

NUSU ACADEMIC SOCIETIES FUNDING SCHEME EVALUATION REPORT (2023/24)

Emily Halsall

INCLUSIVE NEWCASTLE KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

NUSU Academic Societies Funding Scheme

Evaluation Report 2023/24

Emily Halsall (NUSU Academic Societies Intern)
Supported by Charlotte Boulton (Inclusive Newcastle)

Executive Summary

1. This evaluation report for the NUSU Academic Societies Funding Scheme (ASF scheme) will investigate the effectiveness of the scheme against its expected outcomes and make recommendations for improvements. The report uses Theory of Change methodology to evaluate what has worked and what needs improving for this funding scheme.
2. The ASF scheme, facilitated by £20,000 funding from Newcastle University, aimed to give academic societies the opportunity to carry out welcome events for new students, and to enable 6-weeks of free membership to these for new students. Academic societies were invited to apply for funding in August 2023 by outlining welcome events that they would carry out in September and October 2023 with the aim of increasing a sense of belonging within their societies.
3. Key findings from student consultations informing the NUSU 2021 Strategic Plan suggest that students believe sense of belonging to be “critical to a positive student experience”. Research from Newcastle University supports the theory that students’ sense of belonging is comprised of both ‘social fit’ and ‘academic fit’, and that the academic school is a key site of belongingness for students.
4. The evaluation suggests that the funding received **has been associated with the development of a sense of belonging** within academic societies, particularly from the perspective of academic society committees and student members.
5. Recommendations from last year were followed and increased the success of the project, however new recommendations have emerged from the second run of the project and should be implemented to increase the engagement and success of the project.
6. Some societies felt the 6-week free membership period lowered their overall membership levels for the year once the free period had ended, and that this affected their funding levels for the year. However, some societies acknowledged some of the positives of having a smaller but more engaged society.
7. The data collection and analysis approach this year has investigated the demographics of participants, and some analysis considering the differential impact of the scheme for students from underrepresented groups has been possible. There are no statistically significant differences in the sense of belonging and feelings towards the effect of welcome events on their sense of belonging between ‘APP eligible’ and ‘non-APP eligible’ students.
8. Overall, **students reported that they felt like the project enabled them to feel a sense of belonging within their academic societies** and committees found the extra funding useful for their welcome period. Continuing the scheme would enable more students to feel a sense of belonging and allow committees to continue putting on fun and exciting events for students to take part in.

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1. Introduction

This evaluation report for the NUSU Academic Societies Funding Scheme will investigate the effectiveness of the scheme against its expected outcomes and make recommendations for improvements. The evaluation has been co-created by Emily Halsall, NUSU Academic Societies Intern and BA History student, and Charlotte Boulton, Inclusive Newcastle Research, Evaluation & Policy Officer and Evaluation Mentor for this project, in a NUSU-Inclusive Newcastle partnership. The report, written by Emily Halsall, uses Theory of Change methodology to evaluate what has worked and what needs improving for this new funding scheme.

In March 2022 NUSU sent a funding bid to Newcastle University asking for £20,000 to give out to Academic Societies. This would enable these academic societies to put on welcome events in September and October 2022 with the key aims of creating a sense of belonging for new students and supporting them to connect with their peers. New students would get 6 weeks of free membership to these academic societies and could then decide whether to buy the full membership for the continuation of the year. Academic societies, also referred to as 'course-based' societies, are societies that form around an academic subject. They are not run by the school, they are organised by student committee members and supported by NUSU. They are open to all students, not just those who study the corresponding course, but membership is usually mostly from students who study the related discipline. The scheme also encourages academic units to provide support to student committees and disseminate information about the scheme to students in order to support the conditions for the development of academic and social fit.

At the end of the funding period NUSU had spent £23,532.87 of the £29,139.88 budget on applications (£20,000 funding + underspend from 2022/23). A total of 51 out of 78 'course-based' societies (as listed on the NUSU Societies website) applied for this funding and a large number of societies asked for and received more than the £500 guideline. This has coincided with a hope that through a continuation of the funding, increased awareness would be expected and therefore an increase in take-up from societies and confidence to ask for more than £500.

Out of the total 73 applications, 63 were accepted, this included 8 resubmissions from committees that did not receive the amount they applied for and 12 additional applications due to committees pitching further welcome events after the successes of their others. Applications were rejected on grounds of events being centred around alcohol, too little information provided and only being available for small groups. Societies were allowed to resubmit with changes to their events, however, 2 societies did not take up this opportunity.

4203 students purchased the free 6-week membership between September and 31st October. Bio Medical Society had the most free memberships purchased at 234.

This project first ran in the 2022-2023 academic year, and several recommendations were made after its rollout. This project continues from that and will see how recommendations have been implemented and investigate feedback from new committees and students.

Timeline of the funding:

- **March 2022:** NUSU sent a funding bid to the university which was approved.
- **August 2022 – October 2022:** The new society committees were invited to complete the application form and apply for funding and put on events (2022/23 project cycle)
- **June 2023:** Funding was approved for 2023-24 academic year.
- **August 2023- 31st October 2023:** The new society committees were invited to complete the application form.
- **September- 31st October 2023:** New students were allowed 6-weeks of free membership to any academic society, and students in other year groups were allowed free membership to any academic society they had not yet tried. Welcome events were delivered by societies who had been approved for funding.

The events put on by academic societies continued to follow NUSU's code of conduct in line with the 2022-23 events. This includes but is not limited to:

- No forced alcohol consumption,
- No forced humiliation
- No improper advantage of students taken as a result of an imbalance of power/position.

Therefore, NUSU did not want alcohol-centred events being mentioned on application forms due to the pressure it might put on students to drink in order to feel accepted within the society. This is especially poignant during the induction period when new students feel pressure to quickly make friends and may be easily forced into doing things they do not want to do.

For more information on this please see [last year's evaluation report](#).

2. Research Background

The research background informing this report has not changed since the previous year and is based within the [previous report](#).

3. Theory of Change

3.1. What is a Theory of Change?

Theory of Change is an approach to planning, implementing, or evaluating change. A Theory of Change shows what, how, and why something happened, and in which context. These are commonly used for complex interventions where direct causation between actions and outcomes can be difficult to see. This evaluation methodology aims to make clear the chain of events (or expected steps of change) between each component of an intervention, to improve confidence that outcomes can be linked back to actions taken. For the Academic Societies Funding Scheme, the key actions taken are a) providing funding for academic

societies to host welcome events for students and b) providing students with 6 weeks of free membership to an academic society. The continued efforts to engage academic units to support the effective delivery of the scheme underpin these key actions.

The process of developing a Theory of Change underpins the evaluation. In the first year of evaluation for academic year 2022/23, the Evaluation Mentor and NUSU Academic Societies Intern co-created the initial Theory of Change to guide the evaluation and uncover key areas for data collection to answer evaluation questions about the effectiveness of the funding scheme. Stakeholder interviews informed the development of proposed outcomes and objectives.

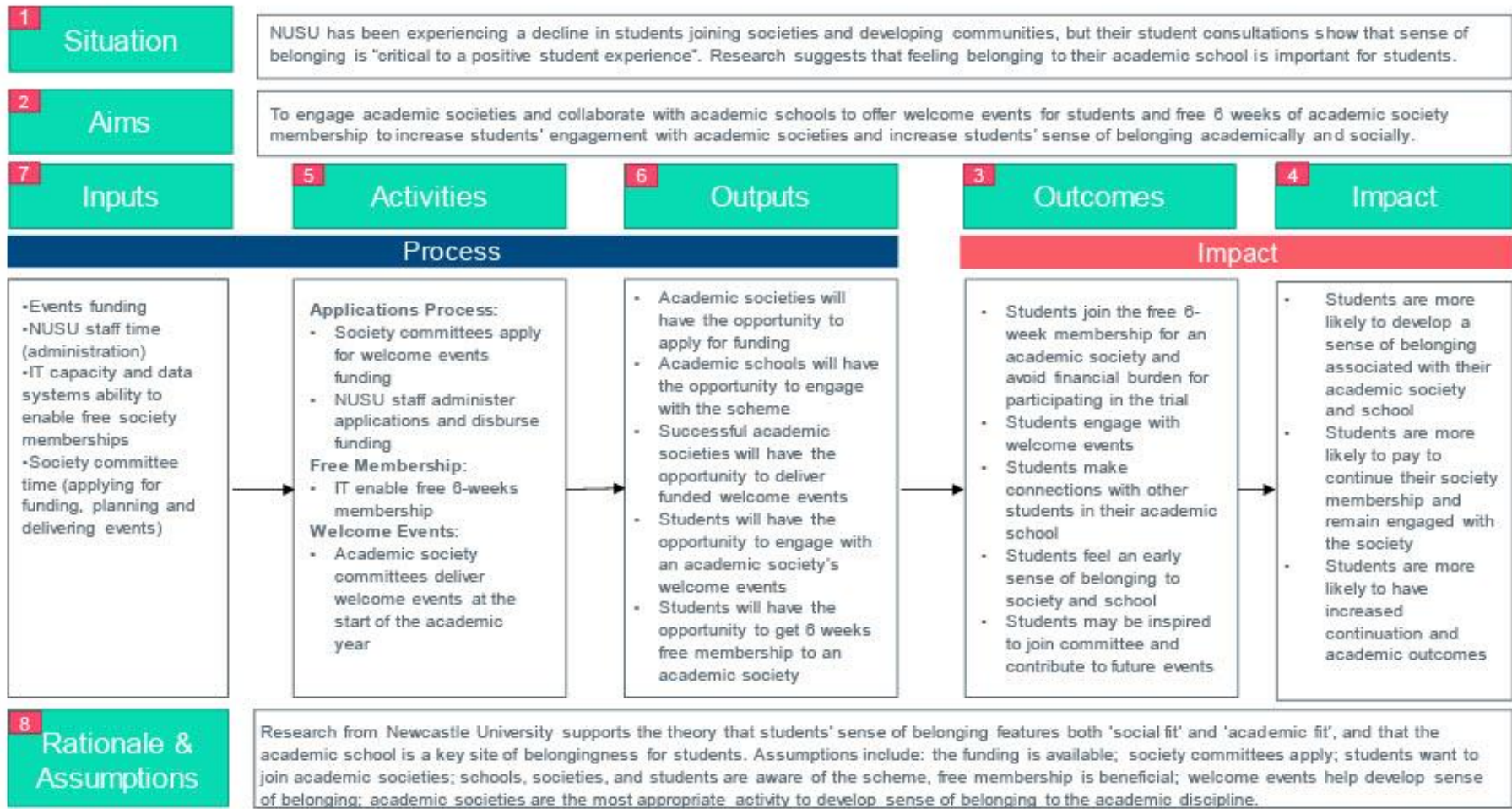
For this year's evaluation, the initial Theory of Change from 2022/23's evaluation was reviewed to revisit impact, outcomes, outputs, activities, and inputs, to make necessary changes and adapt to any changing priorities. As the first iteration of the Theory of Change was well-developed and acted as an appropriate model to monitor progress against, little needed to change. The outputs section was redeveloped after more evaluation guidance has been published in the sector, to more closely align with the approach promoted by TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education).

TASO is a charity funded by the Office for Students, with a commitment to the generation, synthesis and dissemination of high-quality evidence about effective practice in widening participation and student outcomes. They have developed various evaluation resources which the sector has been adopting over recent months. Our Theory of Change has been reconfigured using the TASO core Theory of Change template, to visualise our logic model more clearly and align with the University's shift to incorporate the TASO template across other evaluation projects and strategies, including the Access and Participation Plan. Our Theory of Change is referred to throughout the evaluation report when discussing whether outcomes have been met or not. It has been used to guide decisions about data collection, including target groups and survey and focus group questions. The goal of using a Theory of Change in this evaluation is to be able to assess how effectively the expected outcomes have been met in the 2023/24 scheme and provide logical and theoretical support for suggesting recommendations to improve the scheme and better meet the expected outcomes.

A diagram or logic model can be used to develop ideas and demonstrate expected steps of change between inputs, activities, and expected outcomes. The Theory of Change for this evaluation uses TASO's template:

3.2. Theory of Change model using TASO template

The model below has been simplified from previous iterations of the Theory of Change diagram (see appendices) to ensure there is a focus on the intended outcomes for the students who join academic societies using the free 6-week membership and participate in the welcome events.



4. Data Collection

4.1. Method

Upon recommendation from the previous report, surveys and focus groups were held in the weeks immediately following the closure of the 6-week project. This was recommended due to finding last year that students and committees forgot details or were less inclined to take part in the surveys and focus groups due to the longer amount of time between the project welcome activities and evaluation. This year this change of timings of focus groups and surveys has proved effective and students and committees were more enthusiastic and provided a better account of their experiences.

The following surveys and focus groups were administered in November 2023:

- Committee Members Microsoft forms survey (sent to the committee members that applied for the funding)
- Society Members Microsoft Forms Survey (sent to those who had signed up for a 6-week free membership to any academic society)
- Focus Group for society committee members
- Focus Group for students that had taken part in the 6-week free membership
- INSIGHTS panel survey (NUSU panel of students)

The questions asked in the survey and focus groups were made up of a mixture of open and closed questions to ensure a higher level of responses than a purely open-question survey.

Alongside surveys and focus groups run by the intern, the INSIGHTS panel was asked to present questions that corresponded with the survey questions to their panel. The INSIGHTS panel is a pool of students who signed up to participate in research projects with NUSU. 342 students opened the email containing the survey and 75 clicked onto the survey with 58 completing it. The survey was sent to students irrespective of if they had participated in the academic society's free membership promotion.

4.2. Ethics

Throughout the creation of this report and its corresponding surveys and focus groups, ethical guidelines were followed. This involved each member of the focus group returning a signed consent form that outlined explanations of confidentiality, and the right for them to withdraw their answers before a particular date, to ensure everyone had informed consent to participate. The ethics forms that were sent to committees and society members can be found in the appendix of this report. This aspect of the project has built on the previous year to increase the reputability and validity of the project and ensure all data collection meets an appropriate level of ethical consideration for this evaluation.

