

BRITISH ORIENTEERING

HOW TO START A

UNIVERSITY

ORIENTEERING CLUB

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Are you thinking of starting up your own Orienteering club at your university? Creating a club and likely becoming one of its first committee members will give you a great deal of management experience and other skills which will serve you well – and look great on your CV. Running a university club is hard work and will take lots of time, but your students' union, sports department and British Orienteering are all here to provide advice and help you to get started.

This how-to is written by the founder of Exeter University club, Georgia Jones, who will be walking you through how you can build your own club as well as the challenges and opportunities she faced. Read on to see things that are worth considering as you begin setting up your club. In the appendices are templates for your committee roles, risk assessments, club constitution, a successful university affiliation form and successful grant application to the Orienteering Foundation.

Good luck and have fun setting up your club, and remember British Orienteering are always here to help!

Please note, this document has been updated by British Orienteering in December 2025.

If you have any questions or would like any support with setting up your club at university, please do not hesitate to get in touch with British Orienteering's University Officer, Gracie Grant at ggrant@britishorienteering.org.uk

With your University

Take a good look at your student union website for guides on opening a new club and contact your club development officer or athletic union president to discuss your plan with them, ideally arranging a face-to-face meeting with them. There will be paperwork involved, and there is a slightly different process at every university, but most departments have staff or volunteers who will be able to help.

Affiliating with your university can be done in two ways usually, either through your Student Union as a society or with the sports department. For Exeter, the sports department had strict rules of being a club for at least 3 years before affiliation, so we became a society first.

The exact process varies between universities but the process usually requires certain paperwork completed, such as:

- 1) The aims and objectives of your club; these will eventually be added to your constitution.
- 2) The names of at least 3 people who will become your club's first committee (usually the president, treasurer and secretary). These volunteers will in future be elected by your members. Be sure to read up on the role, responsibilities and resources available for club committee members at your university.
- 3) A list of students who have committed to joining your club, their contact details and their membership fees - there is usually a minimum number of 25 students, but this varies by university. It is best that these potential new members are instructed to pay the fees to your students' union, who will return them if you are unsuccessful in your application.
- 4) A completed risk assessment for orienteering training.
- 5) A basic plan and budget for the first 2 years for your club, focusing on things like:
 - a. How many sessions per week you would like to train
 - b. An operating budget, to include revenue (e.g., club membership fees and training fees paid by club members, competition and travel fees paid by club members, any grant funding from your students' union/ sports department, sponsorship and fundraising funds etc.) and expenditure (e.g., competition entries and travel fees, promotional materials, your club's British orienteering annual membership fee, a purchase and replacement fund for training equipment).
 - c. A plan and annual schedule for training events and competitions you would like to attend.
 - d. A plan to advertise your new club to potential student members
 - e. A completed new sport/club affiliation application form which you can get from your athletic union/ sports department. In the appendix, is an example of a successful application for affiliation with our student union.

At most universities, once your application has been processed and accepted, you'll then be invited to the Students' Union Council/ Societies Council – here you will need to make your case for the inclusion of your new club. Councils will usually only meet a few times a year, so be sure to get everything prepared well in advance. Remember that there will be limited pot of funding available between clubs, so you will need make a strong case for your new club.

Once you are affiliated, you should be inducted, otherwise set up a meeting and make sure you understand the following points about how to operate as a club:

- 1) Procedures and rules for recruiting coaches
- 2) Procedures and rules for electing club committees
- 3) The level of funding that may or may not be available to clubs
- 4) How your Students Union finance office works
- 5) How to make room bookings for training
- 6) Setting up a permanent club email address e.g., xxx.club@your-university.ac.uk
- 7) What information they will need from you for your Students' Union website and how your club will receive inquiries
- 8) What optional and mandatory administrative training your Students' Union provides for club committee members

Finally, make sure you are organised with submitting events, risk assessments and abiding by deadlines of your student union to minimise stress. This is especially relevant concerning Freshers Week as they print guides out quite early in the summer holiday (deadlines are often at the beginning of July).

With British Orienteering

British Orienteering was an invaluable source of advice and support when I was setting up my club. They are always happy to help and provide guidance to ensure that your club is set up successfully. They can also point you in the right direction for funding, equipment and event advice.

