

University of Hertfordshire Students' Union QSU verification report

Verified by Oliver Schofield

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Strategy – Very Good

The students' union strategy is the approach that it takes to translate its vision and values into actions. It outlines how these actions are prioritised and their intended impact.

A. The union has a published strategy that is aligned to the needs of its members and is linked to the current context in which the union operates. The union's members are aware of the plan.

Verifier analysis:

Hertfordshire Students' Union (HSU) has a published strategic plan 2020 - 2023, using its charitable objectives as a starting point for their activities and vision. The Union have worked hard over the past few years to revisit their core purpose and focus on membership engagement at the core of their activities. Students, staff, Trustees and Officers were at the core of developing the HSU strategy. Students interviewed had significant amounts of trust in the SU and felt that the strategic plan aligned with their own priorities. They felt that the SU Officers had enough influence in order to change priorities and this was supported by the SU Officers who felt they were able to frame their own ideas within the strategic direction of the Union.

B. The union has also identified its overall direction, often in the form of a vision. The union has a statement that outlines its fundamental beliefs, normally as a set of values. These values are considered when plans are created and the union is able to evidence the translation of these values into its activities. It is clear how the vision and values have been developed.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has a vision which is to help students love life at Herts, complimenting the University strategy to help enhance the student experience for students. The values within the Union are well known amongst members and Union staff and student members felt that the Union embodied these values in its practices. The emphasis on research and understanding student satisfaction and engagement within the Union shows the Union is committed to assessing whether the organisation is achieving its vision amongst members. Union services actively rely on volunteers ensuring that the Union is student-led. The strong democratic and representation structures allow for the Union to be transparent in its delivery and also allows for the Union to be a true representation of the student voice.

C. In addition to a strategy, the union has an additional document or series of documents that detail exactly what it plans to do over a fixed time period.

These documents will often take the form of an operating or business plan. The operating plan has definite links to the overall strategy.

Verifier analysis:

The Union's strategy outlines four strategic themes each with various KPIs that they have developed to measure their success. The KPIs are aspirational three-year goals which are supported with yearly objectives written as departmental operating plans. The departmental operating plans allow services to think about how they contribute to the organisational objectives and the strategic priorities for the Union. The plans are located on a Trello-board for Union staff to view and each line manager is responsible for delegating work as part of their plans to the relevant team members.

D. The union can demonstrate that the majority of its strategic objectives are consistent with the context of the union and therefore the specific needs of its members. Internal research mechanisms are used to collect this information.

Verifier analysis:

HSU strategy was developed through extensive research and various consultations with students, the University, the Board of Trustees and a number of workshops with Union Officers and staff. An example of research that the Union used when considering students' needs was the OfS sponsored Value for Money research which helped build employability into the Student Communities strand of their strategy as well as the need for transparency, a key component of the Student Voice strategic theme.

E. The union is able to demonstrate an understanding of its current capacity and how this may need to be developed to meet the needs of future members. The union can show that it has also considered the needs of future members.

Verifier analysis:

HSU has shown that it understands its current capacity and knows where it needs to develop in the future. Over the past few years the Union recognised that it was commercially struggling, and it was limiting the work that could be done in its membership engagement areas. As a result, the Union overhauled its approach, limited the commercial services and re-aligned its focus on its core areas around student voice, student activities and student advice, which in turn mostly help the Union to achieve its vision. At present, the Union is also re-assessing its commercial space post-pandemic to consider how space can be more used to support and enable student development. The Union is focussed on delivering the intended outcomes from the transformation project to re-establish its core purpose before taking on new projects or expanding its portfolio. During staff interviews, staff were also aware of external factors affecting their students e.g., less funding, more students commuting and less employment for students. The Union should start to think about how these can be factored into the strategic plan, thinking ahead to what a student in 2023 may need and the role of a Union.

F. The overall strategy is understood by the union's elected officers, staff, members and stakeholders and has been developed in partnership with all of these groups. These groups feel that they have been consulted in developing the plan and can describe how they are/were involved in developing the strategy.

Verifier analysis:

The strategic plan is understood by all stakeholders. Union staff were able to recall many of the values and also described their individual targets as part of the plan. SU Officers felt that their ideas fitted into many aspects of the plan, though also felt that they were able to concentrate on priorities outside of the plan. Students interviewed were able to recall many of the activities within the plan and also felt some alignment to the values listed. Key institutional staff felt that the strategic plan complemented the University's vision. All stakeholders were consulted in the plan through the mechanisms listed in (d).

G. The union can demonstrate that its plan sets out the union's priorities. The plan is generally holistic, covering all of the union's main activities including what will enable the union to deliver this strategy and develop for the future, such as resource/or people planning, maintaining health and wellbeing and digital capacity.

Verifier analysis:

The strategic plan focuses on four key themes: student wellbeing and success, student insight and voice, student communities and also the students' union. The plan sets out the aspirational goals in each of these areas and the associated activities through the form of KPIs. The Union could develop the plan by thinking about its key enablers to drive forwards some of the targets, e.g. funding, people, use of technology. The Union may wish to incorporate these into the plan or think about where investment and resource may be needed to help the Union in delivering on the plan.

Relationships and Partnerships – Excellent

Building and maintaining relationships and partnerships is an important aspect of the governance, leadership and management of students' unions. A union has to have a strong relationship with all of its members to ensure it is fully democratic and can represent them all. Relationships and partnerships with societies, the parent institution, other unions, NUS, other affiliated bodies and the local community ensure that a union can deliver a wide range of positive impacts to its members.

A. The central importance to the union of its relationships and connections with its members is apparent and implicit through everything the union does. The union can demonstrate that it invests in constantly improving these links, with clear decisions being made about allocating resources to forming relationships with unengaged members and deepening relationships with engaged members. There are specific strategies to form relationships with under-represented groups. As a result of this work, the union has built strong relationships across its entire membership and members feel an affinity to the union.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has a strong relationship with its engaged members within the Union. It was clear from the interviews that students saw the Union as the middle ground between the University and the students and felt that the Union had a more approachable presence for students to raise concerns and seek advice. The Union has invested heavily in its research and insights team and associated activities in order to understand its members and their needs.

The Union acknowledges they need to reach out more to their commuters and home students now they have improved their engagement with international students. Each service has KPIs related to its membership engagement and data is shared across teams to help with future planning. More explicit references of how services will engage underrepresented groups would be beneficial for the Union.

B. The union always considers how key stakeholders perceive it, and how this perception is managed – this may take the form of a written reputation management strategy. As a result, there is a strong and beneficial relationship or partnership between the union and some or all of its stakeholders. There are a number of clear synergies between the union and its key stakeholders.

Verifier analysis:

The Union is aware of how it is perceived by its stakeholders and wants to be seen a positive force which accurately represents and meets the needs of its students. Interviews with Union staff and SU Officers were aligned to the responses when interviewing key institutional staff. Both parties agreed that the relationship has improved and that the Union is a respected body for providing rich and detailed insight into student perceptions and feelings. The Union may wish to consider a written reputation management strategy as a way of mitigating future risks. There were clear synergies across the University and the Union, recognising that international student engagement with the Union is high but further work is needed to re-engage home students, as well as those on placements and commuting. The Union and the University share similar challenges and are able to complement one another's work.