4.3. Who did we have data from?

The student society member survey collected data on respondents' demographic data. Last year, as it was only possible to survey the society committees, we had little opportunity to find out more about the students participating in the scheme. Therefore, as the IT developments have made it possible to identify students who purchased the free 6-weeks membership, we have asked students to provide some demographic information. This is important to understand who has been participating and start to look for any trends where some student groups may be missing from our data or reporting that they're having a better or worse experience than other student groups.

The demographic data has also been key in aligning the evaluation of the scheme with the University's Access and Participation Plan (APP). The APP is regulatorily limited to focusing on the experiences of Home, undergraduate students from under-represented groups. Whilst this scheme is intentionally universal and open to all students, it's also important to look at trends for 'APP-eligible' students and better understand how the scheme might be differentially impacting on their participation and satisfaction. This is relevant for achieving the outcomes for the scheme and ensuring the scheme has continuity through inclusion in the APP.

Total number of students that purchased the free 6-week membership:

Found via NUSU online system.

Society	Member Count
Academic Medicine Society	47
Accounting and Finance Society	97
Agricultural Society	26
Anaesthetics and Critical Care Society	61
Anatomy Society	24
Archaeology Society	23
Architecture Society	70
Art Society	132
Astronomy Society	53
Bar Society (Law) Society	41
Bio Medical Sciences Society	234
Biology Society	52
British Sign Language Society	7
Cardiology and Cardiothoracics Society	44
Chemical Engineering Society	80
Chemistry Society (nu:kem)	29
Civil Engineering and Geospatial Society	73
Classics Society	32

Combined Honours Society	37
Computing and Technology Society (NUCATS)	156
Consulting Society	6
Cyber Society	112
Dentistry Society	28
Dermatology Society	12
Economics Society	109
Electrical Engineering Society	41
Emergency Medicine Society	154
Engineering Projects Society	66
English Society	70
ENT & OMFS Society	8
Entrepreneurship Society	150
General Practice Society	18
Geography Society	95
Haematology, Oncology, and Pathology Society	21
History Society	120
Investment Society	153
Law Society	184
Lawyers Without Borders Newcastle University Student Division	14
Lifestyle Medicine Society	38
Linguistics Society	33
Marine Science Society	13
Maths Society	71
Mechanical Engineering Society	48
Media and Journalism Society	72
Medical Womens Federation	29
MedTech Newcastle	35
Modern Languages Society	143
Music Society	98
Neurological Society	25
Newcastle Muslim Medical Sciences Society - (NMM)	36
Nutritank Society	151
Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society	50
Ophthalmology Society	1
Outreach Medics	49
Paediatrics Society	32

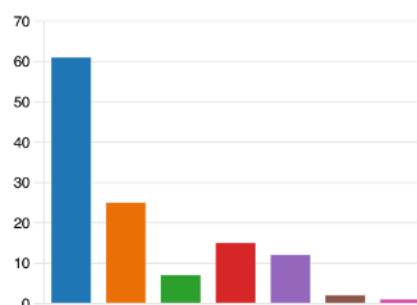
Palliative Care Society	10
PGCE Society	2
Pharmacy Society	117
Philosophy Society	36
Physics Society	17
Planning Society	57
Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery	10
Psychiatry Society	21
Psychology Society	117
Racial Equality in Medicine Society	12
Speech and Language Therapy Society	38
Surgical Society	73
Sustainable Medics Society	8
Vascular Surgery Society	4
WET Soc	13
Wilderness Medicine Society	65

Who did we get survey results from?

Building on last year's report, this year students were asked about their demographic data. By doing this, we have been able to understand who this scheme is impacting on the most and which student groups have been participating in the scheme. 123 students responded to the survey.

1. What is your stage of study?

● Undergraduate Stage 1	61
● Undergraduate Stage 2	25
● Undergraduate Stage 3	7
● Undergraduate Stage 4	15
● Postgraduate Taught	12
● Postgraduate Research	2
● Other	1



- A majority (49.5%) of students that answered the survey were in stage 1 of their undergraduate degree (n=61). This is a key demographic the project aimed to target, therefore the opinions and data received should provide a strong sample to better understand how the target group has experienced the project.
- A dip in responses can be seen from Stage 3 to Stage 4 students (n=7 vs n=15). Through focus groups, it became clear that a number of stage 4 students returning from placement years used the free 6-week membership and society events to integrate back into university life and make new friends. Additionally, students noted

a change in perspective after a year away from academia. Several students focused less on what other people thought of them and wanted to involve themselves in societies which they previously hadn't done in earlier years.

- The percentage of students that completed the survey that are currently completing undergraduate degrees is 87.8% (n=108) compared to a university percentage of undergraduate students (excluding overseas campuses) of 74.9%.
- Therefore, more undergraduate students took part than postgraduates in ratio to the composition of the university. This could be for a number of reasons, including postgraduates having less time to partake in societies, having already established a community, or thinking welcome activities are only for undergraduate students.

Recommendation: 1 Make sure postgraduate students know they can partake in welcome activities.

2. Are you classified as a Home or International student?

- 82% (n=101) of students that completed the survey were Home students and 18% (n=22) were International students.
- This could suggest more Home students were aware of the scheme or were interested in academic societies, or that there may be additional barriers to International students participating. It's not possible to analyse this in full detail but is something to consider.

3. We would like to understand the ethnic background of the students participating in this survey. Please select the ethnicity you identify most closely with from this list:

- 57% (n=70) of students who completed the survey identified as White English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British.
- The second highest ethnic background was Indian with 9 students followed by 'Any other white background' with 8 students.
- The total data received encompassed 14 different ethnic backgrounds.

4. What gender do you identify with

- 70.7% of survey respondents identified as women (n=87).
- 26.8% of respondents identified as men (n=33).
- 0.8% identified as non-binary (n=1).
- 1.6% preferred not to say (n=1).

5. Are you transgender or do you have a trans history?

- 97.5% of respondents said no (n=120).
- 1.6% said yes (n=2).
- 0.8% preferred not to say (n=1).

6. How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- 74.7% of respondents described themselves as Heterosexual/Straight (n=92)
- 8.9% preferred not to say (n=11).
- 7.3% described themselves as bisexual (n=9).
- 4% described themselves as queer (n=5).
- 3.3% described themselves as homosexual (n=4).
- 0.8% described themselves as asexual (n=1).
- 0.8% also described themselves as other (n=1).

7. Are you the first in your immediate family to enter higher education?

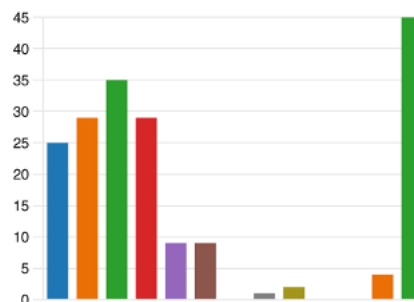
Yes	26
No	96
Prefer not to say	1



- 78% of respondents were not the first person in their immediate family to attend university (n=96).
- 21% of respondents were the first people in their immediate family to attend university (n=26).

8. We want to better understand how some student groups who are often underrepresented in universities are engaging with academic societies.

In receipt of Opportunity Schola...	25
Low family household income	29
Home postcode in an area of lo...	35
From a Black, Asian and/or min...	29
Mature student (undergraduate ...	9
Disabled student	9
Care experienced student	0
Carer	1
Estranged from family	2
Student from a Gypsy, Roma or ...	0
Refugee	0
From a military family (parent or...	4
None of these apply to me	45



- Out of the entire sample (n=123):
 - 28.4% (n=35) of respondents' home postcode is in an area of low higher education participation.
 - 23.6% (n=29) of respondents came from a low-income family.
 - 23.6% (n=29) of respondents came from a Black, Asian and/or minority ethnic background.
 - 20.3% (n=25) of respondents were in receipt of an opportunity scholarship.

- Out of 123 respondents, 62 were APP-eligible (Home undergraduates from the underrepresented groups listed in the question). 39 were Home undergraduates who were not APP-eligible (responded 'None of these apply to me' on the question). 22 were International or Postgraduate respondents.
- Out of the sample of APP-eligible respondents (n=62):
 - 24.2% (n=15) were from a Black, Asian and/or minority ethnic background.
 - 54.8% (n=34) of respondents' home postcode is in an area of low higher education participation.
 - 43.5% (n=27) of respondents came from a low-income family.
 - 35.5% (n=22) of respondents were in receipt of an opportunity scholarship.
- The representation of students from these underrepresented groups shows that the free 6-week membership project has provided opportunities to these students. Although the scheme is universal, it is important to understand how students from underrepresented groups are participating and experiencing activities relating to sense of belonging and extracurricular participation. There were notable numbers of APP-eligible students from low participation neighbourhoods and low-income families who participated, suggesting that these student groups are particularly interested in the scheme; this may be influenced by the free membership offer.

5. Learnings from the last evaluation

5.1. Progress of 2022-23 recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: Short application guidance booklet/information page

RECOMMENDATION 2: Introduce a Zoom Q and A session.

- Surveys and focus groups for the 2022/23 evaluation found that society committees last year often were confused about what events were permitted to receive funding.
- As a result, committees this year had the opportunity to attend multiple Q and A sessions and were provided with several email addresses of key NUSU staff members to ask further questions.
- This resulted in a decrease in the number of committees not abiding by NUSU guidelines and an increase in applications being approved first time.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Integrate information about the scheme into society committee training.

- This recommendation was implemented successfully with committees being briefed about the project during their committee training in a session led by key NUSU staff.
- Additionally, as above, committees were able to receive more help throughout this period on applications.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Define 'Academic Society' more clearly in information pages and application process to ensure students understand who the funding is for.

- Last year, students often got confused what was meant by the term 'Academic Society' during surveys and focus groups.
- This year, the term was defined at the beginning of each survey and focus group resulting in perceived increased understanding and a higher proportion of students understanding what is meant by 'Academic Society' when answering survey questions.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Reform the funding timeline to ensure societies receive the funding in advance of the welcome events time period (September – October)

- As a result of committees being briefed about the project in committee training, they were able to get a head start with planning activities prior to the academic term starting, which allowed societies to apply sooner and plan activities in advance.
- However, this recommendation hasn't been fully met as it wasn't possible for societies to receive the funding earlier, but they were able to plan events earlier, a factor greatly appreciated by the majority of societies.
- This resulted in fewer societies sending in first-time applications towards the end of the application process meaning that societies on average had longer time periods to put on the events they applied for, and decreased societies panic towards the end of the 6 week period.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Increase the funding available for the scheme, to enable committees to fund larger-scale events and reach more students.

- This is an ongoing recommendation and is dependent on funding resources available from the University.
- Societies this year were openly not limited to a certain amount of funding and encouraged to apply for higher amounts of their activities proving the effective use of the funding. This resulted in more societies asking for higher amounts of funding and reporting a greater satisfaction in the amount they received (see section 7.3.1).

RECOMMENDATION 7: Continue to encourage events that bring together year groups.

- Many students this year noted that events provided by societies allowed them to meet students in different year groups which boosted their confidence and encouraged the forming of friendships with people they would not have otherwise met.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Encouragement of school engagement to develop relationship between school and academic society.

- Mirroring last year, there was once again a lack of academic school staff participation in surveys, this is an aspect to try and improve next year.
- However, according to findings from the committee survey, a number of advances have been made with society and school relationships that provide a positive start to this aspect of the project. (see section 7.3.2).

RECOMMENDATION 9: Create a way to track membership levels for the future.

- Last year there was an inability to track 6-week membership levels as this wasn't facilitated through any IT systems, this was successfully rectified with an option added on the NUSU website for students to purchase a free 6-week membership.

- As a result, NUSU were able to collect a database of students’ memberships for each academic society. This is recommended to continue next year to provide further evidence for the take up of the 6-week free membership.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Change in expression of 6 weeks free membership.

- Last year, students from different stages expressed a variety of ways that they believed the 6-weeks free memberships would be best marketed to students.
- This year, a number of emails were sent out to all students about the project throughout September, which was reported as being the main way most students first found out about the project.
- Therefore, email will be recommended to be a key method to tell students about the project in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Continue the Academic Societies Funding Scheme due to the clear interest shown.

- As with the previous year, the majority of committees who responded to our survey said they would recommend their future committees apply to the scheme and would do so themselves.
- Alongside this, students appreciate the project’s 6-week free membership to provide them with opportunities without the worry of purchasing multiple memberships during the current cost of living crisis.

All of the recommendations from the previous year have been followed as far as possible and improved the project as a result. The recommendation that requires an increased level of focus is the encouragement of school engagement (see section 8).

6. Application Process and Opinions

Societies overall liked the application process and did not find it difficult. A recommendation that came out of the committee survey and returned reports was that it could have been made more accessible by being a Microsoft Form application, rather than a downloadable document to amend and email in.

The following questions were asked in the society committee survey in November 2023. 19 committee members responded to the survey.

3. I found the application process easy.

Strongly Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Neither Agree or Disagree	1
Agree	14
Strongly Agree	4



- 95% of committee members (n=18) found the application form easy (Agree or Strongly Agree) compared to 87.5% in the previous year.

- Therefore, NUSU provided information that was clear to the majority of committee members and improved upon results from last year implying that recommendations put in place to allow societies to ask more questions about the application process worked well.

4. I felt supported through this application process.



- The response to feeling supported is very similar to finding the application process easy with 89% of respondents (n=17) feeling supported (Agree or Strongly Agree). This is an increase from the previous academic year of 75%. Therefore, the recommendations implemented to help committees apply were effective and allowed an easier application process.
- NUSU therefore provided a high level of support to its committees. This builds upon recommendations made in the 2022-23 report for increased committee support.
- Committees this year were able to attend several drop-in sessions to ask questions about the funding and application process. Additionally, committees were invited to a presentation over the summer period to set them up for the start of the term and allow them to start preparing their application forms.

5. I struggled with some aspects of the application process.



- 26% of respondents (n=5) struggled with an aspect of the application process (Agree and Strongly Agree).
- Therefore, this suggests that there is still room for improvement in the application process.
- The main concern around this was the accessibility of the form; a number of committees recommend the use of an online form instead of a downloadable word document to ease this process.