Universities affiliate their orienteering clubs with British Orienteering so that their members can run for the university at regional and national events. Other benefits include eligibility to win awards and being able to run your own events under British Orienteering insurance.

Similarly, you will only be able to enter your members at upcoming pre-entry events if they are members of British Orienteering. This is because you need their membership number when registering them for an event. Your members will need to register individually here. As a British Orienteering member, you have exclusive access to a range of discounts, from Decathlon, SportsShoes, The AA and Youth Hostel Association. Check out the full list [here](#). Your members will need to register with British Orienteering individually if they wish to receive those benefits.

To affiliate with British Orienteering for the first time, you will need to email your intention to info@britishorienteering.org.uk and have the following documents prepared:

- The Club's membership fees
- A list of club officials who are British Orienteering members, you will need at least 3 (President, Treasurer, Secretary & Safeguarding/Welfare). *The Safeguarding officer can be the same person in one of the other roles.
- A copy of the Club's constitution (find an example in the Appendix)
- A copy of the latest AGM minutes
- A signed copy of British Orienteering's Club Code Of Conduct
- Payment of £25 affiliation fee (subject to change)

The affiliation process is completed through your own British Orienteering membership, which is why it is essential to be a BOF member. If you are member of your home club or BOF generally, we can assign you to your university as a non-member. The affiliation form can be found under 'My Account' and then 'Club Affiliation'.

You can find a more detailed explanation of the affiliation process in British Orienteering's University Club Affiliation Guide [here](#).

University Club Affiliation Guide



Affiliating your club with British Orienteering

Universities affiliate their orienteering clubs with British Orienteering so their members can run for their university club at events.

The affiliations process begins in September, where your club will have 6-7 weeks to complete the required actions. A new club can be affiliated at any time of year, and will then join the other clubs in affiliating again the next September.

In this guide, there is information on the required documents for affiliation, and guidance on how to complete the affiliation process online.

There are a number of benefits to affiliating your club:

- British Orienteering Public Liability Insurance cover for registered club events

University clubs are managed by an elected student committee who work with their sports department/students' union to run their club. British Orienteering, your sports department/students' union staff and your local club are able to offer support, but the operation of your club rests with its elected club committee.

It isn't essential to have all these roles to begin with, but they cover some of the responsibilities that you will be expected to oversee as a group.

President/Club Captain

The president, or club captain, acts as the face of the committee, attending meetings with the local club and student union. They are the head of the committee, chair of meetings and manage the other positions. They ensure that the club sticks to their committed goals in the constitution. The president requires leadership ability and approachability and an ability to form strong bonds with other societies.

Coach

The coach organises and runs weekly training sessions, caters for and monitors the progression of beginners and advanced orienteers as well as consulting with the president about BUCS and other competitions. They need to be able to create fun, enjoyable training sessions, have a commitment to orienteering and enjoy helping others progress. If you are a British Orienteering member, you can find Coaching Resources [here](#).

General Secretary

The General Secretary helps keep the club running smoothly, assisting in write ups and reports for various purposes and helping the president with organising events, such as entering members, finding lifts and writing risk assessments. Organisation is key for this role as well as computer literacy and being dependable.

Treasurer

The Treasurer's duties are to assist the President and Secretary in organising trips, grants and purchase decisions. They have the responsibility to ensure that decisions are financially wise. They need to be familiar with Excel and have the ability to set up and track budgets.

Publicity Officer

The Publicity Officer is in charge of all of your club's social media and is responsible for updating them with pictures from events and advertising upcoming ones. They can also manage the events section of the club Facebook page, to make sure events are appealing. Photography skills and knowledge around platforms such as Canva, often help in this role.

Social Secretary

The social secretary is responsible for the social side of your club. They can organise weekly socials and ensure the society creates a fun, inclusive atmosphere which collaborates with other societies to do joint socials. They need to be friendly, approachable, organised and inventive.

Safeguarding / Welfare Officer

The Safeguarding officer is crucial to the club, to ensure the welfare of all members within a club. It is important that the role holder is friendly and approachable, so if there are any issues within your club, members feel comfortable to talk this committee member. This role can also take a lead on the safety side of training sessions and trips, to ensure members remain as safe as possible at all times, particularly when they are newcomers to the sport.

