

Scripture Union

Sarah Emerson (Student Leader 2015-16)

Sarah Emerson, our Student Leader 2015-16, reflects on what SU got up to during the last academic year.

Many of my fondest memories are from Scripture Union over the past seven years. As I look back with nostalgia over my time at Banbridge Academy, I am awed at just how much SU has impacted me. I am so thankful for the lasting friendships that I have found, the good times that I've experienced, and most notably, the God that I have come to know, through Jesus Christ.

Scripture Union is one the largest extracurricular activities in school, with around 120 members attending our lunchtime gatherings. As a student-led initiative, it excites me that young people are given the opportunity to lead and to serve in so many different ways, under the patient guidance and wisdom of Mr Clarke.

Our year kick-started with the SU Weekend, held at Castlewellan Castle. As tradition demands, we had a lot of banter and only a little sleep. Upon arrival, we enjoyed some very loud icebreakers, because what better way is there to get to know one another than screaming? On Saturday afternoon, mildly competitive games of capture the flag took place on the castle grounds, and if you were to overlook the maze, you would see a Mexican hat bobbing through the bushes, a colourful clown, and other creative characters, for we were playing 'hunt the leader'. Most managed to find all of the unmissable targets, whilst getting lost themselves, and legend has it that some pupils are still roaming around the maze to this day.

Saturday night got messy with 'Risk it for a biscuit,' as teams went head to head in the battle to earn the most Rich Teas and Digestives. We all know that Christians don't like to gamble, but it was innocent enough to bet seventy biscuits that Mr Beacom could successfully peel - and eat - a banana using his feet, before any of his other competitors. We also saw Miriam Porter fit what seemed like hundreds of marshmallows in her mouth while



mumbling 'Chubby bunnies,' and heard interesting on-the-spot monologues on everything from 'the nature of socks' to 'the superiority of yellow.' Peter Kennedy impersonated Mrs Morrison better than Mrs Morrison impersonates Mrs Morrison, while Beth Matson and Niall McCarter really did 'Shake it off' in an unforgettable lip-sync showdown.

Aside from the fun and games, though, our weekend was extremely memorable because of what we heard about Jesus. Past teacher, trainee minister, Jamie Maguire was our speaker this year, teaching on the theme of 'Union with Christ.' We learned what it means for us to be joined to Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection, and how this changes everything. Sharing in Christ's faultless life, we too are considered guiltless; connected to Jesus in his death, our old selves were crucified and plunged into the grave; and raised with him to new life, we shall always live in the presence of our God. We also enjoyed times of praise, led by Joanna and the band, as well as hearing some great seminars by pupils and teachers alike. As the saying goes, time flies when you're having fun, and before we knew it, we were packed up and dozing on the bus journey home.

Our main meetings take place every

Thursday lunchtime, where we gather together in the Lecture Theatre to sing and to sit under Bible teaching. Usually a visiting speaker will come to tell us about Jesus, what he has done for us, and how this great news affects our lives. Last year, we covered a wide array of topics, as well as having occasional praise weeks. We began with a 'Back to basics' series on who God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are. We looked at 'Loving the Church' and 'Loving the world,' and on 'Throwback Thursday,' some past pupils returned for an interview panel. We heard about 'Joy now,' and 'Joy forever,' and journeyed through a series on the book of Ephesians. For a few weeks, 'Context' was key in discovering what the most well known Bible verses actually mean, and coming up to exams it was only fitting to hear how to deal with being 'Crazy busy.'

Throughout the week, you could also be part of a small group meeting at lunchtime. In the comfort of a close knit group, we asked and answered questions about what it is to follow Jesus as his disciples. Laura Graham and Jayne Johnston prepared excellent group discussion material, and effectively trained the small group leaders to take their own groups.

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On Monday to Thursday mornings, the early birds who were in school before registration met for 'Spark,' our prayer meeting. It was a really special time as Emma Johnston taught us about prayer, reminded us of things to pray for and then we simply talked to 'Our Father in heaven,' who delights in hearing His children speak to Him.

the Word like miners searching for gold. Only we wanted to discover a far greater treasure - Jesus. This year, we walked through the book of Philippians, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, which proved enormously beneficial as we discussed and learned from one another about what the text was teaching us. In our study we learned

(MANDate...get it?) for manhood as well. However, all was not lost, for they then lifted their eyes upward to look at the only perfect man, the God-man, Jesus Christ, who lived a faultless life on our behalf, died a sacrificial death in our place and rose again in victory for our rescue.

Despite the apparent success of Guys' Group, an unbiased judgment must conclude that it lived in the shadow of Girls' Group, which was simply unparalleled. As you can probably guess, the girls met on the third Wednesday of each month. Together, we looked at topics like singleness and dating, suffering and self harm, gossip and godliness; looking to the Prince who journeyed from heaven to earth in loving pursuit of his bride, hoping in the Physician who was wounded to heal our brokenness, and speaking of the Word who silences our gossip with his goodness, to put a new song in our mouths.