6. What improvements would you make to the application process?

The following recommendations were suggested by committees:

- A Google form-style application in place of the document sent via email to make the form more accessible.
- Several committee members wanted clearer information about when payments had to be submitted. They raised confusion over invoices having to be sent in on 26th October before the end of the 6 weeks on 31st October.
- Alongside this, they wanted to know this date earlier on so they could plan events accordingly and better plan their deadlines.
- Committees wanted further clarification on what events were allowed. However, a number of drop-in sessions were scheduled, and email addresses were provided to ask questions about this, so there may need to be more reminders sent or alternative communication methods trialled.

Recommendation 2: Change the way the application form is submitted by providing a Microsoft Form instead of a document to make it more accessible.

Recommendation 3: Clarify deadlines for a) welcome events and b) invoice submissions.

Recommendation 4: Continue to promote support mechanisms and information, including clarity on eligible events.

7. Surveys

7.1. Society Member survey

In November 2023, a survey was sent to members of academic societies who had purchased the 6-week free membership. This was done through NUSU's database which recorded the details of everyone who purchased the membership. The survey received 123 responses and no students wanted their data removed by the cut-off date of 31st December 2023. Analysis of the results are below:

Which academic society's free 6 -week membership did you sign up to?

- According to the survey responses, the societies with the most sign-ups were Modern Language Society and Law Society, both listed in 9 out of the 123 responses.

When did you learn about the free 6-week membership?

- The majority of students found out about the scheme in Freshers' Week in September, this is positive because it shows that societies were good at publishing the events early on in the year to give as many students as possible time to make use of the scheme and get involved.

- Students learnt about the scheme at the Freshers' Fair, from the SU website, from societies social media and when using the SU website to buy a full price membership and opting to do the free 6-weeks first.

How did you learn about the free 6-week membership?

- 16 found out through emails.
- 8 found out from friends.
- 24 found out at the Freshers Fair.
- 12 found out through Instagram/social media (SU or Society Instagram)
- 3 found out in induction lectures.
- 5 found it when trying to purchase a full-priced membership and instead chose the 6-week option.
- The most common answer was Freshers' Fair.

Which welcome activities did you attend?

- Pizza events and quiz nights were a common theme throughout
- Sports events were popular
- Introduction talks
- Welfare meetings
- Beach Breakfast
- Nourish School
- Medtech
- Coastal Hike
- Walks
- Coffee Morning

What kinds of welcome activities would you have liked to take part in?

- Sports
- Pub Lecture
- More social activities that did not always revolve around subject and school
- Themed events
- Pottery
- Movie nights
- Escape room
- Games night and trivia
- Events that involve food
- Coffee Mornings
- Zumba/Yoga
- City Tour
- Brunch Walks
- Casual social gatherings

What welcome events that you took part in did you like and why?

- “Tours, to properly know the city.”
- Beach breakfast – as it allowed members to explore new areas, especially if they were new to the city and area.
- “Intro events with free food- was nice to just learn a bit more about topics and then have a chance to socialise with the group and met new people after.”
- “Quiz- relaxed atmosphere and good bonding with course members in other stages.”
- “The pizza event was a good ice breaker to meet everyone.”
- “Pizza and quiz social of Planning Society. It was good getting to know other students while being in a team with other society members during the quiz that was very fun to play.”
- “I liked the DLD walk because it was lovely to see awareness being spread and to meet new people.”
- “I loved pasta making, made pasta twice since!”
- “The meet and greet was really great, resources and food were provided and there was no event fee which was a big incentive to join the society.”
- “The NMM meet and greet as I got to meet a lot of people and see what the society had to offer this year.”
- “I enjoyed the dog and scone visit, as it was really fun to meet others in the society while playing with dogs!”
- “I loved the investment society first social because everyone was so friendly and we had lots of conversation about common interests.”
- “All of them. Coffee and a walk and breakfast on the beach were very social, getting to know other students, talking about uni work, and as a 4th year giving advice to the younger students. The Two cooking classes were fun and informative.”
- “The socials because it helped me meet people in different year groups and make it less daunting.”
- A number of students also said they took part in Bar Crawls during the 6-week free membership period; however, these events were not permitted to be funded using the money provided by NUSU.

Did you make friends or talk to people in other years at your society's activities? If you did, was there anything about the welcome activity that helped you do this?

- 15/123 people answered with No (12%)
- Therefore 88% of respondents felt that they had made friends or spoken to people in other years/stages at the society activities.
- The most common things that helped students were:
 - The ability to talk to students in other years.
 - During events students liked the aspect that they didn't know what years other students were in, therefore allowing them to get to know a range of people without being worried about older stages.
 - Icebreaker games
 - Quiz night groups
 - Walk and brunch activities allowed people to chat in larger groups.

- Upon reflection, this question could be confusing to understand as making friends means different things to different people, and there could be confusion about whether the question was asking about friends in general or friends in other years. A recommendation for the projects future evaluation would be to change the wording of this question to avoid confusion and make it more applicable to a wider range of people.

Recommendation for project future evaluation: Reword the question about making friends to make it less subjective and make it open-ended to allow for students to elaborate on their experiences.

Now that the FREE 6-week membership has finished, have you purchased the society's standard membership?



- 68% of students said they would purchase the society standard membership (n=84).
- 19.5% of students said they would not (n=24).
- Therefore, the majority of students enjoyed the welcome events run by the academic societies enough to pay for the full membership.

What are the reasons for choosing to purchase a membership or not?



- Students mostly wanted to purchase their society's full membership due to enjoying the welcome events put on.
- Students liked socialising with their peers, learning new skills and taking part in fun activities, and wanted to continue this. Additionally, some societies provide students with career development opportunities and students wanted to join the society to take advantage of these. Medical societies specialisms and career talks were another popular reason to continue in the society.
- However, some students were not sure about purchasing a full membership due to reasons such as their availability round their course, purchasing insurance at an extra price, and feeling left out due to being a postgraduate student whereas most of the society were undergraduate.
- Some students also had not yet gotten around to buying a membership upon completion of this survey which was sent out in early November 2023

- One student said they were planning to use the NUSU Participation Bursary to purchase their full membership, suggesting there is continued need for subsidised memberships for some students.

What was your experience of using the free 6-week membership like?

- 94% of student responses were very positive to the 6-week membership.
- Students appreciated the opportunity to trial societies without paying as it allowed them to meet new people and experience new things they were worried about paying to try.
- Negative points surrounded events being mid-day restricting some students from attending, events becoming sold out quickly due to high demand and some societies not offering a wide range of activities.

Did having the opportunity to try out the membership for free affect your choice to join or not join the society?

● Yes	93
● No	30



- 76% of society members said that having the opportunity to have a free 6-week membership trial affected their choice whether to join the society (n=93), and 24% (n=30) said it did not.

Do you think you would have paid to join the society without trying the free 6-week membership?

● Yes	40
● No	33
● I'm not sure	48
● Other	2



- 33% said yes (n=40).
- 39% were not sure (n=48), this is understandable considering students did not know how they would feel about the society before trying it out.
- 27% said no (n=33).
- 2% other (n=2).
- This mixture of responses shows that students benefited from having the free 6-week trial in different ways. For some it confirmed their choices, allowing them to test a society and then pay for the full membership. It also allowed other students to try out societies that they did not end up liking, stopping them from paying for societies they did not like, therefore taking pressure off payment and allowing students to step outside of their comfort zones and try new things.

Did you find the free 6-week membership useful? Why or Why not?

- A majority of students believed that the free 6-weeks membership was useful to allow them to get a taster of societies and not pay large sums of money for events and societies they did not like:
 - Students reiterated that Freshers' Week is expensive and this scheme provided a relief from the financial burden of the beginning of university.
 - "a good way of setting the cost back till later in the term when there were less outgoing costs".
 - "yes, it was very useful, allowed me to experience the society without spending money"
 - "Yes, as you can make full use of the society even if you haven't got the financial means to join yet"
 - "Takes the pressure off of decision to trial the society as you know you have a decent period to make an actual opinion about it before investing. I think it's also inclusive of students on lower budgets as they can sort of figure out the costs over that month and a half of joining more than a few societies".
 - "helped to spread finances".

Using the Theory of Change model to evaluate the effectiveness of the free 6-week membership for students, we can see that the intended outcomes of the free membership allowing students to join academic societies for a trial period without facing financial burden have been broadly achieved. The majority of students surveyed found this a positive, and 68% planned to buy the membership after the trial period. This suggests that the longer-term intended impact of increasing student engagement in academic societies through continuing their membership is more likely to be achieved.

When you think about the idea of feeling a sense of belonging at university, what does this mean to you?

30 respondents (24%) answered **people** for this question.



- Students repeatedly referred to having a group of friends or like-minded people to spend their time with and have in times of need. Additionally, students appreciated a safe environment within which to enjoy themselves and feel a sense of community with other new students.
 - "Being able to participate and engage no matter the background".
 - "Having a group of people that you feel important to and being part of a group that is creative and fun".

- “This means doing university activities and becoming integrated with the subject school and their extra-curricular activities”.
- “Finding like-minded people in a safe environment”.
- “Having friends and acquaintances in the university that will help you if you need their advice, being surrounded by the responsive staff, feeling as your authentic self that you are on a right track, at the right place at the right time in your life”.
- “Sense of belonging means finding my place on campus, and being able to integrate into, and feel valued in a varied community without barriers set by things such as socio-economic differences.”
- “Having a community (including friends and lecturers) that I feel supported.”

I feel a sense of belonging to my academic society

● Strongly agree	30
● Agree	49
● Neither agree or disagree	35
● Disagree	8
● Strongly disagree	1



- Out of the full sample (n=123):
- 64% of students agreed with the statement that they felt a sense of belonging to their academic society (Strongly Agree and Agree). Therefore, this suggests that the scheme is associated with fostering a sense of belonging.
- 28% neither agreed nor disagreed (n=35). As the survey was sent out early in semester 1, it is reasonable that some students may have felt unable to answer this yet or felt unsure.
- 8% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (n=9). This shows there is still work to do to reach more students and work towards facilitating a sense of belonging for all students.
- Although a high percentage of students felt a sense of belonging to their academic society, there were students who did not. For example, one student commented that they “did not like it as there was no sense of belonging within this society. I got really left out.” Additionally, the same student said “But my experience on the quiz night was terrible. No sense of belonging at all.” They also commented on feeling a lack of cultural integration and “the English are only friends with other English students”. This is concerning and shows that not all students will experience events and opportunities for belonging in the same ways.
- Therefore, a recommendation to prevent students feeling like this would be to implement actions that other students found useful in facilitating them to feel a sense of belonging in their society.
- For example, mixing stages in welcome events to allow students get to know others who know how daunting beginning university is. (Examples of students wanting this is throughout the evaluation)

- Out of the APP-eligible students' sample (n=62):
- 64.5% (n=40) of students agreed with the statement that they felt a sense of belonging to their academic society (Strongly Agree and Agree).
- 25.8% (n=16) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 9.7% (n=6) disagreed, although none strongly disagreed.
- Compared to the non-APP-eligible students sample (n=39), excluding International and Postgraduate students:
- 69.3% (n=27) of students agreed with the statement that they felt a sense of belonging to their academic society (Strongly Agree and Agree).
- 30.8% (n=12) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- None of the students in this group responded with Disagree or Strongly Disagree.
- There is a slight difference visible between these groups reporting of sense of belonging, but this is not statistically significant ($p=0.837$) and so there cannot be a conclusion that there is a difference in the feelings of sense of belonging between APP-eligible and not APP-eligible students. However, it is something to consider for future evaluations and to continue to track.

I feel like attending welcome events helped improve my sense of belonging to my academic society.



- Out of the full sample (n=123), 74% of students strongly agreed or agreed that attending welcome events improved their sense of belonging to their academic society. Therefore, this suggests societies put on appropriate and well-liked events to help students settle in and foster a sense of belonging, and students, on the whole, benefitted from the scheme and funding.
- Out of the APP-eligible students' sample (n=62):
- 79% (n=50) of students agreed with the statement that they felt that attending welcome events had helped improve their sense of belonging to their academic society (Strongly Agree and Agree).
- 14.5% (n=9) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 6.5% (n=4) disagreed, although none strongly disagreed.
- Compared to the non-APP-eligible students sample (n=39), excluding International and Postgraduate students:
- 71.8% (n=28) of students agreed with the statement that they felt that attending welcome events had helped improve their sense of belonging to their academic society (Strongly Agree and Agree).
- 28.2% (n=11) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- None of the students in this group responded with Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

- There is a slight difference visible between these groups reporting of sense of belonging, but this is not statistically significant ($p=0.121$) and so there cannot be a conclusion that there is a difference in the effect of welcome events on the feelings of sense of belonging between APP-eligible and not APP-eligible students. However, it is something to consider for future evaluations and to continue to track.

When evaluating the responses to the questions about sense of belonging using the Theory of Change model, there is strong evidence that suggests the scheme is meeting the intended outcomes of supporting students to develop a sense of belonging related to their academic society and school. Students describe feeling belonging early on due to the welcome events and have reported the connections they've made with other students in their school. This suggests that the majority of students are experiencing the intended outcomes and, therefore, that the project is achieving what it is intended to. Although the longer-term impact can't yet be determined, and there are still opportunities to improve and ensure more students develop a sense of belonging, the evaluation so far is very positive.

Recommendation 5: Continue to promote the academic society opportunities to underrepresented students, aiming to increase the percentage of students from these groups participating in the scheme.

7.2. INSIGHTS Panel Survey

58 people from the panel responded to the survey.:

When did you start studying at Newcastle University?

- 5 began in 2020
- 9 began in 2021
- 14 began in 2022
- 29 began in 2023
- 1 began in 2019

At the beginning of the 2023 academic year, students were invited to sign up for a 6-week free trial academic society membership. Before today did you know about this free membership?

- 33 yes
 - 14 began university in 2023
 - 9 began university in 2022
 - 6 began in 2021
 - 4 began university in 2020
 - 1 began in 2019
- 25 no
 - 16 began university in 2023
 - 5 began university in 2022

- 3 began university in 2021
- 1 began university in 2020

Did you sign up to a 6-week free trial academic society membership?