Club Etiquette & Values

When starting a club, it's important to create a warm and welcoming environment where members feel comfortable and supported. Think beyond training sessions by planning a mixture of social activities and trips, which help build friendships and strengthen community.

Do not forget about the mental health and wellbeing of members, and look to promote an open, supportive atmosphere. This will be important for creating an inclusive club culture that members enjoy being a part of.

Once you start discussing your idea with people and gain support for the club, you need to resolve some logistical problems and formulate your plan of action. Once you affiliate with your university, they may be able to help solve some of these problems.

Transport

Transport can be a make or break deal for your club. As an adventure sport, you will want to get out to events and more remote areas. Options can range from relying on lifts from your local club, using students' cars, public transport and hiring a minibus or hire cars from your student union. One way to figure out how important transport is for your club is to check out the maps in your area and how easy it is to get there via foot or public transport.

Financials

As an orienteering club, you will not have huge equipment costs that some sports clubs will have. However, it is important that you choose a membership price that keeps you at a positive or break-even financial balance. Consider the cost of the trips over the year, kit, map printing and fuel as well as areas to cut costs.

We charged our members £25 in our first year, but in our second year, we offered a tiered membership – full, 2nd term and social. The tiered memberships are a result of people wanting different things from our club. Second term is £10 cheaper than the full year and is aimed at people coming in for the second term, such as international students and students returning from Year Abroad or Year in Industry placements. The social membership is priced at £5, which is aimed at friends who want to join in on the social side but aren't as interested in the sport!

Grants

As a new club, grants can be a helpful way to get started financially. The Orienteering Foundation are always interested in funding a specific project if it fits their criteria. They review grant applications four times a year so make sure you time your application right! Deadlines for submission are:

- 31st March
- 30 June
- 30 September
- 31 December

See an example of our budget and grant application in the appendices to help submit a successful application of your own.

Your local club may also be able to help fund and support various projects, as well as local sports shops for discounts on equipment. Your University may have funding opportunities through their Athletic Union or Student Unions.

The most important thing once your club is set up, is to spread the word to encourage students to come and try out your sessions! There are a number of ways you can do this, such as through your local orienteering club, other societies at your university, social media and your universities fresher's fair at the start of the academic year.

Local Club

Out of everything, your relationship with your local club is one of the most important parts. Provided you establish a good relationship with them, your local club can be invaluable for all sorts of things, from lifts, maps and providing second-hand kit. Our local club, Devon, even mapped new areas for us! Get in contact with the chair and set up a meeting to discuss your plans. We consolidated our friendship with Devon by helping take in controls at events and attending their committee meetings.

Since you can be part of an open and closed club, some of our members were not only part of the University club (a closed club) but also Devon (an open club). This meant we could compete for them at Compass Sport Cup competitions, which helps strengthen the relationship.

Other Societies

As a new club, collaboration is key so get in touch with as many related societies as possible. We got in touch with Out of Doors, Scouts and Duke of Edinburgh society, Expedition society and the Athletics and Caving clubs. This happened in various ways – we knew people personally in some, others were friends of friends and we just turned up to one society's Annual General Meeting and introduced ourselves from there. Not only will they be a great source of new members and advice but also good partners for joint socials and even trips.



Social Media

As a university club, it is vital to build an online presence. This is how most of your potential members will be checking you out, to see if you are worth the membership price. British Orienteering have social media templates and imagery available for members to access [here](#). Keep an eye for a university specific media packs coming soon!

