

How to start an SU Group

These notes are intended as a step by step guide to setting up an SU Group in a Scottish school, but it will help to work through at least some of this with SU Scotland or Associate Trust staff and potential members of your team. This document raises a number of issues and offers advice and guidance relevant to starting an SU Group. The questions in each section offer space to gather information and record your thinking as you work towards starting the group.

The title “SU Group” is virtually the default setting for Christian Groups in Scottish schools (just as a vacuum cleaner is likely to be referred to as a Hoover even when it’s a Dyson). This position reflects the long history of SU’s work in Scottish schools as well as the national breadth of our work over the years. This brings with it a trust from school staff and church leaders as well as a responsibility on current SU staff and volunteers to protect the goodwill offered to us.

We will therefore want to meet with prospective Team Leaders to support them but also to interview and approve them for this work. There are differences in how we work in schools compared to residential events and missions; all school based volunteers will need to be comfortable and capable of working in that way.

We always refer to here to “SU Groups” but you are at liberty to call the group anything that describes, labels or defines the group to the satisfaction of you, the young people and the school. This might be Lunch Bunch, Monday Club, Ignite, 2CY, The Grid, The Point.

If you are calling it an “SU Group” - or referring to it as such with the school’s Leadership Team - then your team must all be accredited volunteers with SU Scotland.

1.1 Research

Get to know your school and some of the people in it. The chances are that you have some involvement already as a teacher, parent, chaplain, youth worker or pupil. Has there previously been an SU Group?

School name: _____

Headteacher/Rector: _____

School phone number: _____

School email: _____

Secretary: _____

Janitor: _____

Other key staff (e.g. Deputes):

1.2 Work with the full knowledge of your local staff member.

You may well have made contact with your local staff member by now. If not, visit suscotland.org.uk/regional and use the links or map to track down your nearest Regional Worker or Associate Worker. We will work with you through our Team Leader and Volunteer accreditation processes as well as support you in the thinking and planning towards an SU Group.

- One member of your team needs to be identified as the Team Leader (TL) and must complete SU Leadership accreditation at suscotland.org.uk/volunteer click on “sign in /sign up” to start the process.
- Team Members complete SU Volunteer accreditation at suscotland.org.uk/volunteer It is also possible to complete paper forms if preferred.
- Our Volunteers Department can be contacted in our head office (70 Milton St, Glasgow, G4 0HR) on 0141 352 7610.
- On receipt of SU Leadership or Volunteer accreditation our Volunteers Department will send out the appropriate form for membership of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme.
- Your local staff member will want to meet with and interview you as the prospective Team Leader, normally once they receive a copy of your SU Leadership accreditation. This meeting will discuss subjects such as your experience in working with the Bible with children and young people; leading and working in a team; working across denominations as well as the content of your SU Leadership accreditation. They will also discuss your understanding of our Protocol or basis for working in schools and also SU Scotland’s ethos statement. The local staff member will, if appropriate, approve the appointment of the Team Leader.
- It may well be possible to put you in touch with other SU Group Leaders to see groups in action before you start, and also to find on-going support.

Local staff member _____
Their office address _____
Phone number _____
Email _____

1.3 Involve other Christians from the chaplaincy team, pupils, school staff or local churches

A team with a breadth of membership will bring different talents and availability to strengthen the programme so gather a workable group of volunteers. It may be that school staff can be there as “gatekeepers” to give school management confidence but cannot offer preparation time or leadership. Be clear what people are being asked to do and are offering to do and be willing to push them.

Chaplains: _____
Christian staff or pupils: _____
Other Christians (e.g. parents): _____
Likely leaders: _____

1.4 Pray as an individual and with others for the school, and for initiatives that could be taken to start a group in the school

Register with *Pray For Schools Scotland* (suscotland.org.uk/pfss) administered by SU Scotland; if others are praying for the same school and are happy to be put in touch, then we'll connect you. The website offers ideas and resources to help you and other people pray for your school throughout the year as well as at two significant times: Back to School with God Sunday (August) and the Europe wide "Pray for Schools" Day in November. Resources and ideas are also available in "hard copy" from our Prayer Co-ordinator in the SU Scotland national office on 0141 352 7632.

Most SU staff circulate prayer needs for their region to supporters on a regular basis; get your news included by contacting your local office. Try to add news to your church prayer agenda in newsletters, prayer meetings or other services.

People to be asked to pray regularly:

1.5 Think what kind of group you would like to start

SU Groups can take many forms and styles. It may well be that the format of the group changes as you talk and pray with others or once the group has started, but you'll need to have a plan to begin with – at least to be able to hold an intelligent conversation with school management. Some groups in both primary and secondary schools have a limited age range; this can help to keep the group more focussed on what it does. If you are looking to develop a senior pupil group for discipleship and Bible study, it is likely to have a different feel from a group that seeks to gather the various pupils who have just come up from their primary school groups.

SU Groups should be characterised by the values agreed with our Student Exec who said that SU Groups should be characterised in these ways

- be safe places where all pupils are welcomed and respected; where Christian values are modelled;
- be fun, memorable, exciting and age-appropriate;
- have good, challenging, interactive Bible engagement;
- have time where there is opportunity for prayer;
- be well structured and led; the leader(s) recognising and using the talents of others;
- have a positive impact on the school, and being known amongst pupils;
- explore Christian faith and encourage one another on their journey;
- work cooperatively and openly with the leadership of the school.