- 6/58 signed up to the free 6-week academic membership.

Which 6-week free trial academic society memberships did you sign up for?

A wide range of societies were signed up for, including:

- Architecture
- Music
- Art
- Law
- Accounting and Finance
- Politics
- Business
- Investment
- Combined Honours
- Cyber Society
- English
- Media and Journalism
- Biology
- Modern Languages

Why did you decide to join?

- “Because I wanted to see what the societies were about and what they included before I spent my money on them”.
- “I wanted to try out societies which I wanted to expand my knowledge on my areas of interest”.
- “I wouldn’t have paid the membership fee without trying them out first, so it was a nice opportunity to broaden my knowledge of different societies”
- “I wanted to be a part of a community that's related to my course.”
- “I wanted to try out the society and as it was free, this meant there was a no loss situation where if I did not enjoy the society, I did not lose money joining.”

Did you attend any welcome events organised by the academic Society with your 6-week free trial academic society membership?

All of the people who signed up for the 6-week free memberships attended at least one welcome event provided by their society.

Please tell us which events you attended:

- Open Mic Night
- Beach Trip
- Meet and Greet

- Quiz
- Introduction events

At the end of the 6-week free trial academic society memberships did you purchase a standard Society membership?

- 4 of the 6 people who bought the free 6-week membership purchased the standard society membership after the 6-week free trial.

Why was this?

Students were asked a follow-up question if they said no to the previous question:

- The three responses consisted of two not having enough time to partake in society events, and one forgot to purchase the membership.
- Therefore, no student who attended the society events reported that they did not purchase a full membership due to the welcome events not being inclusive enough, or not providing a sense of belonging and community.

Did you purchase any standard (paid) academic society memberships?

- 13/58 people purchased a standard membership for a society between September and December 2023.
- Therefore, out of these 13 people, just under 1/3 of people purchased a membership because of the 6-week free trial.

Which standard (paid) academic society memberships did you purchase?

Students purchased a wide variety of society memberships, the majority of which were academic and included Dentistry, Modern Languages, Combined Honours and Geography.

Why did you choose to join the/these academic Societies?

Students joined their academic societies due to the ability to meet new people on their course and find like-minded people:

- "I'm a PGR student and wanted to be in a society with people with shared experiences."
- "I wanted to try out something different and push myself out of my comfort zone".
- "I study modern languages so wanted to meet people on the course with me."
- "Socialise with people on my course who i might otherwise not talk to."
- "It was related to my degree, thus I joined it to make friends and be involved in events."
- "Associated with my course, and I enjoyed it previously."

How did you hear about the 6-week free trial academic society?

- The majority of people found out via a Students' Union Email
- The is followed in popularity by NUSU's Instagram page, an email from the University, and NUSU's website.
- Therefore, an email sent by NUSU was the most effective way of informing students about the 6-week free membership scheme.

How would you rate the quality of the communications about the 6-week free trial academic society memberships?

- 5 rated Excellent
- 1 rated Good
- 7 rated Satisfactory
- 2 rated Poor

How could the communications of the 6-week free trial academic society memberships have been improved?

- The scheme could be mentioned in induction week lectures.
- “Make a uniform post that academic societies could all post so that more people know about it, and they are more inclined to sign up for it because they'll see the free trial offer as they are looking at the society's Instagram”.
- Have societies advertise the 6-week free trial and activities more.

Tell us the reason why you did not sign up for the 6-week free trial academic society.

The reasons why people didn't sign up varied. There was no direct dislike of society events, but reports of lack of interest, not enough time to take part or not knowing how to:

- Society didn't appeal.
- Not enough time to take part.
- 2 people didn't know how to.
- Didn't arrive at university in time.

How would you like us to communicate the 6-week free trial academic society?

- A majority of people wanted communication through the NUSU website, NUSU emails and social media, and posters.
- Therefore, this could be focused on in the next year of the project to reach a wider audience.

Tell us how much you agree with this statement: If the 6-week free trial academic society memberships were offered again I would be interested in signing up.

Out of the 15 people who responded to this question:

- 5 strongly agreed
- 8 agreed
- 2 disagreed
- Therefore 87% of the sample (n=15) would sign up if the 6-week free membership was offered again.

Why is this?

Students liked the free aspect of the project believing that there was no reason not to join due to the opportunity it provided without a high price tag.

- “I think it’s a great opportunity to try out a new society without the financial commitment”.
- “trials are free and a good way to find new opportunities”.
- “Good opportunity to meet like-minded people and possible learn new skills to help you in your degree”.
- “It gives an introduction to the society so if the student is interested after the 6 weeks, they could pay for the membership. If the student feels like it’s not suitable, they don't have to pay for it. No money would be wasted this way”.
- “Cost of living crisis - times are hard”.

What kinds of welcome activities would you like academic societies to host at the beginning of the academic year to encourage new members?

The events recommended were very similar to events societies applied for in September 2023. Therefore, societies are providing the right events for students.

- Bowling
- Crazy Golf
- Networking Events
- Quizzes
- Ice breaker events
- Boardgames

Recommendation 6: Continue to advertise the 6-week free membership through NUSU emails, website and social media, and add in the creation of posters to be placed around the university to attract more people.

Recommendation 7: Provide a way of allowing students to know what activities are included in the 6-week free membership, and what societies are running them. This could be done by a uniform-looking social media post, or a logo included on posts to allow students to quickly recognise if it is part of the scheme.

7.3. Society Committee Survey

The survey responses have been placed into themed categories for ease of evaluation and to increase readership. Committee survey response was low with 19 responses; however, this is most likely due to each society already being asked to fill in and return a form detailing their experience upon completion of the project, so they may have felt the survey was a duplication of responses.

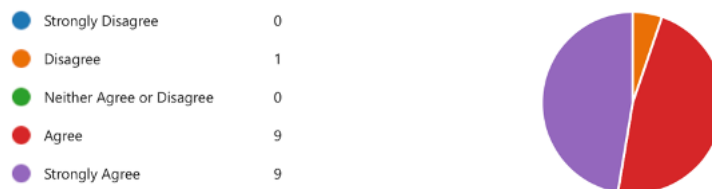
7.3.1. Why did committees apply and what opinions did they have on the funding received?

Why did you apply for the sense of belonging funding for your academic society?

The following are a selection of answers from this question. All responses linked to the reason for the project show that societies understood the brief of facilitating a sense of belonging in their societies by increasing engagement and putting on exciting and inclusive events.

- “We wanted to increase participation in our society and also provide students a learning environment about the field of paediatrics” – Paediatrics Society
- “To help us create a great first term for our potential members- both returners who have high expectations and new first years and final years returning.” – Modern Languages Society
- “It felt like a good opportunity to host big events where as many people as possible could join. It also provided a way to demonstrate what the society was about through being able to host lots of events.” – Lifestyle Medicine
- “We wanted to hold great events at the start of the year and this pot of money was a great way to fund these. A lot of people had purchased the free trial memberships, so we felt the pressure to hold events high in quality and quantity.” – Planning Society
- “to put on bigger and better events to improve recruitment and engagement” – Sustainable Medicine

I believe the funding received was enough to provide welcome activities and create a sense of belonging.



- 95% of committees who responded (n=18) believed the funding they received was enough to provide welcome events.
- Therefore, the funding approved by NUSU helped the majority of committees to organise and run welcome events they planned, resulting in their society’s increased engagement with students and the facilitation of sense of belonging.

How did the amount of funding you received enable you to provide welcome activities? (e.g., Was this money enough? Did you add this funding to existing funds to deliver a bigger event?)

- Societies were happy with the amount of funding they applied for and it allowed them to put on the events that they had planned.
- However, some societies believed in retrospect they could have applied for more funding to provide more events and subsidise costs further.
 - “The funding was a crucial part of being able to execute our vision for the escape room and pizza social afterwards. As a small but growing society, we would not have been able to pay for all the props and associated costs

of the event without the society funding. Whilst it was sufficient, in retrospect, we were surprisingly limited on costs for things like costumes (a £15-20pp budget would have likely been more appropriate) and decorations (of which the true value was likely closer to £100). Next time we'd likely apply for more funding to minimise the cost to our committee members personal funds." - Medical Women's Federation.

- "The money was a good amount and meant we could cover all costs and it did mean we could host a bigger event." – Lifestyle Medicine.
- "Money was enough for two pizza nights (one tees one Newcastle) for medics in both locations. perfect amount for society our size expecting turnout of 50"- Outreach Medics.
- "We found this extremely helpful with buying materials." – Art Society
- "We received £750. It was adequate, although the final total came to a little higher"- Engineering Projects Society.

7.3.2. School Relationship

The survey asked societies to report on their perceived strength of their relationship before participating in the academic societies funding scheme, and their perceived strength of their relationship afterwards.

Table of subsequent responses:

Society	Relationship before	Relationship after
Modern Languages Society	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Paediatric Society	Weak Relationship	Very Strong Relationship
English Society	Weak Relationship	Weak Relationship
Paediatrics Society	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Engineering Projects Society	Weak Relationship	Strong Relationship
Medical Women's Federation	Weak Relationship	Strong Relationship
Trauma & Orthopaedic Society	Weak Relationship	Weak Relationship
Architecture Society	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Lifestyle Medicine	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Unknown	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Palliative Care Society	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Outreach Medics	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Planning Society	Weak Relationship	Strong Relationship
Surgical Society	No Relationship	No Relationship
Economics	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Dental Society	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	Strong Relationship	Strong Relationship
Sustainable Medicine	Weak Relationship	Weak Relationship
Art Society	No Relationship	Strong Relationship

Before applying for and receiving this funding, how would you describe your relationship with your academic school?

● No Relationship	2
● Weak Relationship	7
● Strong Relationship	10
● Very Strong Relationship	0



- 53% of societies before applying for funding reported that they had a strong relationship with their academic school (n=10).
- 37% reported that they had a weak relationship (n=7).
- 11% reported that they had no relationship at all with their academic school (n=2).
- No committees reported that they had a very strong relationship.

Since applying for and receiving this funding, how would you now describe your relationship with your academic school?

● No Relationship	1
● Weak Relationship	3
● Strong Relationship	14
● Very Strong Relationship	1



- One society's relationship developed into a very strong relationship as a result of the funding.
- One society began developing a relationship.
- 4 societies saw their relationship increase to a strong relationship.
- Paediatric Society saw a large change from weak relationships to very strong relationships. This society saw themselves become a lot closer with their school over the 6-week period.
- Engineering Projects saw a change from weak to strong.
- Medical Women's Federation also saw a change from weak to strong.
- Planning Society changed from weak to strong.
- Art Society developed a relationship with their school after having no relationship prior to the project starting.
- Several societies developed a relationship with their academic school throughout the process of the project, therefore a number of societies worked well with their schools to use the funding to the best of their abilities and understood a key aim of the funding. Some societies, as seen in responses below, understood this question to include other students in their school as well as staff, so their relationships may be more influenced by student engagement than engagement with staff in their academic school.

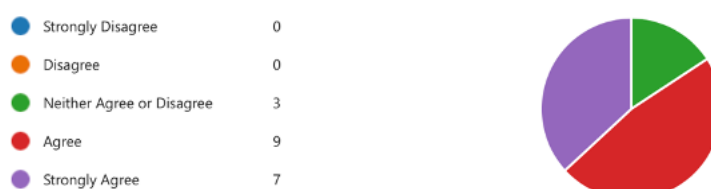
Please provide more information about how your relationship with your school has changed or not changed as a result of the funding.

Society	Comment
Modern Languages Society	"Hasn't changed."
Paediatric Society	"I feel more close to the other society members and as well as the other medical school members. I met and acquainted myself with other y3 medics. "
English Society	"It hasn't changed. "
Paediatrics Society	"It hasn't necessarily changed but it's a good relationship. "
Engineering Projects Society	"Creating our robots for our robotics workshops was immediately interesting to several people in the department that are now promoting EPS at open days. "
Medical Women's Federation	"The funding enabled us to engage with more medical students, who would have likely found money a barrier to attending unique society events. As we were able to keep the event free for members, it encouraged us to form closer relationships with our society members on our course. "
Trauma & Orthopaedic Society	"not changed much. "
Architecture Society	"It has remained about the same, however I am now in contact more with the wellbeing tutors within the school to work on more events. "
Lifestyle Medicine	"More medical students who were originally not aware of lifestyle medicine society were able to come to events and find out more about lifestyle medicine which then increased the awareness of lifestyle medicine within the school. "
Unknown	"The relationship hasn't changed. "
Outreach Medics	"unchanged- this event was relatively more unconnected than our usual events. "
Planning Society	"We have been into lectures to speak to students about the events we have been running. Staff are keen to help us out with the promotion of the society. "
Surgical Society	"The medical school has very little to no input in the running of medical societies. Previous experience with the medical school, to do with both societies and academics, have been poor for many students. "
Economics	"The only thing that has changed between the society and the school, is we are happy to use the department to help us advertise our events. However unsure if this is due to SoB project, or relationship with committee."
Obstetrics and gynaecology	"Hasn't particularly"

Sustainable medicine	“No change”
Art Society	“It has brought the community together”

7.3.3. Have societies become better places?

I believe the funding has made my society a better place for students.



- 84% of committees strongly agreed and agreed that the funding made their society a better place for students (n=16).
- No committees disagreed with the statement.
- 3 committees neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This could be due to societies not knowing the full effect of the funding yet or being unsure.

Please explain why you think your society has become a better place because of the funding for welcome activities.

- “People were more acquainted with our welfare officer and now had a point of call for welfare concerns.”
- “We got to really interact with the members in our well-being event which I think motivated people to join the society.”
- “Having the funding allowed us to challenge ourselves to run an event which would usually not be able to due to funding restrictions. Due the funding we were able to run fun welcome activities that we believe helped greatly improve the image of our society.”
- “It allowed for a warm welcome, encouraged participation, and brought together different groups of people.”
- “More opportunity to make friends through the society, more visibility for the committee to make us identifiable and seem more approachable.”
- Committees again expressed the correct reasons for the funding and showed that the funding was used for the correct reasons. Therefore, NUSU expressed the funding’s purpose well and societies understood what they were applying for.