WhatsApp

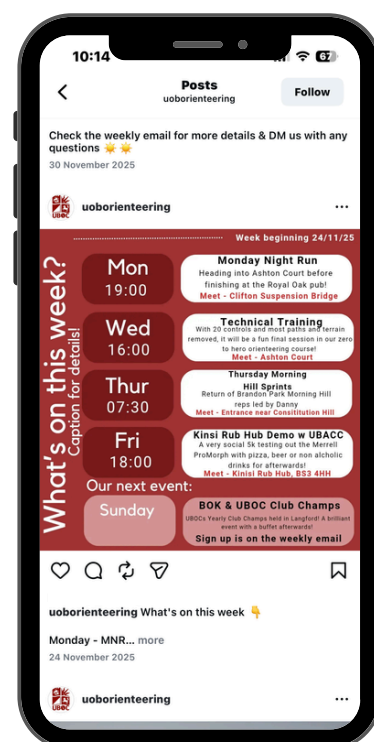
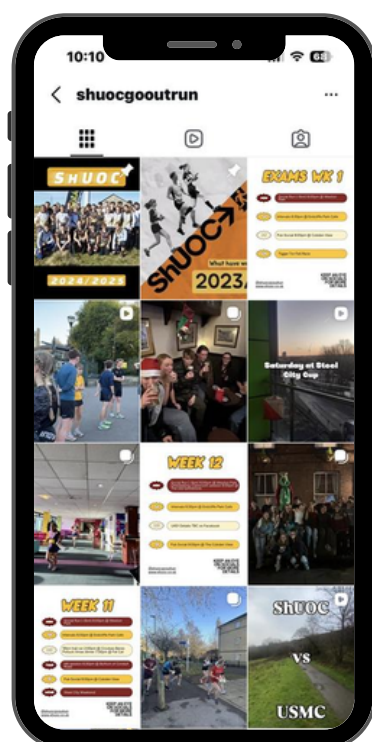
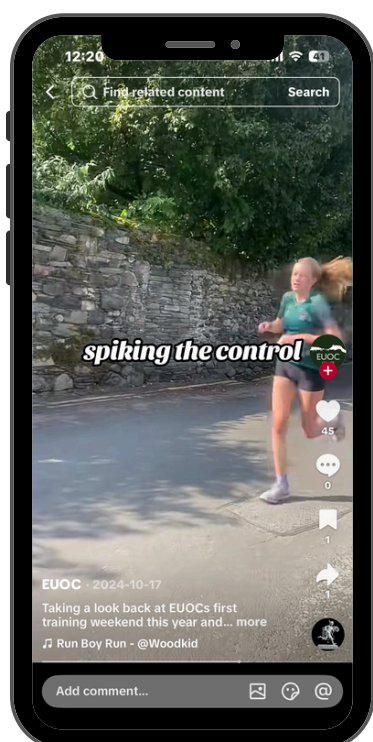
When it comes to communicating with your members on a day-to-day basis, a WhatsApp Community is a great way to keep all your groups in one place. It is easy to join via QR code or link and can be managed by your committee.

Instagram

Instagram is a fantastic way to provide a visual snapshot into what it is like being in your club. We strongly recommend building up a grid that promotes the culture of your club – be this adventurous, outdoorsy, social, relaxed, competitive or a mix!

TikTok

TikTok is a great platform to show what your club gets up to through short-form content. It is similar to reels on Instagram, so if you are already creating videos for Instagram, they can be uploaded to TikTok too. Prospective students can see your videos when interacting with university content, which increases the visibility of your club and the sport.



Social Media

Facebook page

A Facebook page is open to the public. We use this to post all our events and socials, to attract people who were not in the club and might be interested. It also acts as a great advertisement to students new to the University or member of the public who can message the page without having to know someone specific. We ended up converting three or four students into members simply by having a positive engagement with them through the page.

Facebook group

A Facebook group is usually closed, meaning it requires the administrator to approve the members coming in. As a result, everything you post will notify the members. We use the group to post training, invite them to enter big events, such as the JK and Scottish Six Day, and general information. As it is exclusive, it works excellently as a hub for the club, to give your members a place where they can ask questions, post and comment, generally providing a friendly, relaxed environment.

E-Newsletter

Email newsletters are a great way to communicate the weekly happenings such as upcoming events, race reports, photos and other interesting Orienteering related articles. It's also a good second channel to push stash or kit advertisements, aside from social media.

Fresher's Fair

Fresher's Fair is the perfect marketing opportunity for your club. Make sure you are aware of event deadlines from your student or athletics union, as they often have a printed booklet full of Fresher's events that gets made very early in the summer holidays.

We ran four events during our first Fresher's week: two social runs, one social event and one Come And Try It-structured event – this means offering courses with a range of difficulty on a relatively easy map and providing coaching at the beginning. Something we learnt was to avoid placing your event at the same time as a similar society, such as a jogging society or Athletics club!

It is essential that you have a plan going into Fresher's week, with everyone on your committee understanding what will happen. Write up a schedule for the week early on so that you can work around the committee's other commitments and make sure no one person is left on their own to run any of your events.



