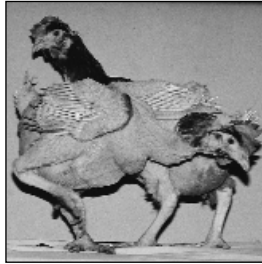


University Animal Rights Groups



Why Start An Animal Rights Group?

The most effective way to spread the message about animal cruelty is through the work of local activists. The reason that animal cruelty continues is because caring people do not make a stand against it, often because they don't know how to get involved or don't have the confidence to believe they can make a difference. Universities have so much scope for campaigning, and even two or three active people can achieve so much for the animals. Even if you have never run a group or been involved in campaigning before, don't let this stop you.

Animal Aid are here to help you, and if you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

How Do I Go About It?

Most student unions have a clubs & societies officer. They will be your first port of call. Find out where his/her office is and explain that you are interested in starting up a new club. The exact procedure will be explained to you, which will vary depending on the university. It usually involves naming a committee. Most clubs tend to require that you have a president, treasurer and secretary, but as you are a new club they will probably allow you to put this off until a later date. The university will then set you up a bank account, allocate you a mailbox, and show you a copy of the club guidelines within which you will have to operate. Any additional information will be explained to you at the time.

Attracting Members

Decide on a place for your first meeting. You should be able to hire a room in one of the departments free of charge. Check with the individual departments for this. Subsequent meetings can be held in your union bar, but it is best to have a calmer atmosphere for the first get-together.

Once this has been booked, put up posters around campus/in all the departments/halls etc. Some departments will allow anyone to put posters up, but others require that you have permission, so it is always best to ask. The back of toilet doors is a good place to attract attention!! Make your poster

as eye-catching as possible, with a catchy heading such as: 'Do you hate animal cruelty?' and make sure it states the time, place and date of your first meeting. Make the poster sound inviting with phrases such as 'Everyone welcome'. Ask your student newspaper if they will publish an advert detailing your meeting. Advertising social evenings is also a great way of attracting new members.

Freshers Fair

Depending on the time of year your group is set up, you may be in time for freshers fair. Freshers fair is possibly the most effective way of attracting members. Freshers are keen to sign up for anything and everything in their first week, therefore they are the perfect targets. Make your stall stand out to entice them over. Have leaflets available, and create a leaflet specific to your group stating your aims and what you plan to be doing, as well as a contact name and address. Many of the people who sign up may never come to the meetings but it is the perfect way to fill your membership quota, so that you obtain your budget! Make sure people pay on the day so that your treasurer can pay the money into your university bank account.

Your First Meeting

You will probably need to chair the first meeting, but make it clear that in future everyone's voice will be heard and new campaign ideas will be taken into account. Start with an introduction session, e.g. everyone goes round the circle and says their name and a bit about themselves. For a more light-hearted atmosphere, try playing silly games to learn each others' names! After the formalities are out of the way, explain what campaign ideas you have and how you want to go about them. What will the main concerns of your group be? What type of campaigning will you do? Try to find out what skills everyone in the group has, e.g. writing, drawing, public speaking etc. You may want to think of a group name at your first meeting if you haven't done so already. A short name or one with initials which spell a word (an acronym) is easier to remember. Compile a contact list containing everyone's email addresses and possibly phone numbers. Type this



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up and bring a copy to your next meeting so that everyone has one.

It may help to provide some drinks and munchies for the first meeting, again to promote an image of friendliness, and also a good way of bribing people to come along in the first place!! At the end of the meeting, make sure everyone knows the details of the next meeting, and has your email address in case of queries. It is probably best to establish a regular meeting day and time, e.g. every other Tuesday evening/lunchtime. Lunchtimes are often better as many people will not like traveling alone to meetings in the dark and they are also less likely to clash with other activities. The disadvantage, however, is that you only have an hour. Discuss it amongst yourselves and find out what time suits the group best.

Depending how many people you have in your group, after a few weeks, you may like to appoint positions. Ideally, you should already have a treasurer, secretary, and a president (you!), but you may like to have a press officer and a social secretary or, if there are enough people, a different rep for all of the campaigns! These positions can swap round whenever you like. Additionally, depending how formal you want the structure of your meetings to be, you may want the secretary to write minutes of the meetings. Some universities may even require that you do this for accountability reasons.

It is a good idea to organise a social event during the first few weeks of the group's existence, in order for everyone to get to know each other better and to show what a sociable bunch you are! It doesn't have to be anything spectacular, a trip to the pub will do!

What Sort Of Thing Should We Do?

There is so much scope for campaigning within universities, and students' opinions are nearly always listened to. Here are some ideas:

The University Shop

Nearly all unions will have a shop selling various cosmetics and toiletries. Most of these will be from companies which are involved in animal experimentation. You will not be able to stop the shop from selling these goods, but you can ensure that at least one cruelty-free alternative is available, and that those which aren't, are labeled with a sign such as, 'This product has been tested on animals'. This can usually be done by presenting a motion to student council. Once passed, it has to be enforced and you can ensure that this is carried out.

The Restaurant

Does your university restaurant/cafe provide adequate vegetarian/vegan options, and are they clearly labelled. If not, why not? Again, this can be rectified by presenting a student council motion. If this fails, lobbying the restaurant with peaceful protests should gain enough support.

