbalance or position within a club, society or organisation
- Involves tacit or explicit improper coercion or manipulation of students to their physical or mental detriment, or which compromises their human dignity.

Examples of initiation / hazing activities (this is a non-exhaustive list):

- Pressure, whether implied or explicit, to consume alcohol, drugs or obnoxious substances, in excessive quantities or against a student’s wishes
- Organised activities that are dangerous, unlawful in anyway, or involve humiliating people (includes pressure, whether implied or explicit, to be publicly naked / semi naked)
- Acts perpetrated against a person’s body (e.g. shaving hair / eyebrows)
- Psychologically and / or physically tormenting people (e.g. locking them in darkened rooms, playing disturbing noises, etc)

- Sexual assault, harassment or misconduct
- Victimisation, where a group of students (e.g. 1st years, the 3rd team, etc.) are targeted for any of the above activities
- Pressure, whether implied or explicit, to buy anything (e.g. equipment, clothes, food, drinks) or attend social activities that is excessive and results in financial hardship.

Key Clarifications – What do the definitions mean?

To support understanding, here some clarified examples what counts as initiation and hazing:

- **Initiation and hazing do not require explicit forcing.** For example, you might say “you don’t have to, it’s optional”, but if the environment creates pressure or expectation because “everyone else is doing it”, this will still count.
- **They often involve challenges and forfeits.** If you organise an event where participants undertake risky or embarrassing tasks, are dared to do something, and receive rewards or punishments, that qualifies.
- **Offering a choice doesn’t automatically exempt the activity.** If you say to a student “X might happen, but you just don’t have to come to the social if you don’t want to take part”, that still counts as initiation and hazing.
- **Group mentality can lower risk thresholds.** It is suggested that when students want to belong to a group, they may take part in activity they wouldn’t normally.
- **They’re not limited to “Freshers”.** These activities can happen at any time of the year, in any social gathering of a student group and doesn’t always simply target “freshers”.

“It happened to me in first year, and I’m fine so what’s the big deal?”

Lots of students have taken part in initiation or hazing activities and seemed fine afterwards. But across universities in the UK, there have also been hundreds of cases where people have been seriously hurt—physically or emotionally—because of these events.

The death of a student from another university during a society initiation in 2018 shows just how real these risks can be. That’s why UON is focused on keeping everyone safe and making sure all students can take part in activities that are fun, welcoming, and respectful—following guidance from Universities UK, BUCS, and national best practice.

Your Role and Responsibility as a Committee Member

As a committee member, you are entrusted by **UONSU** and **UON Sport (if a sports club)** with a level of responsibility for your group and members.

Events you organise must be **safe, lawful and enjoyable** for everyone involved and you are expected to make your activity as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Socials – Positive Activity

A **social** is when members of a student society or club get together for an activity that's **just for fun** and **not part of the group's main purpose**. These events are usually organised by the committee (or sometimes by members) and will take place at a set date, time, and location — which will be shared with all members in advance.



All groups/clubs have support from the Student Groups Team regarding social and trip planning so if you're needing advice, please reach out to them. All group/club committees also have mandatory online training that is to be completed via the UONSU website. It is recommended that you complete these as soon as possible after election to develop good knowledge of the policies.

Whilst socials will differ by group/club depending on interests, the above building blocks are a great start when thinking about what extra activity you want to do outside of our core objectives. Your group/club is a democracy, so ask your members what they want to do that academic year and take all suggestions to committee discussion to

create an inclusive, diverse and safe year. The below are some brilliant examples that we have seen some groups/clubs do over the years that have had a positive impact on their members and culture.

- Organise a team-building workshop with different activities that will promote discussion, group cohesion and build trust to help new members feel connected from the start.
- Host a sport swap event with another club to learn a new skill.
- Run a campus scavenger hunt to encourage teamwork and familiarise new students with the campus / city.
- Plan a volunteering day where everyone contributes to a local cause.
- Create a welcome booklet with introductions, recommendations and messages from current members.
- Organise an open-mic night or games evening.
- Create a joint team playlist, where everyone contributes a song.
- Create a buddy system where newer members are supported by an older members who may be on the same course or play the same position etc.

Reporting – where to go for help and advice

UONSU, UON Sport and the University are here to support you. If you need guidance about an issue occurring please reach out to your CDO team or to sucomplaints@nottingham.ac.uk where the SU Resolutions & Complaints Advisor can provide assistance. We encourage all of our members to report any behaviour or issues in this area to Report & Support at the University you can do so here either named or anonymously:

<https://reportandsupport.nottingham.ac.uk/support/category/hazinginitiation>