C. The union has proactively built and maintained strong relationships or partnerships (including digitally) with all of its stakeholders which provides benefits to its members. This is reinforced by effective networking beyond the student movement – the union has developed strong and highly beneficial relationships with other, non-stakeholder organisations. As a result, there are numerous examples of partnerships that have provided real and tangible benefits to the union's members.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has built strong relationships with many stakeholders to benefit its members. For example, the Advice and Support service has built relationships with several external organisations (e.g. Trussell Trust, Samaritans, CASH Clinic etc) to provide better signposting of advice and more services for Herts students. The Activities Team have developed good relationships with others to provide funding opportunities to student groups as well as providing space for student activities. Volunteering groups have good relationships with local charities and these provide resources and support to volunteers involved with RAG. Internally, the Student Voice team have developed strong relationships with senior institution staff to represent student feedback and advise on solutions to issues raised by students.

D. Internal relationships between departments and between staff and officers are strong, resulting in significant inter-working and demonstrable synergies.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has strong departments and there is good communication across teams and with the SU Officers. SU Officers felt supported in their roles to deliver their key priorities and line managers saw their roles as supporting Officers to help them manage their priorities and make them more realistic and achievable within the operating model. Communication across teams takes place during all staff meetings, inter-team meetings and informally through staff socials. There has been examples of the insight and research team sharing student feedback and data with others as an attempt to influence departmental planning and how others engage with students. It felt that some teams were more suited or forthcoming to sharing their knowledge and best practice, therefore the Union could look at ways in which inter-department working can be facilitated through more formal mechanisms such as strategic goals.

E. The union is able to demonstrate that the institution's plans have been taken into consideration during the union's own planning process.

Verifier analysis:

The Union recognises itself as an independent organisation in order to serve the needs of its members by holding the university to account and representing student needs. Having said that, the Union understands the context in which it operates and tries to complement the University's aims and objectives. HSU has a central role in providing a positive student experience for students at University and is recognised by the institution for providing opportunities for students to develop their skills and take on new roles. The Union considered the institutions own strategic plan when developing their own strategic plan and through the interviews are aware of the strategic direction of the University post-Covid. The Union recognises that the University is preparing for an on-going blended delivery and the Union will ensure that they are still fully able to represent the needs of its members in this model.

F. The union can engage with the institution using a variety of approaches and tactics on issues of interest to students and the partnership remain strong and equitable.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has a good relationship with the University which manifests itself in many different ways. Union Officers and staff are embedded into key University meetings where they are able to share student feedback and influence decision making. There is an open relationship between the senior management team in the University and the Officers and the Chief Executive. Institution staff provide Officer mentoring which helps to develop open communication across the two organisations. The SU Officers felt that they were able to challenge the University in a constructive way and that the University welcomed this.

Governance

A new Charity Governance Code has been developed for the charity sector, created to help charities and their trustees develop high standards of governance.

Your governance submission was very thorough, and we hope the self-reflection tool was useful in highlighting where you might improve. It is recommended that you refer to the Governance Peer Review Scheme [<https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/ud/governance-peer-review-scheme>] for a more in depth support in SU governance utilising the SU Governance Code.

Democracy -Excellent

The principle of democracy is fundamental to all students' unions and is enshrined in the 1994 Education Act. When evaluating democracy in the union, auditors will consider inclusiveness, student control, considered judgement, transparency and efficiency.

A. The union can demonstrate that it is established as a democratic organisation that fundamentally exists to represent the opinions, and serve the needs, of its members. As a result, members are at the heart of the union and the democratic principles of inclusiveness, student leadership, considered judgement and transparency are fundamental to everything the union does.

Verifier analysis:

The Union is fundamentally democratic. Members were consulted in the development of the strategic priorities for the union. The elected Officers are aware of their members views and their role to adequately represent the wider student body. Through the interviews it was clear that the union is inclusive, trying to better understand engagement from its under-represented groups through its extensive investment in research. Through Student Council, Student Reps, Student Community Organisers and the Officers there are ample opportunities for students to give their opinion and influence the work of the union. Student voice is embedded into the organisation at every level. There is student representation on the Board of Trustees and Union staff work with Officers to implement their ideas. The Union is also starting to make use of research across teams to inform and help Union staff to develop their ideas taking into account the views of students.

B. The union has put in place a number of effective initiatives to ensure that members from under-represented groups become engaged in union elections, decision-making and working on issues that interest them. As a result, the candidates and electorate at the most recent election, the makeup of those who participate in the decision-making of the organisation and those who enact the union's decisions, reflect the diversity of the union's membership.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has collected data about which students from under-represented groups are becoming engaged in Union democracy (e.g. international students, postgraduate students) and have recently had a diverse range of students stand in elections and take on student leader roles in the Union. In order to develop in this area, the Union now needs to consider how it can analyse this engagement and also look for strategies to encourage other groups to participate in Union democracy. The Union is very aware of its engaged students and wants to ensure that the Union isn't overly representing one group when making institutional decisions or relaying general student feedback.

C. Students are able to appropriately determine the political, financial and strategic direction of the union. In each of these three areas, members are enabled to participate in identifying problems, analysing options, selecting solutions and implementing their decision. Furthermore, the union can evidence that the decisions made by members are acted on and realised in a timely way.

Verifier analysis:

Students are able to determine the political, financial and strategic direction of the Union in different ways. The best way for students to do this is through standing in an election to be a SU Officer. SU Officers are able to influence the strategic direction of the SU by working with Union staff to implement their manifestos. They are also a member of the Board of Trustees and therefore have an overview of the direction of the Union. In addition, general students can also influence the Union through attending Student Council, standing as a Student Rep or being appointed as a Student Trustee for the Union. Through Student Council the Union was able to make changes to the environmental policy, create more networks for students, as well as champion wellbeing within societies.

D. Information about the union's democratic decision-making process is accessible, relevant and timely to ensure that members can contribute to the union's decision-making and implementation processes in an informed way. Members are therefore able to make considered judgements when voting in elections and making decisions. The union is able to demonstrate that it enables members to consider the views of other members before making a decision.

Verifier analysis:

Information about the Union's decision-making process is accessible on the web so that students are well informed and can make better decisions. There is also a student guide outlining how students can make the most of Student Council. Student Council minutes are uploaded to the web and the link is accessible for the wider student body to join. When holding elections, candidates have to upload their manifestos in which students can see the priorities presented from each different candidate. Students interviewed felt that they had enough information to make informed decisions when voting in elections and attending meetings. SU Officers use Student Council and other platforms to seek feedback on key issues and to help make decisions on priorities. Herts SU also ask students during the elections process to identify their priority issues which can be passed on to successful candidates to consider.

E. The union's members feels that they fully understand how to participate in union democracy, including but not limited to, voting, standing for election and submitting a proposal to be considered by the membership. Those who choose to participate are trained and supported through the process to understand both the terms and consequences of their participation. Members are able to scrutinise the actions of the union and its elected officers through clear communications and a process for members to raise their objections if they don't feel represented.

Verifier analysis:

Students interviewed were able to describe the various ways in which students are able to participate in union democracy, e.g. Student Council, through student representatives and talking with the elected officers. They felt confident that there was good advertising of the roles throughout the Union and that students are well-informed should they wish to take a formal role such as an SU Officer or Student Rep. The Union has good engagement with its Officer elections in terms of both the number of candidates and also the number of votes. Students interviewed felt supported in their roles through receiving training, access to staff and Officer support as well as having networks across peers. Individuals felt that Student Council was a good place for students to scrutinise the work of the Union and the Officers as it was a place to have healthy debate and raise any concerns if needed.