The Fresher's stall needs to be eye-catching and honestly represent your club. Here are three examples of Orienteering flyers that you can hand out on your stall. British Orienteering website also has [marketing materials](#). Other things to include on your stall could be shirts, equipment, control flags, maps and a series of Orienteering-related videos, either your own or pulled from YouTube.

British Orienteering have also recently created an 'Orienteering at Universities' leaflet for clubs to use when looking to work with universities. This could also work as part of marketing materials for your university clubs. You can find this [here](#).

Equipment

Our only real investment in equipment was flags and compasses, as these were the only necessary items for training. SI sticks can usually be hired at events. You can contact your local club to see if they will lend equipment or look at [Decathlon](#) to purchase this yourself and access a discount if you are a British Orienteering member.

Bishop Sports also have some equipment which could be suitable for your training needs, such as kites and checkpoint punches.

Flags: We bought 15x15cm flags from [Davies Sports](#).

Compasses: We bought 15 baseplate compasses for our beginner orienteers. For our BUCS competitors, we mass bought Moscow thumb compasses at the students' expenses.

Kit

Your shirts are what makes your club stand out in Freshers' week, local and national events. [Bryzos](#) was our chosen shirt producer, simply for their high-quality shirts and great customer service. There's also [Trimtex](#), [Scimitar](#) and [NoName](#) as well, all of which offer you the ability to customize your designs.

As you approach your first year, I highly recommend you start with a plan for the year. This will help ensure that there is something on offer for members across the year and give your committee something to work towards and plan around.

Include regional events you plan to attend, training sessions, socials and weekend trips. Other important dates for you to consider are the British Universities Championships (BUCS) and the English Universities Cup, both of which are on the [British Orienteering website](#).

Posting your calendar onto your social media may also attract new students along to your event, as well as maximise the turn-out from your current members.

Training

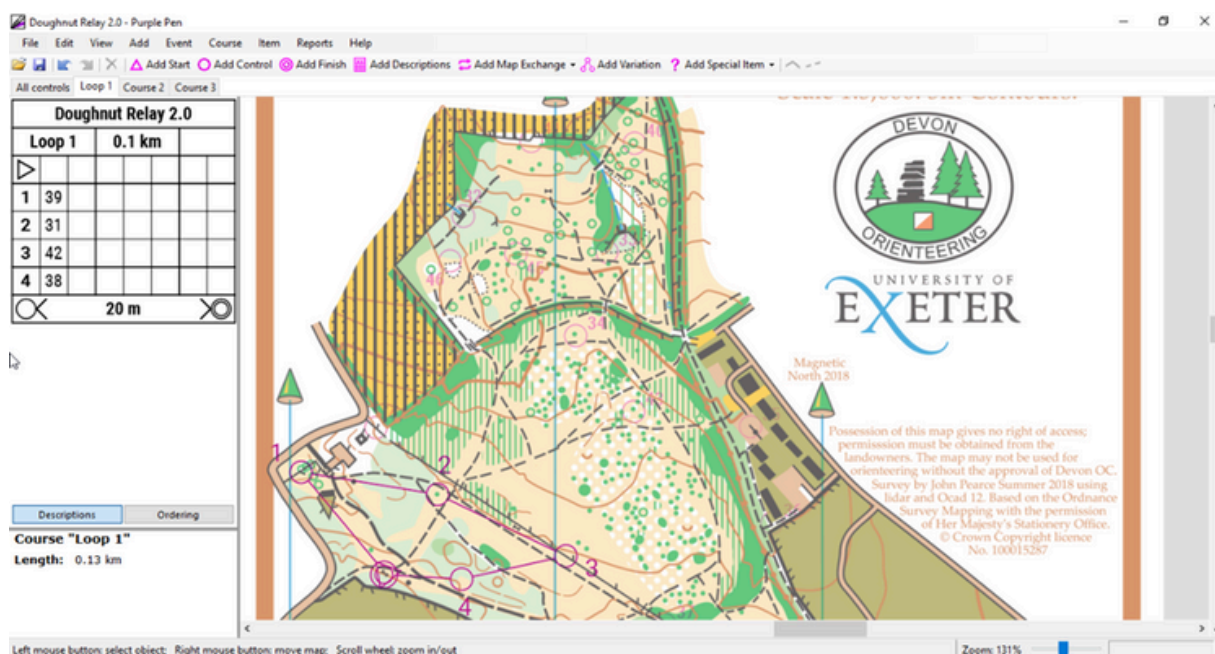
Identify the different levels of experience in your club and work from there. OROX was full of beginners at first but we had to slowly adapt our sessions as they gained more experience. There are plenty of training exercises in *Compass Sport* magazines and on the [British Orienteering website](#) or you can talk to your local club for ideas.