Dissection

Most biology/zoology etc. courses will require that animals are killed and dissected at some point. This is completely unnecessary, especially with the invention of new CD rom footage which can simulate real dissection (Interniche contact www.interniche.org/01162109652). Put pressure on the departments which carry this out through peaceful demonstrations. Find out the professor in charge of dissection, and encourage students to write to/email him/her (politely), and offer details of the alternatives. Similarly, some psychology labs will keep animals for experimentation. It helps to have a friend/contact within the department who will be able to find out details of the experiments. Keep a list of these experiments, and hand them out at demos so that people know exactly what cruelty is taking place at their university. They will hopefully then support you in bringing it to an end.

Other Clubs

Does your university have a field sports society? More often than not, they will be using university money to indulge in activities such as fox hunting or shooting. Organise a lobby against them (however, find out the facts first). Ask a friend to put his/her name down on their email list so that you can find out where they are meeting/their events etc. Make your views known to the clubs & societies officer within the union, explaining that you object to the university spending its money on exploiting animals. Ask for a copy of the union/clubs & societies charter. You may find that they are breaching some small print clause which you will then be able to use against them and get them shut down! This may again have to go to council.

Information Stalls

Most unions are more than willing to allow students to hold a stall within the union building, as long as permission is first obtained through the clubs & societies officer. This is a brilliant way to raise awareness, and to recruit new members who were maybe too shy to sign up in freshers' week. Try to aim for one a month; students are always looking for something new to get involved in, especially if there is a social life involved!





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Student Media

All universities will have a student newspaper and/or radio station. This is the perfect way to convey the message/recruit new members. Find out who is in charge by visiting your union office, and then contact them, maybe with a view to writing an article or doing a radio interview. This is also the perfect way to make people aware of any campaigns that may be being carried out on campus. Don't forget to let the student press know if you are staging a demo on campus; they may turn up to take photos or conduct an interview – more publicity!! Additionally, your university may allow you to have a section of their webpage for your club. For this purpose, it would be useful to have a computer whizz or graphic designer as a member!

An email address is essential to keep your members informed of meetings and progress. Your university will usually provide one of these for free – if not, a free address can be obtained through www.hotmail.com

Speakers

Organise for speakers to come into the university and talk about animal rights. This could be an Animal Aid contact or someone from another campaigning organisation. Then publicise the talk as much as possible, particularly amongst people whose courses may have an interest in it, e.g. if it is a doctor or ex-visivector coming to speak against animal experiments, then publicise it amongst the medicine/biology/science faculty. Similarly, try and organise debates. Find someone who is pro-visivector/hunting etc. Debates will often attract more attention than just a speaker, and you may even be able to convince people on the other side! Your university may have a debating society which you can use. If you are going to be the speaker, make sure you know your stuff and know who you are up against beforehand. If you are not confident, it may be better to invite an outside speaker. Contact Animal Aid if you need to be put in touch with someone.

If you have a lot of extra time, or once you have already done all the above (!), extend your activities beyond the bounds of the university. Is there a local laboratory which uses animals? Is there a zoo or a circus in your town? All urban areas have betting shops, supermarkets, pet shops, burger chains, unethical cosmetic shops, all of which are suitable for protesting outside. Maybe it is best to obtain experience on a smaller scale within the university before extending outwards. There may be a local group in your area from which you can enlist support, or join forces with from time to time. Contact Animal Aid for a list of groups.

National Demos

There are numerous national demonstrations taking place around the country. See www.veggies.org.uk for an up-to-date diary of events. This is a great way of meeting like-minded people from all around the country and for gaining experience of large-scale events.



Campaigners Bulletin

Animal Aid runs a quarterly magazine for all active campaigners containing information about the latest campaigns and how you can get involved. Call Animal Aid to be put on the mailing list. You can also subscribe to our email newslist by sending an email to info@animalaid.org.uk

You should be overloaded with ideas by now! If you need more in-depth advice about conducting any of these campaigns, just contact us at the office. Whatever campaigns you do decide to run, please keep us informed at the office. We're grateful for any photos, press releases and articles you may have done, and you may even get a mention in one of our publications!

How Will I Pay For The Campaign Materials?

Most of the time universities will provide you with a small budget, but this is usually on the condition that you obtain a certain number of members (e.g. 30). Each of these members will usually be required to pay a membership fee (£3 is a reasonable amount). The university will then provide you with a certain budget for buying materials, photocopying etc; the amount varies from university to university. However, they may be reluctant to give you any money for campaigns targeted against the university. It is best to ask your clubs & societies officer about this, and they should give you an unbiased opinion. Some universities may also allow you to have use of their mini-bus for attending demonstrations etc.

Animal Aid are willing to provide leaflets for free provided they are used for constructive purposes. Other organisations may be willing to do the same. Contact the individual organisations.

If you find you're running short of money, despite your budget, try organising fundraising events, e.g. sponsored activities.

What If I Need Help Or Advice On Something?

Animal Aid are here to act as a 'hotline' for anyone who needs help or advice. Whether it is campaign ideas, legal advice or whatever, give us a call and we will try to help you ourselves or will direct you to someone who can.

Animal Aid, The Old Chapel, Bradford Street, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1AW Tel: (01732) 364546
Email: info@animalaid.org.uk
Web: www.animalaid.org.uk