F. Members have options to participate in the union's democracy in a number of ways, including digitally, in order to maximise the diversity of those willing and able to contribute to the development of the union and its work.

Verifier analysis:

There are various ways in which students can participate in the Union's democracy, e.g. Student Council, standing in an election or taking up a role in a Student Leader position. During the pandemic, Student Council meetings have been able to take place online and have seen very good engagement levels with an average of 100 students attending these meetings. During the meetings, students are able to scrutinise the work of the Union as well as find out key updates from the Union Officers. The Union is keen to promote the SU Officer elections to students as this is a good way for students to really influence the strategic direction that the Union takes. In addition, the Union has a strong Student Rep community who are privy to Union developments and have opportunities to hold Officers to account regarding their work.

G. The union can evidence developmental or educational impacts of students participating in its democracy.

Verifier analysis:

Through students participating in the Union's democratic structures the Union and the University have a more engaged student population who are passionate about their education and their overall student experience. The Union have been able to develop a Student Leaders Development Programme to provide additional training and support to engaged students. Democratic structures have also allowed the Union to sense-check on student feelings during the pandemic and have also helped to influence policy and decisions, e.g. environmental policy.

People - Excellent

People are fundamental to a students' union's ability to deliver its activities. This section considers how a union motivates, manages, develops and engages with people to ensure they can contribute fully to the union. The people considered in this section of the audit process are elected officers, career staff, student staff and volunteers working in the union.

A. The development and allocation of people resources is a fundamental component of the union's planning. The union has a culture that welcomes continuous learning and development of all staff equally. There are development opportunities at all levels and all staff actively encouraged to develop their skills and knowledge.

Verifier analysis:

The Union invests a significant amount of funding into people development and has invested in its staffing structures to deliver its commitment to membership engagement activities. The Union promotes continuous learning and development across its workforce offering line manager training, staff coaching, offering study leave and providing training opportunities to all. Staff interviewed were able to describe some of the learning and development activities they have undertaken and felt they have had lots of professional development over the past couple of years.

B. The expenditure on staffing in its entirety is reported through governance structures and may also be explained to other stakeholders.

Verifier analysis:

The Board of Trustees have oversight on the Union's expenditure of staffing and this is documented.

C. Improvements brought about by investments in staff training and development are routinely explained and linked to the achievement of strategic objectives.

Verifier analysis:

The Union monitors return on investment on staff training and development through monitoring scores in a monthly staff engagement survey. Staff satisfaction is a core part of the Union's own strategic plan and the Union has exceeded their target of 7.5 for their staff satisfaction.

D. Recruitment processes embrace equality of opportunity and monitor and scrutinise data to ensure that the workforce is talented and diverse, with shared values that can be demonstrated.

Verifier analysis:

Equality monitoring is included in the recruitment process of staff. The Union recognises the lack of diversity across their current workforce and has a desire to diversify. If the Union appointed an LEDI specialist on the board then this may provide a greater steer as to how the Union can achieve this goal.

E. Knowledge about career progression & internal promotion is strong across all staff. The union is likely to actively promote from within, which will have resulted in a measurable response from staff. Succession planning has been considered and may be outlined in a formal written document. As a result, succession plan training and development has been delivered to individual members of staff across the entire range of staff positions.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has developed a competency map to outline the levels of the different roles in the Union and also to help staff navigate their own journey through the different roles within the Union. The competencies are integrated into the staff review and appraisal process so that staff have opportunities to reflect and think about their own career progression. Staff felt they have been supported with their career progression through opportunities such as training, mentoring and qualifications. The Union is keen for cross-departmental working so that staff are able to gain experiences across different teams to help them with any promotion opportunities. The Union have been able to promote 6 members of staff into management positions, including promotions into the senior leadership team.

F. Staff are deeply engaged in many aspects of the union beyond their job role. They feel they have a role in the union's development, are consulted, and their opinions responded to. Staff feel they are an important stakeholder in the union. Staff feel that internal communication systems work well and, as a result they are knowledgeable about what is happening at the SU and how to contribute. There is some monitoring of internal communications that demonstrate their effectiveness.

Verifier analysis:

Staff make use of the various learning and development opportunities available and as a result are engaging at a deeper level with their work and the Union. The Union has invested a lot of resource into line management development and as a result there is more awareness across teams of what each other are working on and more consultation with line managers on Union Developments. This could be strengthened by ensuring that all Union members have the opportunity for cross-team working and that this isn't reliant on line managers to drive this agenda. Staff felt confident that monthly meetings are a good way of internal communications amongst teams and felt that the senior leadership were transparent in outlining Union developments.

G. All staff have an opportunity to review their progress and direct their learning and development at least twice a year so that they develop in their role. This is valued by staff and may be seen as a wider organisational ethos that embraces coaching and mentoring.

Verifier analysis:

Appraisals are conducted with Union staff twice a year (in May and November) which bring together individual objectives against team KPIs as well as identifying staff learning and development. Staff are invited to career coaching conversations to help them focus on their development and staff interviewed felt they good have honest conversations with others about their career goals and own professional development needs. In addition, the Union focuses on 360 appraisals for different staff groups at different times, e.g. line managers, coordinators to provide further insight and conversations with senior leaders which may not normally happen. Uptake with these appraisals has been positive.

H. Active and up-to-date processes are in place to manage the performance of all staff. Staff have good awareness of these processes and may contribute to their development. A network of support is available to staff who are not achieving their capabilities, and a clear process exists to protect the union if this support fails.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has a Performance Management Policy in place and responsibility falls on line managers to monitor performance across their teams. Line managers conduct regular 1:1s to measure performance across their teams and managers are able to speak to the head of People and Resources for any employee performance advice. The Union ensures that Occupational Health referrals are made to rule out any issues that may affect employee capability and to support Union staff.

I. The SU has a culture which recognises and rewards attainment and high performance. Performance measurement will generally be in line with the union's development (e.g. attainment of KPIs). The recognition and rewards process is written and widely understood by all. Rewards are often innovative and always cost-effective. Staff feel that praise is a regular feature within the union and that recognition of performance is a motivating factor.

Verifier analysis:

Staff interviewed felt recognised by their line managers and the wider Union senior leadership team and provided examples of where others had congratulated them on their work. The Union also have a MS Teams site called 'Shout-Out' where colleagues can congratulate one another on any achievements or just as a place to say thank you. Staff felt that they have to put the work in but feel rewarded for doing so.

J. The SU has responded to the need to ensure work/life balance for its workforce. Examples of where flexible working has been encouraged, implemented and reviewed demonstrate how this policy works in practice.

Verifier analysis:

The Union places staff wellbeing at the centre of its culture. There is a flexible working policy in place and staff are able to spend an hour a week to attend a wellbeing activity. Staff felt that there was a supportive culture in the Union and that individuals are trusted to do their jobs effectively. Staff felt there was a good work/life balance and have enough opportunities to speak to the senior leadership team to discuss any wellbeing issues.

K. The union can demonstrate that volunteers are a very important aspect of the organisation and are highly valued. Appropriate systems that are in place for career staff are also used for volunteers. The union can demonstrate how it trains and develops volunteers and, in some cases, how it reviews their performance. Volunteers feel engaged and sees values in the union beyond their job role.