We centred training around three different skills: compass, map and physical.

We also used PurplePen, which is a free software that can draw on multiple courses, white out areas (great for compass exercises) and pretty much anything you'd want to do with a PDF map.

Make the most of all resources around you that are available, the use of MapRun could also be helpful for club training as it reduces the amount of equipment required.

Look to host joint training sessions with other clubs/societies such as weekly runs with the Athletics Club for example. This builds friendships with other clubs and ultimately spreads the word of Orienteering as a club.



Maps

It's recommended that you reach out to your local club about map access, as a lot of maps will have land access permissions or certain conditions around its usage tied to it. However, that being said, a quick search of "Devon Orienteering maps" was often surprisingly fruitful and helped us discover maps that Devon had forgotten about!

University Competitions

Once you have your club off the ground, and members that can attend events and competitions, it would be worth taking a look at the British Orienteering website and through the below to see the opportunities university students have.

You can find information on the university specific competitions that students can participate in [here](#), on the British Orienteering website. This section of the website is regularly updated to match the most up to date information and competition details. A list below also summarises.

BUCS

The BUCS Orienteering weekend consists of a two-day major championship. It offers male and female championships, along with relay championships. The event caters for competitors of all abilities with different lengths and difficulty courses offered. This means anyone can participate, whether you are an experienced orienteer or just started the sport!

English Universities

The English Universities weekend brings together a number of orienteering universities from around England to compete. This competition is held and organised by an English university each year.

Scottish Universities

The Scottish Universities weekend brings together a number of orienteering universities from around Scotland to compete. This competition is held and organised by a Scottish university each year.

Risk Assessments

To carry out an event, you need to submit a risk assessment for your event to your university. This is so it is covered by the university insurance, means you can claim expenses caused by the event, create tickets and show the event on the university website.

Each student union will have a different risk assessment template that they accept, so you will need to check your student union for this.

See below for an example of a risk assessment we would submit for a Devon-run event. Other British Orienteering risk assessment documents are [here](#) and [here](#).

What is the Hazard?	Who is at Risk?	Risk of harm being caused to the participants			List the measures already in place to reduce risk of harm	Is the risk adequately controlled, yes/no?	If yes, the activity can proceed. If no, then list the additional measures to be implemented to control the risk. (If no additional measures can be implemented then the activity cannot proceed).	Is risk adequately controlled yes/no?
		Low	Medium	High				
Students tripping and injuring themselves	Everyone	X			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The leaders will try to run on the paths most likely to be used to make sure it is clear of debris The leaders will take phones in case of emergency 	yes	•	
Students pulling muscles/harming themselves while running	Everyone	X			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The leaders will ensure everyone is wearing the correct gear (trainers etc) for the run. The leaders will take phones in case of emergency Event is run by external organisers, who will have official first aid provided and insurance 	yes	•	
Students get lost	Inexperienced Participants	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pair inexperienced participant with an experienced committee member Borders of map are marked clearly and in a residential zone with phone signal Ensure inexperienced participants have phone number of a committee member, and they bring it with them Keep head-count of participants and mark off list before and after riding on public transport to and from the event Ensure there is back-up money to cover students who forgot money 	yes	•	

Club Constitution

The club constitution is required to affiliate with British Orienteering and often by the University when you are registered your club as an official society.

- See [here](#) for an example of OROX's club constitution
- A sample constitution is [here](#)

Successful University Affiliation Bid

To affiliate with your university, you usually have to submit an application form answering their set questions. See [here](#) for the application we successfully submitted to our university.

Orienteering foundation Bid

Orienteering Foundation have specific requirements and criteria that you must meet before they consider accepting your grant application. Pay attention to the criteria they look for and think carefully about how you meet them.

See [here](#) for our submitted budget and application to help guide your application.