The final week of the month, everyone came together again for 'Go.' Led by Rachael Gamble, the outreach group met to discuss how they can intentionally love others and share the message of Jesus with those around them. We heard from Henryk Podsiadly, the president of a mission organisation called the Joy Foundation, who shared about his work in Poland. 'Go' also got practical, making Christmas gifts and preparing for what would take place during Outreach week, as well as other events.

Outreach week took place in November, and what a busy week we had. SU had the privilege of taking the morning assemblies in school, which was a great chance to share with our classmates about the acceptance that we have found in Christ. Also, we set up 'cinema' and played the movie 'Big Hero 6' during lunchtimes, providing popcorn that disappeared a lot quicker than expected. We got baking and provided the teachers with lots of desserts in the staff room, which apparently went down a treat. Grace Generation Church kindly opened up 'Bean There' for us, which is just down the road from school and on Friday afternoon we held an acoustic cafe, with live music and



If you happen to be strolling along the History corridor on a Friday morning, you'll find your stomach growling and your mouth watering, as the smell of pancakes and toast (and maybe even croissants) reaches your nostrils. That's because our famous 'Tea and Toast' is taking place, and, well, you guessed it, there's tea, and toast, and coffee too. So whether you missed breakfast, find yourself frozen after the walk to school, need the caffeine boost at the end of a long week, or are just hungry for company, pop down to Mr Clarke's room before 9am. Oh, and did I mention the food is free?

This year we decided to introduce some new after-school programmes to the SU calendar. Bible Study took place on the first Wednesday of every month, where we met to open the Book for ourselves, the book that God himself has written. Gathered 'round in a circle, with pens in hands, Bibles on knees, and armed with tea and biscuits, we were ready for business - to dig into

what it was to "rejoice in the Lord", regardless of one's circumstances, and the fact that Paul gladly wrote such an instruction whilst chained up in prison gives it a lot of weight.

The second Wednesday of the month, the budding gentlemen of our SU community assembled for Guys' Group. As implied in the name, Guys' Group operated under a strict 'no girls policy' and so became quite the object of our curiosity. I think we all wanted to know - what actually was going on in Guys' Group? Xbox? Weightlifting? Jewellery making? Quite the contrary, I believe. Left in the capable hands of Matty Burke, the 'dudes' discussed manhood. They broke down the world's perception of what a 'real man' is (think about that actor in that chick flick), allowing the Creator of man to instead define what masculinity should look like. They realised that not only do they fall short of this unrealistic secular stereotype, but they all fail at meeting the impossible biblical mandate

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good food.

Throughout the year, SU held various events that we encouraged our peers to come along to. Remembering that God invented fun and gave it to us as a good gift, we saw it fit to enjoy ourselves! It was habit to gorge ourselves on Dominos, whether that was at our 'Pizza and praise' night, the Social, or the Christmas party, where we topped off the festivities by watching Elf, playing games and singing carols, dressed in the appropriate Christmas jumper attire, of course. And who can forget the legendary SU formal? After getting 'all dolled up,' we sat down to dinner at the Seagoe Hotel and then partied the night away. Even the teachers were caught busting some moves on the dance floor, and I can tell you, that was quite a sight to behold.

Knowing that our God is a generous God, who has given us Himself and

all good things, we wanted to be a generous people. Having raised money from the events that we held, we decided to donate to four charities over the year, to support the amazing work that they do locally and globally. We had the privilege of giving to The International Justice Mission, AsiaLink, The Big House, and Reach Counselling NI. You can find out about these organisations and what they do by searching online.

It was great to see members of Senior SU get involved with Junior SU this year. Emily Middleton put together a team that helped out with the juniors. They journeyed down to the JSU weekend, to get to know the first to third years, and then were a constant presence at the JSU meetings on Tuesday lunchtimes, to further build relationships with them. They put together a JSU band for the first time, helping them to practice, ran the weekly JSU prayer meeting, and

started up a Bible study for the younger members of our SU community. The juniors loved getting to learn from and spend time with older Christian students, whom they wouldn't have otherwise come into contact with.

This year also saw the launch of our website and I am enormously grateful to Hannah Emerson for creating banbacsu.com. Online, you can find out all about SU and what's happening throughout the year, listen to any talks you might have missed and read blog posts by your peers and teachers.

I shall miss SU greatly, as it has been like a home and a family to me for an era. Though I leave, I do not walk away empty-handed. Through Scripture Union, I have gained a full and forever joy found in Jesus, the crucified, risen and reigning Rescuer. That glad news has, and I hope ever will be, SU's firm foundation and beautiful focus.



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