Verifier analysis:

The Union uses volunteers throughout the Union services, e.g. Student Reps, Volunteering groups, societies etc. Volunteers receive the same high level of support, training and development as Union staff. Equally, volunteers are recognised through formal recognition schemes such as Awards. This is discussed in more depth in Participation (c).

L. The union actively monitors workplace wellbeing to understand staff perceptions, create best practices, and to identify where improvements can be made to existing processes. Regular and open discussions take place between managers and their teams in relation to planning and managing workloads, healthy working practices, supporting existing health-related conditions, and other factors that may contribute to improving mental health, wellbeing and happiness at work.

Verifier analysis:

The Union uses a weekly staff survey to review staff engagement, staff wellbeing and general feelings amongst staff within the organisation. The results from the survey are analysed by the senior leadership team and then line managers take responsibility for the wellbeing of their staff. Staff members felt supported by their line managers and felt there was always an open door if needed. Staff particularly commented on how managers have been supportive during the pandemic assisting them to adjust to flexible working, as well as engaging with those on furlough. Staff described the Union as a happy place to work.

Liberation, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Very Good

Implementing liberation, equality, diversity and inclusion (LEDI) in all aspects of work ensures that staff and members are valued, motivated and treated fairly. When evaluating LEDI in the union, verifiers will consider inclusivity, consistency and efficiency.

A. The union has policies which outline the union's commitment to equality and diversity. People within the union are aware of the union's LEDI policies and know when and where to refer to them. LEDI policies are embedded into the union culture. Staff are reassured that questions about, or requests for, policies and benefits will be treated confidentially by line managers and HR.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has a range of policies which can illustrate its commitment to LEDI, e.g. EDI Policy, Recruitment Policy and Whistleblower Policy, and students and staff are involved in the consultation process when updating these policies. It was hard to determine whether the wider staff body knew about these policies or where to find them as LEDI did not come up in the staff interviews. Staff did feel though that Herts SU was a supportive place to work and that issues can be discussed with line managers confidentially and sensitively. In order to achieve 'excellent' the Union should heighten the awareness of these policies and start to translate some of the LEDI issues across the various departmental action plans, using the action plans from the NCD as a starting point.

B. The union offers a range of support to their staff which includes a key point of contact, whistleblowing forum, LEDI staff networking groups, and staff counselling. Staff are aware of and understand reporting options available to them.

Verifier analysis:

Union staff felt supported at work and very much felt that their individual needs were recognised by line managers and others. Staff are able to use Office Vibe to anonymously report issues (including discrimination, bullying and harassment) and employees will receive support during the process. During the interviews, staff felt confident in this system and would use it if they needed to. Staff also felt that the senior leadership team were approachable and that issues could be taken to the highest level without any detriment to themselves or their roles.

C. The union embraces learning and staff development on LEDI issues. It can demonstrate that line managers and other staff supporting members are trained on LEDI issues and policies. Line managers feel they are supported to increase their understanding of LEDI and its policies and implementation. Line managers feel confident to discuss LEDI and can identify areas where they need extra knowledge and professional development to create an inclusive working culture.

Verifier analysis:

Line managers are involved in consultation exercises when updating LEDI policies. In addition, all staff receive unconscious bias training and the Union is able to work with the EDI team within the University to deliver bespoke training. There are further opportunities for line managers to take more of an active lead on LEDI issues as they will form a steering group to implement the actions recommended from the NCD action plan. Union staff did not talk much about LEDI issues in the interviews which could suggest that staff are not confident in this area. The steering group will be a good place for staff to talk about their own development needs in relation to LEDI which will help enhance the existing culture.

D. Staff can be trained in equality and diversity and are encouraged to implement positive behaviours. Staff can identify and understand LEDI issues and their impact. Staff are engaged with their LEDI knowledge and the union provides an opportunity for learning.

Verifier analysis:

Training is offered for staff within the Union and LEDI issues are frequently discussed at staff meetings. The understanding and impact of LEDI amongst staff in the Union is unknown as during the interviews very little was mentioned, this was also apparent at the interviews with the Trustees. However, achieving accreditation for Investors in Diversity does highlight the Unions commitment to LEDI. In order to help the Union to advance its culture and own understanding of LEDI, it is recommended that the Union reviews the make-up of the Trustee Board and may find it beneficial to seek a LEDI specialist to help the Union advance this area further.

E. The union hold up to date data on the diversity composition of their staff and volunteers. Where external agencies are used for recruitment a requirement for a 'diverse' shortlist is included in any request for proposal or tendering process. Staff feel the union acknowledges that LEDI is important in the recruitment and progression of staff. They can identify areas for improvement in their recruitment practice (e.g. where roles are advertised) and keep a record of staff progression against LEDI targets.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has up to date information regarding the demographics of its staff and volunteers. Equality monitoring is also included in the recruitment process and have also included an equal opportunities statement in their job descriptions to attract more diverse applicants. The Union recognises the lack of diversity across their current workforce and has a desire to diversify. If the Union appointed an LEDI specialist on the board then this may provide a greater steer as to how the Union can achieve this goal.

F. The union culture is advancing to become more equitable and inclusive. The union identifies approaches to LEDI to ensure each member of staff can fully contribute at work. The union encourages all staff to participate in a range of national and international diversity events (such as trans remembrance day, international women's day) and acknowledges multiple equality initiatives. The union can demonstrate that they encourage staff to reach their potential through activities and development. Staff feel that the culture considers all people and their needs at an organisational and interpersonal level.

Verifier analysis:

It is clear from the evidence that the Union is advancing to become more equitable and inclusive, e.g. recognising the lack of diversity across the workforce, achieving Investors in Diversity, using line managers to implement LEDI issues. The Union also has a good understanding of its own staff training in LEDI. It is recommended that the Union further encourages staff development in LEDI.

Communication - Excellent

This section of the audit considers how the union communicates with its members and other stakeholders, the quality of that communication and how successful the union is at getting its messages out

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A. There is a strategic approach to communications strategy as part of the union's strategic plan, which has the overall aim of promoting member engagement, participation and transparency or other priorities in the union's strategy. Digital engagement is a core feature. Key messages are conveyed using a range of communication methods over extended periods of time. As a result, members feel that the union's communication methods give them the appropriate knowledge to enable them to actively participate in the union.

Verifier analysis:

Communication is a key enabler as part of the Union's strategic plan and links into the Union's value of being transparent with its members. Supporting the strategic plan, the Union has developed a Comms Plan to map out relevant communications across the student journey. The plan is supported operationally with a schedule to ensure that services are able to deliver these key messages and to help manage the overall Union perceived brand. The Union has included digital engagement as a core aspect of the delivery of messaging, relying on email communications to students as well as increasing its use of social media to engage students. The Comms Plan is kept up to date so that the Union can give a voice on topical issues such as Black Lives Matter so that students can identify the Union's position on these matters. The Union's communication strategy is about raising awareness of Union provision, services and activities, as well as engaging members through raising awareness of social causes and encouraging debate and conversations. Students interviewed felt that the Union communication channels were strong, with students identifying a strong brand, and being clear as to signposting what opportunities are available for students.