7.3.4. How did the project affect committees’ start of term?

Was the funding more of a help or more of a hindrance to your start of term?



- 95% of committees believed the funding was a help to their start of term (n=18).
- Therefore, the process of applying and using the funding overall was a positive experience for the majority of societies.

Please explain more about how the funding affected your start of term as a committee member.

- The majority of societies had a positive experience as a result of the funding. Common thoughts were that the funding relieved pressure at the start of the year to put on larger events without the worries of funding.
- However, a couple of societies believed that the funding provided a hindrance to the number of paid society members they were able to gather and increase their membership levels for higher guaranteed funding for the next year.
 - “It helped me organise a talk and gather enough numbers by incentivising the Pizza.”
 - “Brought both the committee and the members together and I feel like I know a lot of the society now which I’m not sure would have been as achievable without the money.”
 - “we were able to deliver our first social event without worrying not having enough funding for the rest of the year.”
 - “We didn’t have a lot of funds at the start of the year as our society was classified as dormant last year, so this funding was vital for restarting the society.”
 - “In general, it was helpful to have more money to put on n good events. However the free memberships were a hindrance as People got these and then didn’t renew which made It difficult for is to meet the minimum requirement. These people likely would’ve just paid £5 for a permanent membership otherwise.”
 - “It is good to show new students that we offer a wide variety of events. I would say we were hindered by the free memberships though, as we historically get a lot of members at the start of term, but now this has ended, we have low numbers.”
- English Society and Sustainable Medicine noted their worry about a lack of paid memberships in the weeks following the free 6-week trial. This worry was raised a couple of times, including by Cyber Society (see section 9.2 for more information).
- History Society also raised concerned about the project impacting their number of paid membership at the start of term saying that "the project has really hurt the society in terms of membership. The school of history run events alongside the society at the beginning of the year to encourage people to join and in previous years this has been successful in engaging a large number of students. Due to the project these events and socials were unable to attract the paying members we

need. As a committee we feel like the society has lost out greatly on membership and has suffered financially".

- These concerns are important to consider to ensure the scheme does not inadvertently negatively impact society funding or perception of the scheme.

I would apply or encourage the application to this fund again for the 2024/25 academic year.



- Despite a couple of societies worried about membership levels, 100% of committees agreed or strongly agreed that they would encourage the application for this funding in the next academic year (n=19).
- Therefore, the positives outweighed the negatives for committees, and they are more likely to believe the sense of belonging project improved their society.

7.3.5. What events were put on?

Please tell us about the events and activities you used the funding for, and if you thought they were successful or could have been improved.

- Societies used their funding for a range of innovative and fun activities that attracted students to partake.

Society	Comment
Modern Languages Society	"conversation exchange evening in collab with ESN."
Paediatric Society	"They were incredibly successful, the only thing that could change for next year is if this could be eligible for the rest of term 1 instead of the first 6 weeks only."
English Society	"An open mic night for students to read writing (either their own or something they enjoy) to the group at a hired venue which was set up with lights and a microphone. The event was a great success with a higher than expected turnout."
Paediatrics Society	"We had a talk from a paediatrics registrar with pizza afterwards, which allowed the committee and the doctor to talk to the members after the talk and ask all the questions they wanted, which really developed a sense of community. We then had a coffee evening which we used to get the members a coffee and cake, which worked well to check up on the members and get to know

	them which I really enjoyed. All in all the funding really developed us as a society.”
Engineering Projects Society	“We hosted 4 robotics workshops. We created 20 advanced robots for comparatively simple programming. These were used to brief members on the basics of programming with arduino.”
Medical Women's Federation	“We used our funding to create a Halloween themed escape room. The concept of the escape rooms was "Witch trials" in which participants were invited to solve 3 cases involving women that were accused of being witches for practicing medicine. The escape room was a big success and allowed us to increase our society numbers to a larger number than we would historically have by this time in the year.”
Trauma & Orthopaedic Society	“Pizza orthopaedics-themed pizza night - they were very successful and all the people enjoyed it.”
Architecture Society	“Bob Ross painting evening - a relaxed evening with painting equipment, food, refreshments, and a Bob Ross video playing. It allowed participants to mingle, be creative, and generally have fun within our first event. Cobalt Studios UV life painting event - It was a very fun and unique event which brought people out of their comfort zones, everyone who attended participated and shared their joy and excitement for the event.”
Lifestyle Medicine	“We used the funding to host a hot yoga session as well as a talk and a Hadrian’s Wall hike.”
Unknown	“Board Games was extremely successful and it is something that we can do often.”
Palliative Care Society	“Talks with external speakers on our speciality. Group events. Funding our main group seminars about death.”
Outreach Medics	“2x pizza night (1 Newcastle one Tees) for medical students. successful in boosting awareness and recruitment.”
Planning Society	“Pizza and quiz night - free pizza for attendees, good first social of the year, and an opportunity to get to know each other better.”
Surgical Society	“Welcome event: ran well however we underestimated turnout quite significantly! Career's roadshow: was well attended and ran similarly to previous years. Tees events were well received and particularly important as social events for medical students at isolated base units. Surgical skills and specialty talks were both important socially but also as a taster of our regular events throughout the year.”
Economics	“Welcome picnic, bowling social, pub quiz.”
Dental Society	“Free Gregg’s for freshers, free cake for dental school, making committee visible, pumpkin carving.”
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	“Cafe trip to talk about obs and gynae and the plans for the year. Trip to a talk at the life centre.”
Sustainable Medicine	“Magichat social - very successful with a very good turnout.”
Art Society	“Bought art materials.”

Do you feel like your welcome activities achieved the goals of improving a sense of belonging and community for the students who attended? Why or why not?

- Committees felt that their welcome events allowed people to meet new friends and become integrated into their course in a fun and safe environment.

Society	Comment
Modern Languages Society	"Not many of our members turned up it was more the Erasmus students but those who did were able to make new international connections."
Paediatric Society	"Yes, people got to know the committee more."
English Society	"Yes. Gave them a space to share their writing and socialise."
Paediatrics Society	"Yes - lots of people talked to committee and other members and it was a really nice way to get to know the community."
Engineering Projects Society	"I would say so - at the end of each workshop we had a small social event. Frequenters became more well known and social."
Medical Women's Federation	"Yes, I believe as well as helping our committee grow closer through the planning of the event, as money was not a barrier for us or our members, it helped foster a sense of belonging between everyone who was able to attend our welcome event."
Trauma & Orthopaedic Society	"yes absolutely, they have learnt more about orthopaedics and initiated some of the students who were not as interested in orthopaedics to join our society."
Architecture Society	"Yes definitely, it encouraged many different groups of people to take part and meet new people, everyone could take part in their own way and were free to treat it as a social event or a calm individual creative task."
Lifestyle Medicine	"Yes as lots of people were able to chat to other like minded people and participate in activities that they enjoy."
Planning Society	"Yes. Students who have never been part of the society before came along and made friends with fellow planners."
Surgical Society	"I think students attended more for an experience / to gain understanding of surgical specialties without the expectation of making friends. However I think a greater sense of community and friendships were unexpected by products of these events."
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	"Yes, but if we had found out about the project earlier and known we had more money we might have been able to create opportunities for more people to get involved with."

If you/your society were to apply again, would you do anything differently? (e.g., Would you plan different kinds of activities or ask for a different amount of funding?)

- Some committee members would not have changed anything; however, a few had some improvements to make which included:

- Plan more activities.
- Increase advertisements for events.
- Ask for more funding to put on more events.
- Apply earlier to organise events and activities earlier.
- Put on events more often.

7.3.6. Opinions on the 6-week free membership

I believe that welcome activities boosted my society's membership numbers.

● Strongly Disagree	0
● Disagree	0
● Neither Agree or Disagree	2
● Agree	11
● Strongly Agree	6



- 90% of societies believed that the welcome activities boosted their membership levels (n=17).
- Therefore, the funding has allowed a majority of societies to increase their presence and gain more members to create a larger community.

How did you feel about the FREE 6-week membership being offered to students?

● Very Negatively	1
● Negatively	3
● Neither Negative nor Positive	3
● Positively	6
● Very Positively	6



- 64% of societies thought positively or very positively about the 6-week free membership offered to students (n=12).
- 21% felt negatively or very negatively (n=4).
- Therefore, a majority felt that it improved their society and the start of the year.
- However, a selection believed that it came with negative aspects, detailed below.

How did the FREE 6-week membership impact your society?

- A number of committees were concerned with the lack of free 6-week membership's turning into paid memberships.
 - Engineering Projects Society said: "We got up to 90 members at one point - great. However, when the trial expired, I'm not convinced that as many people "converted" to a full membership than they should have. We have 31 full members now (around the same as last year) yet I feel the promotion was better this year. For the price of a membership £5, I feel the biggest prohibitive is not the money but the effort required to sign up - the trial membership required no details to be entered. If there was Google Pay integration, PayPal, or some way of in-person buying of memberships I think we would have a lot more. People forget to update their

memberships or don't take it seriously, I'm not convinced the free trial helps in that regard (even makes it worse).”

- English Society said: “Has left us with significantly less members than usual as we are past the point where people want to join a society to make friends and meet people.”
- However, other societies believed it was a positive experience:
 - Planning Society said: “We gain more members than we probably would have done if the membership fee was £10 from the start”.
 - Medical Women’s Federation Society said: “It really helped boost our engagement and identify who was interested in our society. This meant we could tailor the advertisements of our society events to these people and help build a stronger community between our society members.”

Despite a number of societies feeling as though they have lost out on membership numbers, this did not translate into societies not wanting to recommend future committees to bypass the project. Therefore, this aspect of the project did not diminish their overall view on it and they still saw the benefits. Improvements to this were shown at the committee focus groups held in November 2023. (see section 9.2)

7.4. Society committee reports

14 societies completed and returned reports. This section of the report will focus on the societies that did not answer the committee survey, to provide new opinions.

1. Academic Medicine
2. Chemical Engineering Society (CEG)
3. Cyber
4. Economics
5. Entrepreneurship
6. Muslim Medics
7. NUCATS
8. Nutritank
9. Paediatrics
10. Planning
11. Speech and Language Therapy
12. Surgical Society
13. Sustainable medics
14. Trauma and Orthopaedic Society

The following are key takeaways from the reports:

Question 1: What welcome activities did you run between 18th September – 31st October:

- Academic Medicine: A Welcome event and an ‘Introduction to the SFP’ event
- CEG: Quiz Evening and Chatter and Natter – both very successful and members enjoyed. The Chatter and Natter was aimed at students’ mental well-being and community within the engineering school as CEG soc recognised engineering courses as being very intensive and demanding.

- Cyber: Workshops, Talks and Video games socials.
- Entrepreneurship: Ice-breaker event that allowed networking students to meet each other. Additionally, speaker events.
- Muslim Medics: Academic talks, girls' night, meet and greets.
- Speech and Language Therapy: Pizza and games social and DLD Day bridge light up and welcome event.

Question 2: How did the FREE 6-week membership impact your society?

- Academic Medicine: "We had fewer paid members so less budget (the grants were only available for things that create a sense of belonging so that didn't help) and now we have to spend a long time in October (in addition to all the time we spent in September) to get members, so it feels like it made more work than it attracted new members."
- CEG: "Initially, most memberships bought were through the Sense of Belonging initiative which saw a higher number of students purchase "memberships" to the society. In comparison to previous years, the initiative encouraged a wider range of events to be organised and is believed to have reached more members."
- Entrepreneurship: "More people joined initially meaning a larger outreach and larger events. Was certainly beneficial for us and people are buying memberships now".
- Muslim Medics: "It helped create an environment where those who were uncertain about joining felt encouraged to join and experience our society firsthand. The trial membership proved to be helpful in attracting prospective members, providing them with an accessible means to explore our offerings without any financial commitment".

Question 3: What was the impact of the funding?

- Academic Medicine: "We were able to afford more food to entice people in, and it meant that we could provide more social opportunities to allow people time to talk to committee and each other".
- CEG: "The funding was greatly appreciated by CEGsoc and allowed it to host a range of inclusive events during the period. It allowed members to connect and attracted students who, by admission, had otherwise been unaware of the perks and activities the society hosts."
- Entrepreneurship: "A positive one, we used it to create a networking workshop which was a big success."
- Muslim Medics: "The funding enabled us to make our activities more engaging, attractive, and well-organised. We could provide better resources, materials, and activities for our events, which in turn improved the overall experience for our members and prospective members. It not only helped in drawing students to our events but also in providing them with a memorable experience that emphasised the value and quality of our society."
- Speech and Language Therapy: "It was great to have funding that allowed us to offer free incentives (pizza and a prize) to encourage people to participate."

Question 4: Did the project help members develop a sense of belonging to your society and Newcastle University?

- Academic Medicine: “People really liked it, we have no specific evidence but everyone stuck around to talk to people, and that was attributed to the pizza. Therefore I believe, while it wasn’t a massive impact, there was some impact on the sense of community.”
- CEG: The committee collected feedback via Microsoft Forms from students, they received positive feedback and the students appreciated the sober aspect of the events. CEG Soc believed that numerous students who purchased the free 6-week membership went on to purchase paid membership. The following is a selection of student feedback they received:
 - “Thank you for this event, I really enjoyed it and met people in my year I would have otherwise not have had the courage to speak too”.
 - “I wish I had known about the quiz sooner so I could've invited some other of my friends who are more sober nights kinds of people”.
 - “A really fun event, very wholesome! Can’t wait for the next”.
 - “Tasty! A lovely break to the day :)”
 - “It was a lovely evening. Enjoyed having a chance to talk to different people. Maybe in future quizzes you could mix up the groups to include different stages.”
 - “I had a really good time, and especially enjoyed the Taylor Swift or Shakespeare round. Got to meet some people too”.
- Entrepreneurship: “Yes, it allowed the society to be closer knit and allowed members to really get to know each other.” Only positive feedback from members was received by the society.
- Muslim Medics: “We received feedback from members who expressed their appreciation for the welcoming and inclusive atmosphere created by our activities. They felt like they were a part of a supportive community, and this sense of belonging extended to their connection with the university as well.”
- Speech and Language Therapy: “The pizza and games social was a great way for members to make friends and meet people from different years as well.”

