

High-pressure religious groups on campus

*a guide to help you
make an informed choice*

What are high-pressure religious groups?

It's a good feeling to feel wanted. And joining a group can be a great way of making new friends. Now that you're at university, you'll find yourself invited to spend your time with lots of societies and groups of all kinds.

Among these societies and groups you'll find numerous religious or faith groups. Some are well organised and some are very informal. Some rely on free choice for joining, while others use persistent recruiting efforts to win you over.

Choosing a religious or faith group while you're at QMUL can be one of the most important decisions in your life. In general we recommend the faith societies which are affiliated (and therefore somewhat accountable) to the Students' Union, but we'd also like to offer you some information to help you make an informed, free choice about other groups.

To put it bluntly, some of these groups can be harmful. They may:

- Be dishonest about their true nature.
- Demand much more of your time than you expected.
- Cost you a lot of money.
- Harm your other relationships.
- Make you emotionally dependent on them.

How can I identify these groups?

Listing names isn't so simple since the names of some groups change from time to time. However, you can usually identify these groups by what they do. Check out the group's claims and responses to you. If you can answer "yes" to any three of these statements, you might like to reconsider your involvement.

- The group claims to have all the answers to your problems.
- You are asked to recruit other new members soon after joining.
- The group encourages you to put their meetings and activities before all other commitments, including your studies.
- The group speaks in a derogatory way about your past religious affiliation.
- You are told that your parents and friends are not able to understand and help you with religious matters.
- Doubts and questions are regarded as signs of a weak faith. You are shunned if you persist with these questions.
- Leadership of the group is mostly male, and males in general are believed to have superior rights and abilities to females.
- You are invited on a retreat with the group, but they can't give you many details of the purpose or activities before you go.

You are most vulnerable to high-pressure groups when

- You are feeling lonely or homesick.
- You are feeling hurt or depressed.
- You are feeling at a loose end or without a purpose in life.
- You are feeling under pressure academically or financially.

Remember, these feelings and reactions are common among students. They can all be handled and overcome. They can, however, get you seriously down if you ignore them, and they can be an open invitation to recruiters.

How to deal with high-pressure groups

- Get another opinion from someone you trust outside the group: a friend, parent, tutor, advisor, lecturer, advisor, counsellor or chaplain.
- Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself.
- Ask questions. Be curious. Be sceptical.
- Learn to say a polite, 'No, thanks.' More than once, if necessary.
- Examine yourself — are you especially vulnerable right now?
- Think carefully before you go to any meetings or give any money.
- Check it out. Are you getting a clear picture? Or is it a bit odd?

And never give your address or phone number to anyone unless you are sure of who they are and what the purpose is. Otherwise you can expect calls and visits you may not want. Being cautious and careful is not being rude.

Where you can get help

INFORM is an independent charity, based within the Department of Sociology at the LSE, University of London, which gives objective information and reliable advice about new religious movements and alternative spiritualities.

tel: 020 7955 7654

email: inform@lse.ac.uk

www.inform.ac

If you, or others known to you, are having problems with any religious group, or want more information, or just want to talk about these things with someone with experience and understanding, there are people at QMUL who can help:

Revd Jenny Petersen
St Benet's Chaplaincy
327a Mile End Road
London E1 4NT
tel: 020 7882 3179
email: stbenets@qmul.ac.uk
www.faith.qmul.ac.uk

QMUL Advice & Counselling
Ground Floor
Geography Building
tel: 020 7882 8717
www.welfare.qmul.ac.uk