B. The membership as a whole has a detailed understanding and widespread knowledge of the union's activities, operation and key messages. Members are able to identify a number of the main roles of their union and feel the union acts in a way that is open and transparent. Knowledge of, and access to, one or more feedback mechanisms is strong across the entire membership. There is a clear link between members' input/feedback and action. Members feel they can effectively contribute to their union.

Verifier analysis:

The students interviewed were able to comment on all aspects of the unions activities, operations and key messages. Despite living and studying remotely, students felt they had a good understanding of the priority areas of the SU Officers through the email communications from the Union. Students were able to describe the range of opportunities they have seen advertised through student communications and they felt the Union made the roles look fun and engaging. Members felt that they give feedback through surveys, focus groups and also Student Reps and felt that this information is shared more broadly with the student population. Students interviewed felt that the Union communication methods and approaches made the Union more accessible to the University and as a result make students more likely to engage with the Union. Students commuting into the University feel like they have a good understanding of what is happening on campus.

C. The effectiveness of the union's communication is clear and measured. The union has also set targets for communication, and performance against these targets is scrutinised by the governance structure. The union may have considered benchmarking its performance against others both inside and outside of the movement. As a result, the union has a strong understanding about which communication methods work and which do not, for various segments of its membership. This knowledge may also help the union to make informed decisions about investment in communications.

Verifier analysis:

The Union measures its communication in its Marketing Departmental Plan 2020-21. The Union makes use of Google Analytics to monitor the engagement and the effectiveness of its communication channels, e.g. measuring traffic on individual webpages, the number of emails opened etc. The Marketing Team then share this information more broadly with the Union staff so that they are able to use the data to inform their own area development/member engagement. Through this insight, the Union knows that it has a strong audience on its social media channels, in particular, Instagram, and as a result the Union has actively used this channel to communication and entice its members. The Union uses email communication to capture everyone and to update on important communications.

D. The union's communications are dynamic, proactive, innovative, responsive and specific to the needs of its membership. Typically, the union uses tailored communication methods based on contexts and messages specifically designed to reach different groups of students, including methods to target under-represented members such as placement students and distance learners. These mechanisms include face-to-face communication.

Verifier analysis:

Students interviewed felt that the Union's communication style was fun and exciting and more informal to communications from the University. The students explained that the communications make you want to be part of the opportunity being advertised or promoted. Students generally were happy with the way in which the Union communicates to them, e.g. through email or through the SU Officers. The Union uses a mix of generic communications as well as tailored communications. Societies make use of more tailored communications, but students mentioned there is often cross-posting to content from generic Union messages. Throughout the year, the Union does send out tailored communication to various groups. For example, different Schools are targeted in advance of the elections as they know that it is harder to reach some candidates from certain Schools.

E. The union is effective in its communications with all its other stakeholders and is able to demonstrate effective two-way communication and demonstrate that its key messages are widely known and understood.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has developed a good working relationship with the University to ensure that the communications to members across the two organisations complement one another. In addition, staff have good working relationships with colleagues in similar work areas and regularly keep staff informed as to what the Union is doing for students. The senior institution staff when interviewed had a good understanding of what the Union has been doing for students and where its key priorities were. Communication between the SU and Union at a senior level is positive, mainly aided by involvement on committees, through mentoring opportunities and being able to have informal conversations when needed.

F. The union can demonstrate that it understands the value of its brand. It is able to show that its brand has been considered in its strategic plan/communications plan. The union has very high levels of consistency in the messages that it communicates, which continuously reinforce its brand. This is seen throughout the union. Members are able to identify key features of the union's brand.

Verifier analysis:

The Union understands the importance of its brand and has developed brand guidelines to ensure consistency across the communications sent from various services. The use of strong and bold colours was chosen to emphasise the fun and friendly tone that the Union was going for, which students interviewed felt worked well. Other Unions and external organisations have featured HSU's brand as best practice, acknowledging the hard work that has taken place to create this identity. Students interviewed felt that Union messages were similar and consistent. The students agreed that they were fun, friendly and informal and made students want to be part of the Union.

Services - Excellent

This section of the framework covers everything from a students' union's mental health support, employability workshops, its athletic union to its shop and night bus – essentially everything that the union provides for its members - including how the union has decided what to offer and the quality of its services. The services a union provides may be very different to that of another union, therefore they'll have very different health and impact indicators. Large unions will not have to list every service that they provide and how they meet these metrics but should instead look at how their practice aligns with the descriptors in this section across the portfolio of services they offer.

A. The services offered by the union, either directly or through a partner, are intrinsically linked to the current needs of its members and the union context. This link has been planned for through the union's strategic planning process.

Verifier analysis:


The Union has thought strategically and operationally about the services that it offers and has gone through an extensive period of change going back to the charitable aims of the organisation and greater emphasis on membership engagement. The Union has expanded its Research team to ensure that there is an excellent and effective representation service within the union. In addition, resource is allocated to its advice service so that its members can use it when required. In addition, the union also offers an activities service to provide opportunities to help students make the most of their time

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at university. Whilst the Union is relatively small and services usually run by one or two individuals, HSU have shown a good understanding of their members in order to determine which services to provide and where additional resourcing is required.

B. Where the union is restricted (in its space, finances or other restriction), and therefore limited to deliver key services identified by members, they are delivered in alternative ways. In some situations, this may be in the planning stage and not yet in place but a board-level commitment has been made.

Verifier analysis:

As a small Union, HSU have gone through a transformation project to revisit their core charitable purpose and re-align their provision to focus on what matters the most to supporting students to make the most of their time at University. Therefore, as a result, the Union has stripped back some of its commercial offerings and have partnered with others to provide different services to students. One example can be illustrated through the partnership with a local Estates and Lettings Agency advertising local lettings for students. The Union have also done the same type of provision with a catering supplier and a bus company. Taking this approach has enabled the Union to focus on membership engagement.

C. As a result of the union's approach all the services it provides are well used and highly valued by its members. The union can demonstrate that it delivers effective, high-quality services. Staff in each service area are aware of feedback and KPIs have been set. The union is able to demonstrate that in all areas it is focused on providing the very best service it can to members (and other consumers). This high level of customer service is very apparent. As a result, members are very satisfied with each service.

Verifier analysis:

HSU services are thought of highly by its members and the university. The Union monitors student engagement across its services and this is generally very good. In the meetings with students they were positive regarding the quality of the services they have used, e.g. student representation. This was also strengthened by university staff acknowledging that they are confident in the Union representing the wider student body. The Union have been working hard to use data and research to inform their service development, e.g. sharing student feedback in all staff meetings. Staff in all services were involved in the development of their KPIs. Staff at all levels in the Union were focused on delivering services that are appropriate for students and where excellent customer service is paramount. Students described the staff and services within the Union as friendly, approachable, supportive and knowledgeable.

D. The union has clearly defined the outcomes it is striving to gain from each of its services. These outcomes are often targets that directly address the union's strategic priorities or detailed financial targets and connect the student experience with the union's representative work to the institution and beyond. There may also be examples of services that deliver both. Each service has multiple and carefully selected measurement mechanisms that allow performance to be monitored. As a result, there are clear success criteria for each service that support effective management and enable the union's governance structures to monitor performance. Knowledge of how each service is performing is high. Services are in line with, or exceed, their targets. Where this is not the case, the union can demonstrate remedial actions.

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In some cases, the union will benchmark its performance against other comparable organisations.