Question 5: Please let us know any other feedback you have about the project.

- Academic Medicine: “The application was easy and the staff were approachable and friendly, and would always make an effort to help with queries. We got all the funding we asked for so that was good. I liked the fact that academic societies got the opportunity, as I worry sometimes that they are forgotten about when there are projects run by NUSU”.
- Entrepreneurship: They believed it went well and hope the scheme will run next year.
- Muslim Medics: “The application process could be streamlined to make it more accessible and straight forward”.
- Speech and Language Therapy: “Funding was easy to apply for which was useful.”

Question 6: If we were to run this project again next year, what feedback or recommendations could you give us to improve this?

- Academic Medicine: “I would recommend removing the free membership, but allowing people to come along for free for longer (i.e., extend the taster sessions but

not make people buy a membership) because I believe our uptake will decrease when people leave after the free trial.”

- CEG: “Target some advertisements at 2nd years and above as students in their society heard of the initiative through other students.”
- Entrepreneurship: “It was fantastic.”
- Muslim Medics: The society believed that if the 6-week period could be extended it would allow them to showcase more activities to more students and what they have to offer as a society.

Question 7: Please add any evidence or feedback about your welcome activities here.

- Academic Medicine: “Our informal feedback was all very positive, we saw that from members coming back after the first session and attending the second. The only other thing was we had low uptake for the SFP introduction as we couldn’t fully advertise it until the special grant came through and it only came through 2 days before the proposed date of the activity. While this was probably my fault for not applying early enough (I am a first-time treasurer this year so am still learning the ropes!), I would appreciate next year knowing a ballpark figure on how long it will take for grants to come through.”
- CEG: The society collected feedback on Microsoft Forms and respondents said they would attend the events again and rated them 5/5 stars.

7.5. Focus Group

On the week commencing the 20th November, three focus groups were held, two for society members and one for committee members. The demand for the participation of student members meant that two were held, however, due to the increased feedback asked for from committees throughout the 6-week period, especially the report asked for concluding the project, it is thought that the lack of demand for committees to take part came from this increased contact.

Society Members Focus Group

Have you remained involved with the society /societies since October?

- A majority of students in the focus groups said they had remained involved with their society since the end of the 6-week free membership.
- Those that hadn’t carried on being involved said that their academic workload did not allow them to have enough free time to attend.

What activities would you want to facilitate a sense of belonging?

- Social activities, not PowerPoint presentations
- Board games
- Pizza
- Team building – e.g., Escape rooms, junk yard golf

- Versions of events they do throughout the year.
- For medical societies, students said they liked the sub-discipline focus to help them discover which branch of medicine they most appealed to.
- Meet and greet with committee and other students.
- Coffee and Walk
- Simple activities

Did the events live up to your expectations of the university?

- “Some of them”.
- Students said they could tell when event put on had had a lot of effort put into them and liked this.
- “Good way to try new things”.

Did the society events help you connect with others on your course?

- A couple of students were from Newcastle Muslim Medics and acknowledged the diversity and ability for people to come together and enjoy the events they put on.
- Students also acknowledged how meeting people in different year groups made them feel more comfortable on their course: “Helpful to listen to older years”, “Advice from older years”.
- “Nutritank events were good, informative and fun”.
- “making sure students belong and enjoy activities”.
- One student mentioned that they returned to Bio-Sci after two years away from the society and disliked the experience they had, saying their events were centred around drinking socials and no longer felt inclusive, therefore they would not be returning to the society after their welcome events.

Do you think being part of the academic society could impact your academic outcomes e.g. grades and not dropping out, and why they think that.

- This question received mixed answers.
- A majority of students said being part of a course-based society would not affect their grades but would instead make them more confident in a new academic setting.
- Students noted that course-based societies facilitate the creation of friendships which could in turn prevent students from dropping out of university.

Has your academic society helped you feel a sense of belonging during the first few weeks of term?

- “Yes, people get to know others in different year groups and create a sense of community”.
- “Range of ages and have a good time- good environment”.
- “Good seeing uni friends outside of uni”.
- Students found the welcome events helpful for making connections during the first few weeks of term, especially in different year groups.
- One student recommended that it was easier for them to make friends in smaller group settings, therefore a mixture between larger group activities and smaller

groups would allow people to make more connections and appeal to difference groups of people attending.

Some students say they feel it can be more difficult for them to feel like they belong to their course because of their identity characteristics like their gender, race, or income level being different to the majority.

a.) How do you feel that your identity has affected your experiences participating in an academic society and feeling a sense of belonging at university?

- The main response to this question related to the 6-week free membership allowing those with lower incomes to experience a wide range of societies without the financial burden.
- One member of the focus group was in receipt of a Participation Bursary and was happy to speak about the freedom the 6-week free membership provided her. In turn she was able to try Nutritank events and loved the society.
- Another focus group member acknowledged the ability societies provided her to meet students from a wide range of countries and backgrounds compared to her usual university life.
- A student noted their preconceptions of Nutritank as being a mainly female society however, when they went they saw gender diversity there and found it a nice surprise.
- A 4th year student said that they recognised a stigma about joining societies in the later years of university and wanted to combat this by joining.
- In the first focus group, a non-drinking member said they liked the non-drinking aspect of these welcome activities as it stopped pressure being placed on students, allowing them to feel safer about going and not being withheld from activities.

Recommendation 8: Make it clear that this project is for anyone to try and combat the stigma about older stages joining new societies.

b.) How have the academic society free membership and welcome activities helped or hindered your experiences?

- “Trial especially useful for first year students but also for other years”
- One member had returned from a placement year and said the 6-week free membership period allowed them to try out a couple of societies and feel as though they could try new things without the financial worries. They decided on joining Nutritank instead of Bio-Sci.

Are you involved in other societies? (not just academic)

- This question was asked due to the general trend of people buying membership decreasing over the last few years.
- Very few people had joined more than three societies.
- Most only joined one or two societies with the most common combination being one academic and one sport.

What does a sense of belonging mean to you?

- Comfortable
- Community
- Friends
- Enjoyable
- Welcoming
- Relaxed
- Family
- Support system
- Feeling understood
- Identity
- Familiarity

Committee Focus Groups

Where did you hear about the Sense of Belonging Scheme and 6 weeks free membership?

- Email from NUSU activities team over summer and the subsequent zoom sessions run.
- Committees said this email was very useful but would have liked to receive one before summer so they could plan events earlier or help new committees with planning them.

How would you improve the scheme in the future?

- Agree on a date that all events had to be put on by to allow for money to be sorted out after this period to prevent the last week being prepayments.
- Shorten the 6-week period so students don't get overwhelmed by a range of activities and then 'drop off' after.
- A way to prevent a big drop between free members and paid members when the free 6-weeks trial ends.

Which of your events worked the best and why?

- Linguistics Society said that their board games night was the most successful event they put on as it created a good balance between the academic subject and creating a sociable environment.
- Newcastle Muslim medics Mirrored this and said they meet and greet event went really well as it wasn't just academic knowledge.
- Nutritank expressed the success of collaboration events and how well these went, bringing new members to both of the partaking societies.
- Nutritank also said their Tynemouth trip was especially beneficial for their first year students as it made local areas appear more accessible to them.

Would you encourage committee to apply again next year?

- All of the societies in attendance said they would encourage committees to apply again next year.
- They all commented that it would be useful for current committees to provide new committees with advice on how to apply and let them know events that were successful to prevent stress during the first few weeks of term.

How is your relationship with your academic school both prior to, and following the project?

- Combined Honours continues to have a good relationship with their academic school including using common rooms for socials, and staff partaking in events. They also noted first years feeling more comfortable in the events when they got to know staff and found a point of connection with their school.
- Cyber Society already had a good relationship with their school prior to the project, however, they said it didn't do any harm and allowed them to continue their good relationship.

How did you publicise the 6 weeks free trial period to students?

- Combined Honours Society used Instagram, putting up regular posts and stories. They also made use of common room areas by putting up posters and asking peer mentor groups to tell their mentees about events. The committee said these methods were very successful and got lots of students to attend the events they put on.
- Nutritank also used Instagram posts (see section 9.1).
- All of the societies noted how useful social media was in spreading the message about their events and the free 6-week membership.

What event would you like to attend if you were taking part in the free 6-week membership?

- Relaxed events with no pressure
- Taking part in an activity, for example, ice skating, or bowling as this takes of the pressure of making conversation and allows students to enjoy the activity with others.

What would you do differently next year?

- Linguistics: Due to being a new society they had little experience of putting on events so might branch out into new activities.
- Paediatrics: Start events earlier in the term and do fewer academic ones and increase the amount of social activities so people can chat with each other.
- Nutritank: They didn't expect as many people to turn up as they did, therefore pre-planned events couldn't allow high numbers of students to attend, therefore next year they would try and avoid this by adding in some larger scale events.
- Cyber Society said they would begin promoting full memberships to members earlier to try and increase full paid memberships after the 6-week free period.
- Newcastle Muslim Medics: Also saw a drop in number of paid members, however it had started to rise again by the time of the focus group.

The focus groups were all very useful to understand what students and committees thought of the welcome period. They provided invaluable experience, different to that from the survey due to their personal nature and as students relaxed into the session they opened up about their experiences.

Recommendation for future evaluation: Continue to run focus groups to understand students' and committees' thoughts on the society events and free 6-week period.

8. Academic Schools

Academic schools, mirroring last year, were difficult to engage. This year, knowing the struggle in the previous year, a list of school contacts was provided through the Inclusive Newcastle team and a survey was drafted up to be sent out. No feedback was received following several follow up emails. Two staff members joined a schools focused drop in over the summer period, however little further response was made. Therefore, school engagement remains a priority and a meeting should be facilitated between NUSU and academic leads to get them more involved with the project. By doing so, the project would receive increased engagement from a key part of the project, increasing its success at facilitating students with an increased sense of belonging.

Academic school involvement is important because of the research basis of this project, as students report that feeling a sense of belonging in their academic school is important as a space where feelings of social fit and academic fit are developed. This should be supported by staff within the academic school, as feeling part of the school includes building positive relationships with staff, not only other students. Without academic schools' engagement, societies are also at risk of not being able to run events in school spaces and missing out on course-based information sessions. Improving the awareness and engagement of the scheme within academic schools remains a priority.

Recommendation 9: Explore different ways of engaging academic school staff with the project, working with NUSU and university colleagues to increase awareness.

9. Case Studies

9.1. Nutritank Society

This case study focuses on the success of Nutritank's welcome events. Nutritank Society as of 31st October 2023 had 183 members. Nutritank is based in the School of Nutrition but also targets medical students in the School of Medicine.

Nutritank submitted two applications for funding, the second based upon NUSUS's recognition of their events and optimism that they could be further expanded. The first requested £750 and detailed plans for a swim, Pilates and brunch collaboration with Pilates Society and cooking lessons. In their second application, Nutritank planned to put on a second cooking workshop, add in a collaboration event with Blank Canvas Society and arrange pottery painting. This second application received £665. The following events were subsequently run by the society:



Nourish Food School Cooking Workshop 1: 2nd October.



Wine Glass painting collaboration with Nutritank: 12th October.



Beach Breakfast: 15th October.



Nourish Food School Cooking Workshop 2: 18th October.



Pilates and Brunch collaboration with Pilates Society: 21st October



Winter Warmer Social: 24th October

Upon completion of the 6-week free membership and funding period, Nutritank returned their completed report. Their responses are reported below:

Question	Answer
<p>How did the free 6-week membership impact your society?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Created a great amount of interest in our society selling out tickets in under 10 minutes for all 6 events and having maximum attendance to each.” • “Thanks to the free 6-week membership we had 170 members sign up for Nutritank which was incredible (the society only had approx. 40 members last year)” • “it allowed people to get a good taste of what the society offers and the kind of events we’re planning in running for the rest of the year.”
<p>What was the impact of the funding?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Having the increased amount of funding meant we were able to be much more creative with the planning of our events, include a lot more people due to not being as limited with our budget and also run a larger number of events, which was great for increasing interest in the society and attracting new members.”
<p>Did the project help members develop a sense of belonging to your society and Newcastle University? Please let us know of any evidence or feedback from members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We think this project definitely helped members develop a sense of belonging and make the transition into University and Newcastle as a city easier for students” • “When speaking to members at our events they shared with us how nice it was to meet new people in these different environments, as well as how much fun it was to be trying a new activity, such as cooking, Pilates, visiting Tynemouth for the first time.” • “The success of the 6 week trial and the events that we organised has helped create a lovely sense of community within the Nutritank society.”
<p>Please let us know any other feedback you have about the project (for example: the FREE 6-week membership/ the application process/ comms about this / funding/ support and anything else!).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As a society we feel like it has been a great scheme to run, and it should definitely take place next year.” • However due to the project starting early on in the academic year it did mean planning and organisation had to occur before we had even started term / during end of the summer holidays, we made this work but this could be a bit of a barrier for societies when trying to organise events.
<p>If we were to run this project again next year, what feedback or recommendations could you give us to improve this?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Perhaps more advertising from the university and medical school as well as student union so more it reaches a wider audience.” • “The funding was really helpful in order for us to create a good foundation for the rest of the year.”
<p>Please add any evidence or feedback about your welcome activities here – these could be photos of your activities, screenshots of your Instagram, any feedback</p>	<p>We created a feedback form for our members to complete. Below are some examples of the feedback we received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Very good range of activities, something for everyone, always well organised and fun!” • “The beach brunch was such a nice way to spend a Sunday”. <p>When asked to share their opinion on the 6-week trial:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Great’

you may have received from members:

- ‘Fab society!’

“100% of responses said they would recommend our society to a friend, a statistic we are very pleased with! “

During the focus groups run for society members in November, a number of the attendees were a member of Nutritank Society, and they had the following comments to make:

- One student said that Nutritank’s cooking events stood out to her because they were informative and fun, creating a good balance between course-related activities and being a place to make friends.
- Another student explained their surprise at how diverse Nutritank society is, across stages, gender, ethnicity, and courses.

