

# Encouraging a Christian Group in your College

**Easy Option or Tough Assignment.  
What do you think???**

## **Obstacles to overcome**

- ✚ Even in the best case scenario the Christian student feels in a minority.
- ✚ It seems more comfortable to leave faith in Church, keep your head down and stay quiet.
- ✚ We all like to be loved and sometimes friends don't like what we believe so we feel we have to choose.
- ✚ What could a small group ever do?

## **Big Advantages to be gained**

- ✚ Christian students have some idea that faith comes to college with them.
- ✚ Some are really looking for a way to engage in living for God in the college.
- ✚ They have no restrictions on being with their friends, sharing what is most dear to them.
- ✚ Just a handful of people can make an impact on a college for good.

## **Thinking about a group**

- ✚ Christians can support one another and help each other to mature in their faith.
- ✚ They can pray together
- ✚ They can provide a place where other students can hear about the Christian Faith. They can serve the college.

## **Christian Groups in Colleges**

Research over the years shows that at any one time about 25% of the FE and Sixth Form Colleges of the UK has a group of Christians that meet regularly. In many places these groups are known as Christian Union or CU for short. In some places these CUs have a long history of continued witness but it is more often the case that when a group of enthusiastic students or a member of staff leaves the group will stop for a few years only to be resurrected later.

Generally the groups meet in the lunch hours so they have a limited time and in colleges with staggered lunch breaks there are always keen students who cannot attend because of timetabling. Booking rooms, publicising the meetings, organising programmes and working out how to share the Christian message within the college are the issues the groups have to face.

Some of the CUs are part of the fellowship of groups in both Colleges and Universities called “Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship” ([www.uccf.org.uk](http://www.uccf.org.uk)) which in turn is a member of the “International Fellowship of Evangelical Students” ([www.ifesworld.org](http://www.ifesworld.org)).

## Working with an Existing Group

### **Best Practice - Get the students to do it themselves.**

Chaplains and others help where needed probably more at the beginning of term less at the end. But students are glad of people standing with them, just how much supporters do will depend on the ability of the students each year.

### **Have a vision**

Do work with them to have a vision for what they are doing.

READY MADE VISION OF THE CU MOVEMENT IN THE UK

“Making Disciples of Jesus in the Student world” is the UCCF vision which is explained as ‘Live for Jesus, speak for Jesus’.

### **Enlist prayer support**

This is one of the best things anyone can do for a CU especially if the communication is good so that the group knows it can rely on people to support in this way and the prayers are well informed. **Festive** is committed to this but we rely on people to let us have their prayer requests and also just as important their answers to prayer. Keep those coming in to our prayer notice board.




### **Have a good Programme**

Do have a programme – groups that decide what to do each time they meet rarely thrive. Students will often have big ideas – some are just wild and best forgotten – Do let them to dream a little. They will have talents amongst them and they need to be encouraged.

There are a growing number of resources for this on the student resource section of this website.

**It is possible to look at the bible together** even in a short lunchtime meeting this will help the group to hear God speak, be encouraged and challenged and grow together. There are some tried and tested series of bible exploration resources plus some newer ones that need people to try and help us improve on the student section of this website.

If you are called on to do a 15 –20 minute slot of really good bible exploration ASK questions like:

-  Why do you think this is in the Bible?
-  What would be missing if it wasn't?
-  How can this make a difference in the world/CU to me?

### **Some other ideas for programmes**

- ✚ Do look for good opportunities for special events and outreach: Christmas, Valentines Day, Pancake Day, Easter, summer teams, preparing for exams, leaving college etc.
- ✚ There is always the chance for a great new start at the beginning of the college year.. A college with two or three good singers – the CU worked hard and then sang in the college café inviting people to talk with them about Jesus if they wished.
- ✚ Another group had caterers and put on lovely invitation lunches.
- ✚ Another joined with the Student Union to do events publicising the CU was taking part.

#### REMEMBER

- ✚ Don't expect perfection – help students to evaluate and learn
- ✚ Don't get downhearted – if you do they will be too.

## Starting a Group

### First things first

Sometimes a group of students want to start a Christian Union – when this happens it is so much easier. More often than not it is a case of “first find your students”, which experience has shown can some time take more than one term!!

**Pray** – those who have started CUs all say this is the most important part. Get people to join with you. Maybe start with a staff prayer meeting at the college or locally.

### Ways of getting to know Christian Students

These have worked:

- ✚ Advertising a “Getting to Know You” meeting around college, making it clear that it is for those who are interested in being part of a CU. Put a mobile phone or email address on for contact as well, in case the student can't make the meeting. If you can offer a drop in facility on two or three days so much the better
- ✚ Contacting local churches to link you up with students at the college
- ✚ Having a stall or publicity event in a public place advertising the aim to start a CU.
- ✚ Some colleges have enrichment programmes and CUs can be part of this. It is well worth exploring this option.

### **How to run the initial meetings**

Always try to use students in this - involve them to the level of their ability

Aim a half term plan to begin with including:

- ✚ Getting to know you
- ✚ Who is Jesus
- ✚ Visiting speaker or a hot topic
- ✚ What do CUs do?
- ✚ Invitation lunch and question time

### **What if attendance is poor?**

Don't give up

Check that you have chosen a good time. Remember students often mean to come but then forget.

Don't think no one is coming – they may well come late.

Perhaps only 2 or 3 who are interested at this stage. They will need encouragement.

So be that for them.

Many CUs of this number have had events where over 100 have attended.

## **Running a Discovering Christianity Courses**

### **Be sure you are clear why you or the students are doing this**

It is important everyone involved knows that:

**The aim is for the participants to explore the Christian Faith  
so that they might be in a better position to make  
informed choices about what they believe.**

The great opportunity presented today is that there are lots of good courses around, the most famous of which is Alpha. You might like to look at Christianity Explored or 'Discovering Jesus through Mark's Gospel' on this website.

These have worked well in colleges in three ways

- ✚ As a publicised course, usually put on by the chaplain or the CU
- ✚ After an event as follow up.
- ✚ Done one to one by students with their friends

Care needs to be taken that you have enough time: The idea is that people should be able to air their thoughts and questions in a safe and friendly environment. It would be a good idea to read the introduction to the Discovering Jesus through Mark's Gospel as this goes through all the practical implications as well as how to prepare the CU.

Other top tips:

1. Start near the beginning of a term – it is difficult to restart in the middle of the course after a break
2. Set aside enough time to do the course– If you use the Alpha videos they are too long for a lunch time.