Verifier analysis:

Service KPIs are embedded into the Union's strategic plan and service managers are responsible for delivering on these targets. The targets are quantitative in nature and often measure engagement with the provision being offered or determine user satisfaction with the individual service areas. Through annual planning, managers and staff are able to develop suitable KPIs and review engagement with their provision effectively. During the staff interviews, there was a good level of service performance knowledge and this was also shared at a senior level. Services have the opportunity to present to the Board of Trustees who have oversight of service delivery. The Union may wish to identify other comparable Unions to benchmark against in order to enhance the measurement of its services.

E. There are mechanisms in place to consider the best delivery mechanism for services, to ensure that the highest level of quality is achieved. For example, in advice services this could mean online support, peer group support, good triage processes etc. As a result, there are often examples of the union opting to work in partnership with other organisations or companies to further develop the quality of its services and regularly reviews how the union is delivering the service. This could be in-person, digital, in batches or 1-2-1, highly personalised or standard options. If the union is a NUS purchasing consortium member, it regularly accesses the support offered by the trading support team to ensure its offering is of maximum impact and quality. Where the union has sought to deliver services to its members through a third party there are formal control mechanisms in place to ensure the service is delivered to the highest possible standard. Additionally, where these services are provided outside of the building the union can demonstrate clear attempts to influence the quality of the service where appropriate.

Verifier analysis:

Teams are responsible for managing their service delivery and is primarily led by line managers and external factors such as the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic Services adapted their provision to adapt to the need for online access, e.g. online advice appointments, student representation meetings online etc. In addition, the Union was also able to develop new approaches, e.g. facilitating online activities within the Activities Team for students to do at home. Across the Union there is a good blend of service delivery, e.g. through student groups, through buddying, through appointments etc. Moving forwards the Union should take stock of their journey so far, lessons learnt through pandemic engagement and start to think about the future of their service delivery. The Union are already aware of the university's plans for a blended learning profile moving forwards so there may be a good opportunity for the Union to complement some of this delivery.

F. The union operates its services in an ethical manner that is in line with the union's values and prevents internal competition or conflict while promoting a strong brand. Its services demonstrably contribute towards the achievement of the union's aims and commercial operations demonstrate behaviours in line with those aims. Services that are provided in conjunction with, or solely by, a partner also comply with this ethos.

Most of the union's services, in the way they are run, support its representation, campaigning and partnership work. This could be the union always having a non-alcohol option as the cheapest on the menu if it is working against alcohol harm, or, being a living wage employer if it has campaigned for employment rights. As a whole there is a sense that each individual service, however it is delivered, is cohesive with all other services to bring about an overall synergy.

Verifier analysis:

The Union operates in an ethical manner committed to the Union's own values. The Union is committed to being a student-led organisation and as a result student feedback underpins service development and delivery. The Union has made use of employing student staff to cover customer service type roles and heavily relies on student volunteers in other activities. The Union is transforming its Forum to enable it to not only be a nightclub but to be a flexible space for students to take part in extra-curricular activities, as well as to support their learning and teaching. The Union and its services are also committed to reducing their negative impact on the environment by reducing their use of single-use plastics, using recycled products and operating more digitally. The Union recognises the importance of modelling best practices as a way of encouraging members to consider similar social causes.

G. The union collects and analyses data they've obtained from their services provision (e.g. EPOS reports) alongside other data sources to map user journeys, using this information to enhance student engagement levels.

Verifier analysis:

The Union makes use of data such the number of students it has supported through its advice services to make an assessment of student engagement overall. This information combined with feedback through the Union's representation structures helps the Union to understand overall student engagement.

Participation - Excellent

This section of the framework examines the level of member participation in a variety of activities organised by the students' union. It includes clubs, societies, sports, volunteering and media activities (where applicable). Student leadership and diverse participation is an important feature of an effective students' union.

A. The union is able to demonstrate that it has dedicated time and resources to developing participation opportunities and promoting exciting opportunities to all its members. The union also has specific strategies to promote participation opportunities to under-represented groups. As a result, a broad range of students actively participates in the union. Additionally, there may be examples where this promotion of participation has led to individual members engaging with the union for the first time.

Verifier analysis:

Enabling students to participate in a range of activities is fundamental to the mission and vision of the Union. The Union has gone through organisational change with a greater focus on membership engagement.

The Union has staff resource to enable students to participate in a range of different activities: student representation, sport, societies, volunteering and other Union events and activities. It was clear from the interviews that student members were deeply engaged across a broad range of opportunities and members felt that these opportunities added to their own student experience stories. The Union is committed to understanding its members and how they engage and perceive the Union, and this comes through when thinking about underrepresented groups. The Union monitors participation across opportunities and understands its hard to reach groups. The Union is focusing on its BAME and placement students initially to engage them in the Union.

B. The union can demonstrate that it has a highly innovative range of opportunities for its members to contribute to union decision-making. The union is able to demonstrate decisions that have resulted from these opportunities. Union groups and members fully understand how to contribute to union decision-making processes.

Verifier analysis:

The Union is committed to enabling students to have a maximum voice in any student opportunities. The Union combines traditional decision-making methods such as Student Council and the Trustee Board, with non-traditional approaches such as collating feedback from research and informally through student involvement with groups and societies in order to take a more informed approach. Students interviewed were well aware of these channels. The Union should focus on its communication now to tell the wider student body where student decisions have informed Union activity.

C. The union actively encourages its members to volunteer and supports them in doing so by providing training and support. The union also understands the two-way process of volunteering and the benefits it brings. Volunteering opportunities are meaningful and provide a double benefit (improving the skills, experience, confidence of volunteers whilst making an impact on peers/local community/the environment). Where there are volunteering opportunities, the union has achieved the Investors in Volunteers award or complies with its criteria.

Verifier analysis:

All roles within the Union are done in a voluntary capacity. The Union is committed to its volunteers and recognises that without them the Union would not function. As a result, there is a strong emphasis on volunteer training, support, development and recognition, compliant with the Investors in Volunteering criteria. Effective training is offered across all SU roles, and students are encouraged to reflect on their training and opportunities through going for the University's Go Herts Award. The Union has introduced a Student Leaders' Development Programme to offer further training and development for those with leadership roles in the Union, which saw 200 students go through this programme. The Union shows acknowledgement of volunteers through its recognition schemes, e.g. the SU Awards, in order to harness the enthusiasm and motivation of the volunteers, but also to give students formally recognition of their work.

D. There is evidence of where students have designed their own opportunities, and processes were simple to use. The union can evidence how students were aware of their health and safety requirements.

Verifier analysis:

Students have the opportunity to run their own events and activities for others. For example, the Union encourages student volunteering through Raise and Give which supported 9 events during the academic year. Societies are active in organising opportunities for other students and in some cases partner up with externals to offer better opportunities, e.g. coordinating inter-university competitions for students. Students are supported in training with health and safety requirements and with risk assessments. The Union is considering how it can further enable student activities through repurposing space post-covid to provide more flexible spaces for student groups to use.