Promotion of trial

Nutritank regularly promoted the 6-week free trial through their Instagram page, encouraging students to attend their events and purchase the free membership. Upon completion of this, they asked students to buy a full-price membership for £5.



9.2. Cyber Society

Cyber Society as of 31st October 2023 had 112 members. Cyber Society is based in the School of Computing.

Cyber Society had very different opinions compared to the other societies that took part in the scheme. Cyber Society acknowledged that the free trial period was great for getting people involved and in turn, created a high turnout for the society’s events due to it being

free; however, they had several problems with their post-6-week membership. They saw fewer paid members than they had in previous years (85 last year). They acknowledged that this year's committee were aware of the possible trade-off between an increased sense of belonging with a tighter-knit society and higher involvement rates but thought subsequent committees could drop out of the scheme to increase membership numbers from those who buy at the start of the year and do not attend regularly.

Cyber Societies' report returned after the project was rolled out:

Question	Answer
<p>How did the free 6-week membership impact your society?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The free trial membership was great for getting people involved with our society events and we saw the highest turnouts in the history of the society at some of our welcome events this year. Additionally, we saw our society Discord server (group chats) become far more active than in previous years as members used it to make friends on their course and within the school in general. • We found it much easier to persuade students to come to our events by telling them they could attend for free. To give a specific example, one student told us they would not have initially interacted with the society if they had to pay a membership fee. This student later bought a full membership and has since become a Technical Officer on our committee, running some of our events. We would not have had this opportunity to welcome the student onto our team had the free trial programme not existed. • After the trial period, we have struggled to keep members. We expect this to improve a little as people purchase memberships when they see events they want to attend, but after the trial expiry we are seeing far fewer members than we have had at this time in the last several years. As of mid-November, we are at around 50 members compared to 160 during the free trial and around 75 at this time in previous years. At the start of each year, it is inevitable that a number of students will purchase memberships but then decide not to engage with our events regardless of how we run them. This year these members opted for the free trial instead, meaning we are also seeing a notable dip in our members balance compared to previous years.”
<p>What was the impact of the funding?</p>	<p><u>Jackbox Games and Nintendo Switch Console</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We used the Nintendo switch console and Jackbox games packs to run a large gaming social event during the welcome period. At the peak we had 40 students all playing a game called Lie Swatter together using their phones, and feedback on this event was that it was a great way to get people talking and laughing with each other. As a committee we have specifically noticed several pairs/ small groups of students who are often seen together around the School of Computing after meeting at this event, particularly stage 1 students. • We have subsequently purchased games such as Mario kart for the switch console thanks to separate funding from the school of computing, which we have used to run smaller informal weekly welfare and chat events which are promoted by the school rather than the society itself.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In my opinion this has been the most cost-effective society purchase in a long time for the use we have been getting from it and the benefits it has brought our members. <p><u>Technical Zines</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We were given funding to purchase a pack of “zines” (technical comic booklets which comprehensively explain complex concepts in a beginner friendly way, see https://wizardzines.com/). The author of these zines generously added a free license for us to print unlimited copies for our members with our purchase. • We used the Linux, Bash and Command Line zines in our “Introduction to Linux” event to accompany the talk and workshop. They allowed members to work through the content at their own pace which meant for the first time there were 0 participants who skipped the interactive parts of the event because they felt unable to complete them. • We have had requests from members to run subsequent events using the zines on different topics and they have given us a great basis on which to plan our tech events
<p>Did the project help members develop a sense of belonging to your society and Newcastle University? Please let us know of any evidence or feedback from members.</p>	<p>Yes. Feedback from members was that it gave them the chance to try out societies where they wouldn’t have otherwise done so because of the membership fees, and that the welcome events were a great way to meet other students and make friends. The groups that this was most effective with were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 1 UG students • PGT students/PGRs • International students
<p>Please let us know any other feedback you have about the project (for example: the FREE 6-week membership/ the application process/ comms about this / funding/ support and anything else!).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The scheme is a great idea and has been a great benefit to students, but practical issues need to be ironed out before next year if it is to be repeated. For the reasons mentioned elsewhere in this report, on paper it looks like taking part in the free trial scheme again would be against the best interests of the society in terms of funding and members after the trial ends. Please note this does not take into account the academic societies funding. We would like to see a revised scheme that solves some of these problems around paid membership upgrades so that we aren’t financially worse off for having offered the free trials. • There seemed to have been some miscommunication around whether we were awarded funding for the Nintendo console during the application process. It was initially rejected but later approved after further explanation, we think this may have been miscommunicated inside NUSU as the Activities Officer saw our promotion of the Nintendo event at the freshers fair and told us the funding for the console was rejected, and didn’t seem to know about the approval.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This caused some concern for the committee as we had already purchased the console the previous day and hadn't submitted reimbursement yet, and had to check the funds had appeared in our special grant account during the freshers fair thinking we had made a mistake."
<p>If we were to run this project again next year, what feedback or recommendations could you give us to improve this?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The project was great at increasing participation and a sense of belonging within the School during the first 6 weeks and we had great feedback from people who took part. It was particularly useful for getting people to come along to a wide variety of events who otherwise would not have attended. • However, the drop-off in numbers after the trial period ends, and particularly the fact that our numbers are much lower now than in previous years, may unintentionally create a perverse incentive for the society for having taken part. • In previous years, a percentage of our members would buy memberships at the start of the year and then forget about the society. This year we have not seen the membership fees in this case. It could be argued that in some cases a society's participation in the scheme is in practice a trade-off for increased sense of belonging against reduced membership funding. While we this year were happy to do this for the benefits it brought to students and feel it is the right thing to do, it would rely on future committees holding the same values and not choosing to drop out of the scheme to protect their projected members' balances. • I would suggest that in future years there be a stronger distinction between free trial members and full paid members. Not to the extent that free trial members are excluded, which would defeat the point of the sense of belonging project, but to ensure that there is some incentive to upgrade the membership during the trial period rather than after it. We want to reinforce the idea of progression to a paid membership and the benefits associated during the trial, rather than students seeing this as an opportunity to merely extend a membership they already have. This could be more something that individual societies need to manage themselves, but I see it as vital that we have at least some reasons for free trial members to upgrade during the trial, without excluding people from events. The sense of belonging project is important to protect the monetary interests and membership strength of societies, else they be at risk of folding in future years. • Additionally, the sudden increase and then drop-off in numbers has been difficult for us to scale with as a society. We struggled to run our welcome events with such a small committee for the numbers of attendees, so we opened applications for more roles which were filled at the end of the welcome period. But we now find ourselves with less members than in previous years, and a larger committee."
<p>Please add any evidence or feedback about your welcome activities here:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Today's event was great! It was really nice to have attended it!" • "Cheers, had a blast today" • "Very good day"

10. Conclusion

The academic societies sense of belonging project for the 2023-2024 academic year has improved on the results of the previous year. This year's project has seen more applications from societies, fewer resubmissions due to failed application attempts and a higher awareness of the project from both committee and student members.

As a result of providing societies with the opportunity to learn about the sense of belonging project and a 6-week free trial at committee training, committees appeared more aware of what activities were permitted to receive funding for and put on more unique events than the 2023-23 academic year. Additionally due to the option for students to purchase a free 6-week membership for their chosen academic society on the NUSU societies webpage, the evaluation was able to see how many students were buying memberships and the high take up of the project.

The majority of the feedback received through society member and committee member surveys and in-person focus groups was positive. Students liked the 6-week free trial in particular due to the current cost of living crisis and the ability to not be put off joining societies as a result of cost.

Committee members liked the increased knowledge they had on the project and the ability to resubmit applications as their societies grew during the 6-week period. However, a number of societies were concerned about the 6-week free trial period lowering their annual membership totals having previously relied on inactive members to boost society funding levels and receive sponsorship from outside the university, although societies recognised the positive aspect of having fewer but more engaged members.

Using the Theory of Change model to evaluate whether the scheme is having the intended outcomes and impact on students, **we can see the scheme is broadly meeting these outcomes** and it is **likely the impact on sense of belonging over time will be seen through future evaluations**. There is more to be done to understand how feelings of social and academic fit within the school environment could be influenced by this scheme. Overall, the majority of students felt like the project enabled them to feel a sense of belonging within their academic societies and schools, and committees found the extra funding useful for their welcome period; therefore, the project's future would enable more students to feel a sense of belonging and allow committees to continue putting on fun and exciting events for students to take part in and form a community around.

The Academic Societies Funding Scheme has improved since its initial rollout; however, more can be done to help it succeed further, and below is a summarised list of the recommendations made throughout the report.

Summary of recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Make sure postgraduate students know they can partake in welcome activities.

Recommendation 2: Change the way the application form is submitted by providing a Microsoft Form instead of a document to make it more accessible.

Recommendation 3: Clarify deadlines for a) welcome events and b) invoice submissions.

Recommendation 4: Continue to promote support mechanisms and information, including clarity on eligible events.

Recommendation 5: Continue to promote the academic society opportunities to underrepresented students, aiming to increase the percentage of students from these groups participating in the scheme.

Recommendation 6: Continue to advertise the 6-week free membership through NUSU emails, website and social media, and add in the creation of posters to be placed around the university to attract more people.

Recommendation 7: Provide a way of allowing students to know what activities are included in the 6-week free membership, and what societies are running them. This could be done by a uniform-looking social media post, or a logo included on posts to allow students to quickly recognise if it is part of the scheme.

Recommendation 8: Make it clear that this project is for anyone to try and combat the stigma about older stages joining new societies.

Recommendation 9: Explore different ways of engaging academic school staff with the project, working with NUSU and university colleagues to increase awareness.

Project Evaluation recommendations

Recommendation for future evaluation: Continue to run focus groups to understand students' and committees' thoughts on the society events and free 6-week period.

Recommendation for project future evaluation: Reword the question about making friends to make it less subjective and perhaps make it open-ended to allow for students to elaborate on their experiences.

11. Appendices

Excel spreadsheet of survey responses:

Society members survey:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/AnalysisPage.aspx?AnalyzerToken=JPMF1Re05dfN6PjqZi5DnDc8jIJvdiLS&id=yRJQnBa2wkSpF2aBT74-h33iA1d5AK5Ii2kFJwV0qm9UQjhBTvBMOUJNQ0g3SIYxRFQyT1ZaS0VZQS4u>

Society Committee survey:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/AnalysisPage.aspx?AnalyzerToken=UqxYZVh07TNMQrj8Db8XXapzuAEBRPOM&id=yRJQnBa2wkSpF2aBT74-h33iA1d5AK5Ii2kFJwV0qm9UNUZGVVAzNkhFT1k3S0FDTIJTOEIRMFwQS4u>

Survey Ethics form:

At the start of the survey:

As part of our evaluation on how well our welcome events funding scheme for academic societies is working, we are interested in student experiences participating in an academic society and your thoughts and opinions about how this may have affected feelings of belonging to your academic school and university community. We are particularly interested in the views of students who belong to underrepresented or marginalised groups, but opinions from all students are valued.

Please answer honestly, with as much or as little detail as you like. If you are unsure or don't want to answer a question, either leave questions blank or write down that you are unsure/don't know.

Demographic data will be collected for the purpose of understanding how the student population is engaging with academic societies.

This survey is anonymous, unless you choose to provide your email address to express your interest in taking part in an additional focus group session or to be entered into the prize draw. Any data used in our research will be anonymised and pseudonyms (fake names) will be used where necessary.

Participation in the survey is voluntary. You do not need to take part and there will be no negative consequences if you do not.

If you do not provide an email address, please note that you will be unable to withdraw your response at a later date as your data will not be identifiable to you.

If you do provide an email address, you are able to withdraw your data by contacting the team (contact details at the end of the survey) and your data will be removed from the research. You can withdraw your data at any time up until 31.12.23.

This data will contribute to recommendations to the Students' Union on how to improve the academic societies funding scheme. Your data will primarily be used in an evaluation report for this project.

At the end of the survey:

By pressing submit, you are consenting to the use of this data by NUSU for the purposes of this research project. Any personal information (email address, if you have chosen to give this) will only be used for the purposes of contacting you to invite you to a focus group or to contact you with the results of the prize draw. We adhere to NUSU's GDPR Guidelines. The full document for data protection guidelines can be found [here](#).

Any information shared is optional and will be stored and used to write recommendations for how to improve student representation at the SU.

Please contact Emily (e.f.halsall2@newcastle.ac.uk) for any questions, including if you wish to withdraw your data following submission.

Demographic data was collected through NUSU databases and through the society members' survey. The following questions were asked to gather the data:

1. What is your stage of study?

- Undergraduate Stage 1
- Undergraduate Stage 2
- Undergraduate Stage 3
- Undergraduate Stage 4
- Postgraduate Taught
- Postgraduate Research

2. Are you classified as a Home or an International student?

Home students are those living in the UK or Republic of Ireland on the first day of the first academic year, and EU nationals with settled status in the UK, who have been ordinarily resident in the UK for the three years before that date and who pay Home fees. If you do not fall under the home fee definition, then you will be classed as an international student.

- Home
- International
- What course do you study?
- Open text box for answer

3. We would like to understand the ethnic background of the students participating in this survey. Please select the ethnicity you identify most closely with from this list:

- Arab
- Bangladeshi
- Bangladeshi British
- Chinese
- Chinese British
- Indian
- Indian British
- Pakistani
- Pakistani British
- Black African
- Black African British
- Black Caribbean
- Black Caribbean British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Roma
- White English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups – White and Asian
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean
- Any other Asian background
- Any other Black background
- Any other ethnic background

- Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background
 - Any other White background
 - Not known
 - Prefer not to say
4. What gender do you identify with?
- Woman
 - Man
 - Non-binary
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other open text box
5. Are you transgender or do you have a trans history?
- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other open text box
6. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
- Asexual
 - Bisexual
 - Heterosexual/straight
 - Homosexual (gay or lesbian)
 - Queer
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other open text box
7. Are you the first in your immediate family to enter higher education?
(Immediate family includes those directly related to you such as parents, brothers and sisters. This does not include cousins, aunts or uncles.)
- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
8. We want to better understand how some student groups who are often underrepresented in universities are engaging with academic societies. Please tick any of the following characteristics which apply to you.
- In receipt of Opportunity Scholarship
 - Low family household income
 - Home postcode in an area of low higher education participation
 - From a Black, Asian and/or minority ethnic background
 - Mature student (undergraduate starting their course aged 21 and over)
 - Disabled student
 - Care experienced student
 - Carer
 - Estranged from family

- Student from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community
- Refugee
- From a military family (parent or guardian was in the military)
- None of these apply to me

Focus Group members consent form

The following text was sent to all focus group members to sign and return before they could take part.