This list is not intended to stifle creativity by group leaders, but rather to engender a common ethos that defines the ministry of SU Scotland.

Aim of the group: _____

Age group: _____

Timings: _____

What will you call the group? _____

What day(s) of the week work for the team? _____

What days do choirs happen in the school – never a good one to clash with! _____

What venue do you have available to you? _____

What kind of room would you like? Are there restrictions about eating for example in school rooms? _____

1.6 Work with the full knowledge of the School Leadership Team

Headteachers value a busy extra-curricular programme. SU Groups contribute to this and the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence as pupils learn and lead together. They are also understood by Scottish Government to have an important place in Religious Observance:

When members of a non-denominational school community wish to have opportunities for organised acts of worship, Headteachers should consider these requests positively and make suitable arrangements if possible. Such events may be distinct, although it is likely that they will be complementary to the school's provision of RO.

(Curriculum for Excellence - Provision of Religious Observance in Scottish schools, Scottish Government, March 2017)

Contact the school, asking to start an SU Group and requesting a meeting with the Headteacher or another member of the School Leadership Team. Do not expect to just turn up and speak to them unless you have a particularly good relationship already. The Scottish Government letter quoted above still leaves the decision on your group with the Headteacher so don't go in asking for "your right." There may be reasons for "not now" such as school refurbishment. Clearly we believe in the power of prayer to change people and circumstances so it may be that you have to ask again after a reasonable period of time.

Headteachers will apply and interpret best practice in different ways. For example, a letter to parents makes it very clear what the group is about but tear off permission slips provide an administrative exercise for the school to implement as well as being a hurdle to children attending. Don't set out to make it difficult for pupils to come to the group but be prepared to go along with all that is asked of you by the school.

Bear in mind that an SU Group is, first and foremost, an extra-curricular club for the school so the approval of the school is paramount and relies on the Headteacher's assessment of you and of your proposal. Prepare well for this meeting. A further implication of this is that the group is 'governed' firstly by school policies and secondly by SU policies. For example it will operate under the school's child protection policy and GDPR policy which you should ask about. For example find out who the member of senior staff is to whom you would report any child protection concerns. Ask what data you can hold on pupils as the school will normally be the data controller.

Member of staff to meet: _____

Date of meeting: _____

Council accreditation (e.g. PVG) needed? _____

Letter to parents discussed? _____

Parental permission slip discussed? _____

Child Protection briefing received: _____

What is the dress code that is expected of you? _____

Are you allowed to park in the school car park? _____

What technology is available in the school? Where is it stored and who looks after it?

Are pupils able to take packed lunches to the room?

Can you store resources in the school? _____

How can the group be publicised within the school? (See Section 1.8 below) _____

What are you expected to do if the fire alarm goes off during the group? _____

1.7 Make sure that you and your leaders are properly prepared for your group

Agree what materials you will use. You will get suggestions from our staff or other volunteer group leaders. As well as planning your content we need you to keep a record of each week's content to show the Headteacher or others who may ask about the group.

You will need to be prepared to maintain discipline in setting the boundaries for your group. (Try *Top Tips on dealing with challenging behaviour*, published by SU!)

When is your planned start date? _____

What material will you use? _____

How will you plan and communicate who does what each week?

How will you keep records of who attended each week and what your subjects were?

Do you need resources for music, crafts, games etc? How will these be provided and stored?

What is your approach going to be to discipline? What is acceptable? What “crosses the line?”

1.8 Advertise your group to those whom you would like to see coming

Work with the school leadership to try to generate an awareness and anticipation for the group starting. Ask local staff for our current SU Scotland logo or design templates.

Being able to talk to people face to face will be more significant than an email, notice read out in class or poster on the wall – though these ideas can still be used. Ask for some input to assemblies or a presence in a central area of the school at breaks. Some SU Volunteers have been instrumental to starting a “Clubs and Societies Fair” at the start of the school session.

Agree with the school if a record of who is attending the club each week is required. Under GDPR, the school will normally be the data controller so you are handling school information not SU Scotland information. (The key exception will be an after school SU Group that meets outside the school; talk to your local staff member and to the school!) Perhaps have a “sign in sheet” for each session at a secondary school. Arrange with the school where this data can be stored.

Contact local churches and youth groups to help the group reach a critical mass early on.

Assemblies: _____

Launch event: _____

Posters: _____

School notice sheet/email: _____

School Tannoy/video boards): _____

Local churches: _____

1.9 Personally invite those who you would like to see coming

Perhaps some pupils already have a connection with you or with a local church; try to get information to all the local churches. Perhaps some pupils have been to a Scripture Union Holiday, weekend or mission. Ask your local staff member if it is possible to contact them.

Who to speak to and invite?

Who is going to do it?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

1.10 Persevere with your vision for the school for at least a term and then evaluate

SU Groups can take a bit of time to get off the ground but they can also become “the place to be” so be prepared for either eventuality. Keep supporters informed and praying for your group. Try to balance the need for a consistency and structure that pupils can identify and relate to with an expectation that there will be new and exciting things happening at the group.

A couple of questions to think about:

What has gone well in this launch process?

What do you want to see happen in the school?

What should you start, stop and continue doing to realise this?

Are there other people who you need to involve?

(end)