E. The union has clear strategies to improve the scale of participation in union activities and develops its members to enable them to participate as effectively as possible. The union can show that it proactively supports its members to participate in national campaigns, and link to appropriate national bodies, encouraging and facilitating individuals and groups of members to take part. Members feel very strongly that the union is 'their' union and know how they can participate in all aspects of the union.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has a vision to engage its harder to reach students in its activities and opportunities, though are currently focusing on Placement students and BAME students. The Union should focus on how it will achieve this vision and start to incorporate some of the research and insight that it has collected. Officers and students are encouraged to engage with national activities and national bodies as illustrated in (d). Students interviewed felt that the Union aligned with their own wishes for the Union and members felt that the Union was relevant. Members were able to describe the range of different opportunities that were available for students to participate in and felt that communications were strong.

F. The union can demonstrate how participation with the students' union has developed members' skills and experiences.

Verifier analysis:

The Union is able to demonstrate where participation has had a positive effect on its members skills and experiences. Through research, the Union can demonstrate that its engaged members are more likely to leave University with a better degree classification than those who don't. Students involved in buddying have stated that this has helped them with their own wellbeing, and in a recent survey 66% students felt that the Union had a positive impact on their wellbeing. When interviewing the students, student members felt that their own confidence had improved by being involved in the Union and that they have experienced personal growth in their own ways. The Union may wish to capture these student voices to help less engaged Union members see some of the benefits.

Representation and Campaigning - Excellent


A. The union has a comprehensive training, support and development programme for academic representatives which is delivered throughout the duration of the role. In some cases, responsibility for support of the

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representation system is undertaken in partnership between the union and the institution. Monitoring and evaluation shows that academic representatives feel they have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively represent union members' views to the institution.

Verifier analysis:

Student Reps have a comprehensive training programme delivered through a conference style programme, with alternates considered for those unable to make the training. In addition, the Union provides training for its School Community Organisers through a residential style programme. Reps and School Organisers are invited to monthly forums to keep an open dialogue with the Union. In addition, School Organisers are encouraged to take part in the Student Leaders Development Programme in order to provide reflection and skills development opportunities. Students felt they have access to good training and support to help them succeed in their roles. The Union uses a survey to review its support to its reps and other elected representatives.

B. The union can show evidence that students are represented at every relevant institution committee. These formal representations are reinforced by the union's elected officers, academic representatives, and key institution staff members.

Verifier analysis:

Students are represented at relevant institutional committees in various ways. At the most senior level, SU Officers represent student interests by sitting on various senior management committees and informally meet regularly with the management team. SU Officers felt that they were listened to within these committees and that student needs were considered. Representation is reinforced by Student Reps and School Community Organisers representing students via Programme Committee Meetings, as well as informal meetings with Programme Leads and Associate Deans.

C. The union can demonstrate that its representatives are able to make highly effective, accurate representations/interventions at institution committee meetings. This effectiveness is due to thorough preparation including an evidence-based understanding of the views of students on major issues. The union can demonstrate a number of impacts that have been a direct result of this representation.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has more of an active role at committee meetings and student feedback is welcomed and listened to. The SU Officers raised an example regarding the personal tutoring framework where they were able to hold the University to account using student feedback to ask for a focus on wellbeing as this was raised during the second lockdown. There has been progress on this by the University and the new Officer team have the momentum to continue with this. Another example where students have been able to influence the University include the Safety Net Policy that was successfully lobbied for in order to help students achieve a degree classification that fairly recognises their efforts studying throughout the pandemic.

D. The union can also show that its elected officers and other members participate in national campaigns and represent the views of the union's members nationally.

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Verifier analysis:

SU Officers have been involved in their own campaigns (e.g. Private Accommodation Rent Freeze Campaign) as well as national campaigns (e.g. Sign, Write, Tell Campaign in collaboration with Greenwich and 25+ other SUs calling for the government to waive the debt of all healthcare students, and the Students Deserve Better, NUS Covid Campaign). SU Officers did not mention the relevance of these campaigns or the national picture, therefore the Union may consider how it supports Officers to think about their own influence at a national level.

E. The union proactively encourages individual members and groups of members to run campaigns. The availability of this support is well communicated. The union can demonstrate robust mechanisms to improve the effectiveness of member-led campaigns, often by providing training and/or advice.

Verifier analysis:

The Union actively engages students to get involved and run campaigns and this is led by example at the top with SU Officers each having their own priority campaign for their time in office. This year, the focus has been Student Success Through COVID; an all-encompassing campaign covering such areas as lobbying for Placement Students, International Students, BAME Students. Campaigning amongst students is still in its infancy and the Union hopes that through its introduction of various networks more campaigning activity can emerge. The Union has rich data and insight and should consider using this to help with the emergence of themes that could ignite student campaigns.

F. Union-supported campaigns have a defined objective or impact and the union is able to point to successful past campaigns.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has started to increase its campaigning activities over the years. SU Officers are supported by staff to refine and develop their priority campaigns at the start of the year so that these align best with the strategic priorities of the Union and also the current needs of the members. The Union signposts current campaigns it is involved with on the website, and these campaigns define the overall purpose and associated objectives. The Union could provide further resources and support for student campaigning and could illustrate impact by showing where campaigning has enabled student wins in the past.

Sustainability - Good

Through sustainability initiatives on campus, alongside the content of the taught curriculum, students can graduate from their education being equipped to deal with the global challenges we currently face. Good sustainability management is now synonymous with good organisational management. Students' unions have long been at the forefront of this activity, and Green Impact is a UNESCO recognised framework for union staff, officers and students to collaboratively address key issues to transform into a sustainable union and campus environment, tried and tested over more than a decade.

A. The union has current Green Impact good status.

Verifier analysis:


The Union are expecting a Good Green Impact status by 2021.

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Insight and Learning - Excellent

Constant review and evaluation is critical for any organisation. This is particularly important in students' unions, which have ever-changing leadership teams. This section of the audit considers a union's insight gathering and use, its review process and practicalities, and how these fit into its overall planning process.

A. Review and evaluation are clearly demonstrated as a fundamental aspect of the governance, leadership and management of the union. The union is fastidious in its approach to evaluation, constantly measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of its activities. As a result, the union has a strong understanding of its own performance and how it impacts upon its members.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has structures to ensure that review and evaluation is a part of their governance, leadership and management of the Union. The Board of Trustees have a good oversight of the Unions performance through regular reporting and engagement. Leadership ensure that KPIs are set across departments and that these targets are monitored at a strategic level to inform the Union of its own progress. Across the Union, staff are aware of their targets and how these contribute to Union performance. The Union is data-driven and has invested in this area recently in order to improve its own awareness of its provision.

B. The union uses sophisticated evaluation tools that provide detailed information on performance and areas for improvement. These tools are accessible and aid detailed scrutiny and opportunities to challenge actions through the governance body.

Verifier analysis:

The Union uses a range of different evaluation tools to evaluate the Unions performance. For example, the Union makes use of quantitative data to measure student engagement with Union activities, e.g. attendance data, number of volunteers. The Union also incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation when measuring satisfaction with services through collecting student feedback about the provision they were involved with. The Union works with the University to receive information regarding the academic outcomes of students involved in the Union, so it is able to make sophisticated conclusions regarding the Union's ability to contribute to academic achievement. In addition, the Union has thorough financial reporting mechanisms through the Board of Trustees and senior management review regular feedback from staff to look at areas to improve.

C. The union can demonstrate the process it has used to identify the most important and informative KPIs for external communication. To assist transparency, the union will have typically identified what is key, and selected KPIs accordingly. The union uses these KPIs in conjunction with narrative reporting to provide a clear assessment of its performance. Additionally, the union selects KPIs that allow the assessment of progress against objectives stated in its strategic plan.