NUSU Academic Societies Funding Scheme for Sense of Belonging: Participant Information Sheet

Each of you have been invited to participate in a discussion to hear more about your experiences joining an academic society and your thoughts and opinions about how this may have affected feelings of belonging to your academic school and university community. This is an opportunity to share your thoughts on your academic society events, your initial experiences of feeling part of the society, academic school and wider university community.

Please take time to read the following information carefully so you understand what the research will involve for you and can decide whether or not to take part. You do not need to take part and there will be no negative consequences if you do not.

This will be a semi-structured discussion between members of the group, facilitated by myself. The discussion is scheduled to take 40 minutes I will ask some questions that allow for open discussion, where anyone is allowed to chime in with their own thoughts and feelings. No need to wait to be addressed with a direct question. Please note that the discussion will be audio recorded for the purposes of accurately recording what is discussed and aiding transcription. This audio recording will only be accessed by the research team for the purposes of transcription, and all speakers will be pseudonymised.

I will be asking about academic societies, their events, your experiences participating in academic societies, and your feelings of belonging and being part of a community at university. I will also ask broad questions about having a marginalised identity and how you feel this may affect your sense of belonging, but I will not make any direct remarks towards any individual's identity without that individual first bringing it up. We acknowledge that asking individuals from marginalised backgrounds to talk about lived experience requires emotional labour on your part.

I will take an approach that encourages optional sharing of personal experiences, rather than requiring anyone to disclose specific examples. We recognise that disclosing these experiences can feel difficult and have a risk of causing psychological harm when discussing negative or harmful experiences. Therefore, we want to be clear that there is no obligation to discuss your identity characteristic or lived experiences unless you choose to. If you feel you need to leave the room at any point, you can do so with no prior warning. A quiet space is available if you need time to sit alone. The Support and Advice Hub team is always available to listen.

This will be a safe space to share your experiences, meaning any discriminatory behaviour towards others will not be tolerated. No assumptions will be made towards individuals in the discussion regarding their age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation,

gender identity, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity status, income background, ex-offender status, parental, carer or guardian status, nationality, care leaver status or mode of study.

After the discussion, my contact details will be given in case you change your mind and want to withdraw your data. There will be no negative consequences of you withdrawing your data. You can withdraw your data at any time up until 31.12.23.

Personal identifiable information shared in the meeting will only be used where strictly necessary and only for research purposes. Please note that non-anonymised data, in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings are collected and retained as part of the research process. These will only be accessed by the research team.

We may end up discussing demographic information including ethnicity, age, gender, parental and disability status and whether participants identify as working class, but it is not compulsory to share any of this information. All names will be anonymised for the purposes of the written report and given a pseudonym. We ask that all participants respect each other's confidentiality and anonymity outside of the discussion and do not discuss information shared in the group outside of this meeting.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process by storing non-anonymised data securely, discussions not continuing outside of this specific meeting, and the use of pseudonyms. It is important that you are aware that the research team may need to break confidentiality if the researcher has a strong belief that there is a serious risk of harm or danger to either the participant or another individual or if a serious crime has been committed.

This data will contribute to recommendations to the Students' Union on how to improve the academic societies funding scheme. Your data will primarily be used in an evaluation report for this project.

We adhere to NUSU's privacy and GDPR guidelines. A detailed breakdown can be found at <https://nusu.co.uk/privacy>.

If you have any questions, please contact me using the email address below.

Emily Halsall, NUSU Academic Societies Intern
e.f.halsall2@newcastle.ac.uk

NUSU Academic Societies Funding Scheme for Sense of Belonging - Consent Form

- I voluntarily agree to take part in this research project.
- I confirm that I have read the information sheet above and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw permission to use data from my interview up until 31.12.23 without giving any reason, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study, as described in the information sheet.
- I understand that participation involves taking part in a discussion about experiences of academic societies and may include disclosing personal experiences.
- I consent to my anonymised research data being stored and used by others for future research.

- I consent to being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed immediately after transcription and used for research purposes only. I know that any identifiable information spoken out loud will be anonymised and/or pseudonymised in transcription.
- I understand that signed consent forms with my personal identifiable information will be retained by the research team in a secure location for the duration of the research project.
- I understand that my research data may be published in a report.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in an evaluation report, conference presentations, visual dissemination methods, and published papers.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that I or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities. They will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that, under freedom of information legalisation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Interview consent form

In the event of an interview, the interviewee would be required to sign and return the following consent form:

NUSU Academic Societies Funding Scheme for Sense of Belonging: Participant Information Sheet

You have been invited to participate in an interview hear more about your experiences joining an academic society and your thoughts and opinions about how this may have affected feelings of belonging to your academic school and university community. This is an opportunity to share your thoughts on your academic society events, your initial experiences of feeling part of the society, academic school and wider university community. Please take time to read the following information carefully so you understand what the research will involve for you and can decide whether or not to take part. You do not need to take part and there will be no negative consequences if you do not.

This will be a semi-structured interview, facilitated by myself. The interview is scheduled to take **X TIME**. I have a series of questions I am asking all participants and may ask you specific questions about topics I have discovered through my research so far, or topics that you mention during the interview. Please note that the focus group will be audio recorded for the purposes of accurately recording what is discussed and aiding transcription. This audio recording will only be accessed by the research team for the purposes of transcription, and all speakers will be pseudonymised.

I will be asking about academic societies, their events, your experiences participating in academic societies, and your feelings of belonging and being part of a community at university. I will also ask broad questions about having a marginalised identity and how you feel this may affect your sense of belonging, but I will not make any direct remarks towards any individual's identity without that individual first bringing it up. We acknowledge that asking individuals from marginalised backgrounds to talk about lived experience requires emotional labour on your part.

I may ask questions about your experiences of feeling marginalised or discriminated against, however the amount you choose to share is completely your choice. I will take an approach that encourages optional sharing of personal experiences, rather than, for example, requiring anyone to disclose specific examples of discrimination experienced. We recognise that disclosing these experiences can feel difficult and have a risk of causing psychological harm when discussing negative or harmful experiences. Therefore, we want to be clear that there is no obligation to discuss your identity characteristic or lived experiences unless you choose to. You can stop at any point, and there will be a quiet space and wellbeing resources provided to support anyone who needs them.

I will ask everyone to share pronouns at the start of the interview. This will be a safe space to share your experiences, meaning any discriminatory behaviour towards others will not be tolerated. Gender neutral language will be used in all correspondence. No assumptions will be made towards individuals in an interview setting regarding their age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity status, income background, ex-offender status, parental, carer or guardian status, nationality, care leaver status or mode of study.

Optional pre-meetings can take place to implement any practices you need to feel safe and comfortable, including informing me beforehand of any topics you find too triggering to hear talked about, and I will do my best to avoid discussion of these. If you feel you need to leave the room at any point, you can do so with no prior warning. A quiet space is available if you need time to sit alone. The Support and Advice Hub team is always available to listen. All participants have a right to withdraw from the study. If you feel you need to leave the room at any point, you can do so with no prior warning. A quiet space is available if you need time to sit alone. After the interview, my contact details will be given in case you change your mind and want to withdraw your data. There will be no negative consequences of you withdrawing your data. You can withdraw your data at any time up until 31.12.23. Personal identifiable information shared in the meeting will only be used where strictly necessary and only for research purposes. Please note that non-anonymised data, in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings are collected and retained as part of the research process. These will only be accessed by the research team.

We are likely to end up discussing demographic information including ethnicity, age, gender, parental and disability status and whether participants identify as working class, but it is not compulsory to share any of this information. All names will be anonymised for the purposes of the written report and given a pseudonym. We ask that all participants respect each other's confidentiality and anonymity outside of the interview setting and do not discuss information shared in the interview outside of this meeting.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process by storing non-anonymised data securely, focus group discussions not continuing outside of this specific meeting and the use of pseudonyms. It is important that you are aware that the research team may need to break confidentiality if the researcher has a strong belief that there is a

serious risk of harm or danger to either the participant or another individual or if a serious crime has been committed.

This data will contribute to recommendations to the Students' Union on how to improve the academic societies funding scheme. Your data will primarily be used in an evaluation report for this project.

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If you have any questions, please contact me using the email address below.

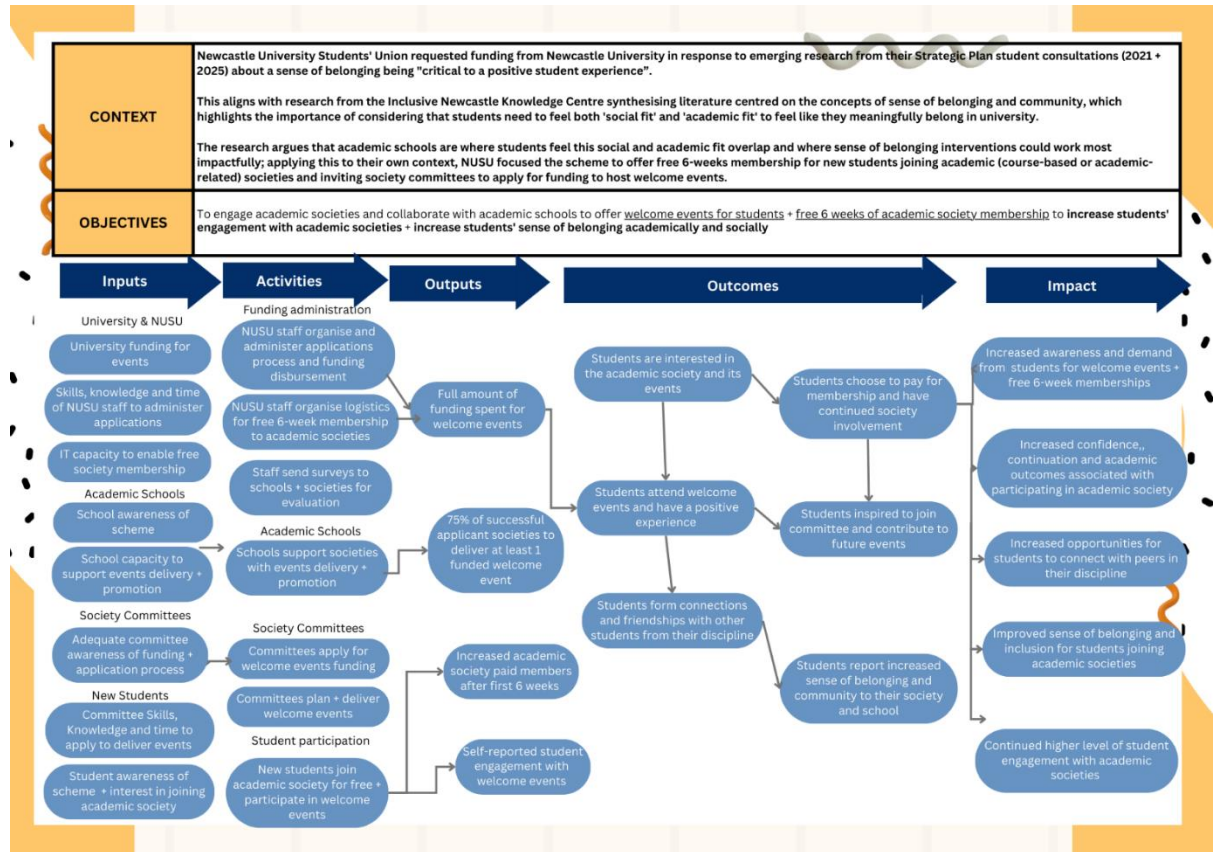
Emily Halsall, NUSU Academic Societies Intern
e.f.halsall2@newcastle.ac.uk

NUSU Academic Societies Funding Scheme for Sense of Belonging - Consent Form

- I voluntarily agree to take part in this research project.
- I confirm that I have read the information sheet above and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw permission to use data from my interview up until **X DATE** without giving any reason, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study, as described in the information sheet.
- I understand that participation involves taking part in a focus group discussing experiences of academic societies and may include disclosing lived experiences of marginalisation and discrimination.
- I consent to my anonymised research data being stored and used by others for future research.
- I consent to being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed immediately after transcription and used for research purposes only. I know that any identifiable information spoken out loud will be anonymised and/or pseudonymised in transcription.
- I understand that signed consent forms with my personal identifiable information will be retained by the research team in a secure location for the duration of the research project.
- I understand that my research data may be published in a report.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in an evaluation report, conference presentations, visual dissemination methods, and published papers.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that I or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities. They will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that, under freedom of information legislation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Earlier versions of Theory of Change model for students and committees:



CONTEXT	<p>Newcastle University Students' Union requested funding from Newcastle University in response to emerging research from their Strategic Plan student consultations (2021 + 2025) about a sense of belonging being "critical to a positive student experience".</p> <p>This aligns with research from the Inclusive Newcastle Knowledge Centre synthesising literature centred on the concepts of sense of belonging and community, which highlights the importance of considering that students need to feel both 'social fit' and 'academic fit' to feel like they meaningfully belong in university.</p> <p>The research argues that academic schools are where students feel this social and academic fit overlap and where sense of belonging interventions could work most impactfully; applying this to their own context, NUSU focused the scheme to offer free 6-weeks membership for new students joining academic (course-based or academic-related) societies and inviting society committees to apply for funding to host welcome events.</p>
OBJECTIVES	To engage academic societies and collaborate with academic schools to offer welcome events for students + free 6 weeks of academic society membership to increase students' engagement with academic societies + increase students' sense of belonging academically and socially