Verifier analysis:

When developing its KPIs, the Union had two focus points. Firstly, to measure their own performance making use of KPIs that stipulate expected footfall, intended student satisfaction with services, balanced financial health and finally staff satisfaction and wellbeing through the Union. The second focus for the KPIs intend to measure the impact the Union has had on students, for example, on their wellbeing, their academic achievements, their employability skills, as well as improving engagement with research. The Union has reported on these KPIs through Impact Reports, Student Engagement Reports as well as management reports going to the Board of Trustees.

D. Internally, the union makes highly effective use of well-presented KPIs supported by a narrative reporting to enable effective governance. While there is some consistency in the KPIs it uses, the union is able to demonstrate its flexibility to modify KPIs to reflect changes in strategic priorities. The union uses both qualitative KPIs (such as satisfaction), together with external benchmarking, in at least some areas to enable the review and evaluation of soft impacts.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has outlined its KPIs in its strategic plan and these are familiar across Union staff. The Union makes use of a Trello-board to make sure everyone is aware of departmental plans including the KPIs. Every year, departments produce an operating plan in order to support the strategic goals. Union staff meet with SU Officers who are able to feed into discussions and ensure that their priorities and goals are embedded into the operating plans. As mentioned in (c) the Union makes use of a range of different KPIs, mostly quantitative KPIs to measure their own performance, and more qualitative KPIs to measure the impact on students. Going forwards the Union may wish to find comparator Unions in order to set benchmarks or to find other frameworks to help frame their KPIs.

E. The union's members have a detailed understanding of how their union is performing, how this performance relates to them and the areas in which it could improve.

Verifier analysis:

The Union is good at telling its members how well it is performing through Student Council and communicating with the wider student body. The Union uses an Impact Infographic and Impact video in order to communicate with students regarding any successes for students. During the interviews, students felt that the Union was performing to a good standard but couldn't provide any examples. The Union may wish to look at how it shares its progress against its KPIs with the wider student population, e.g. through SU Officer updates, blogs or through an action tracker which is available on the web. The Union may find it helpful to learn from other Unions in this area.

F. The union has a range of mechanisms in place to continually examine the wants, needs and perceptions of its members. It has developed ways to canvass the opinions of its members and has specific strategies to target under-represented groups. The union specifically examines how it has impacted on its members in the past. As a result, the union feels confident that it understands its entire membership, and how they engage with the union, as far as practically possible.

Verifier analysis:

As mentioned throughout the report, the Union makes effective use of their research and insight into order to examine the wants, needs and perceptions of its members. Student feedback and consultation is embedded throughout the Union and its services, in order for the Union to ensure it is still relevant for its members. The SU Officers are instrumental in collecting student feedback and representing the wider views of students and as a result have input yearly into the operating plans for the various Union services. Through its democratic and representation structures, student consultation happens formally, and the Union can collectively focus on underrepresented groups, e.g. placement students and BAME students. Staff interviewed very much felt that they understood the student body they were serving, and students interviewed confirmed that they felt the Union was relevant to all students. It was clear from speaking to the senior institution staff that the Union is recognised highly for its engagement with students.

Verifier statement

I would like to extend my thanks to Rebecca and the wider team at HSU for allowing me to verify the organisation. I can see the journey you have been on within the Union and you have some real strengths in which you can continue to thrive. Your relationship with the University has greatly improved and you are clearly an enabler to providing opportunities for students to make the most of their student experience. You have a real opportunity now that you have developed your membership engagement provision to really start thinking about the future. I hope that the verification is not only an acknowledgement of your hard work over the past few years but also provides some insight into areas in which further development and resource may be allocated. You have some exciting opportunities coming up in the next year or two, e.g. supporting students post-COVID, implementing your EDI action plans and also re-opening your student Forum with a re-aligned purpose.

I wish you all the very best on the rest of your organisational development journey.

Summary of Recommendations

Strategy

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier assessment level: Very Good

Recommendations

The Union should start to think about how external factors affecting their students can be factored into the strategic plan, thinking ahead to what a student in 2023 may need and the role of a Union.

The Union could develop the plan by thinking about its key enablers to drive forwards some of the targets, e.g. funding, people, use of technology. The Union may wish to incorporate these into the plan or think about where investment and resource may be needed to help the Union in delivering on the plan.

Relationships and Partnerships

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier Assessment level: Excellent

Recommendations

More explicit references of how services will engage underrepresented groups would be beneficial for the Union.

The Union may wish to consider a written reputation management strategy as a way of mitigating future risks.

The Union could look at ways in which inter-department working can be facilitated through more formal mechanisms such as strategic goals.

Democracy

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier Assessment level: Excellent

Recommendations

To develop on work being done to engage under-represented groups, the Union now needs to consider how it can analyse this engagement and also look for strategies to encourage other groups to participate in Union democracy.

People

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier Assessment level: Excellent

Recommendations

Ensure that all Union members have the opportunity for cross-team working and that this isn't reliant on line-managers to drive this agenda.

LEDI

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

Recommendations

In order to achieve 'excellent' the Union should heighten the awareness of these policies and start to translate some of the LEDI issues across the various departmental action plans, using the action plans from the NCD as a starting point.

The steering group will be a good place for staff to talk about their own development needs in relation to LEDI which will help enhance the existing culture.

To help the Union to advance its culture and own understanding of LEDI, it is recommended that the Union reviews the make-up of the Trustee Board and may find it beneficial to seek a LEDI specialist to help the Union advance this area further.

If the Union appointed an LEDI specialist on the board then this may provide a greater steer as to how the Union can achieve their goal of attracting more diverse applicants.

It is recommended that the Union further encourages staff development in LEDI.

Communication

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier assessment level: Excellent

Services

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier assessment level: Excellent

Recommendations

The Union may wish to identify other comparable Unions to benchmark against to enhance the measurement of its services.

The Union should take stock of their journey so far, lessons learnt through pandemic engagement and start to think about the future of their service delivery. The Union are already aware of the university's plans for a blended learning profile moving forwards so there may be a good opportunity for the Union to complement some of this delivery.

Participation

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier assessment level: Excellent

Recommendations

The Union should focus on its communication now to tell the wider student body where student decisions have informed Union activity.

The Union should focus on how it will achieve its vision to engage harder to reach students in activities and opportunities and start to incorporate some of the research and insight that it has collected.

The Union may wish to capture the voices of students who have benefitted positively from participating in and with the union, to help less engaged Union members see some of the benefits.

Representation and Campaigning

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier assessment level: Excellent

Recommendations

The Union may consider how it supports Officers to think about their own influence at a national level.

The Union has rich data and insight and should consider using this to help with the emergence of themes that could ignite student campaign activity.

The Union could provide further resources and support for student campaigning and could illustrate impact by showing where campaigning has enabled student wins in the past.

Sustainability

Self-assessment level: Good

Verifier assessment level: Good

Insight and Learning

Self-assessment level: Excellent

Verifier assessment level: Excellent

Recommendations

The Union may wish to find comparator Unions in order to set benchmarks or to find other frameworks to help frame their KPIs.

The Union may wish to look at how it shares its progress against its KPIs with the wider student population, e.g. through SU Officer updates, blogs or through an action tracker which is available on the web. The Union may find it helpful to learn from other Unions in this area.