

Union of UEA  
Students  
Strategic Plan  
2013-16  
**Draft**

# Introduction

The Union's strategic plan establishes the ambitions and objectives that we, as an organisation, wish to achieve over the upcoming three years.

Most important to remember is that everything in this plan has come from students. Since the last strategic plan was published in 2009, we have gathered over 5000 student opinions from our annual student surveys. Using this information we have established five main areas of focus that students want to see us improve, which are the five main areas within this plan.

Using this information, staff from all departments of the Union were brought together to develop ideas about how we should work to improve these areas and best meet students' needs. These initial ideas were then put out for consultation with students in 'The Discussion' – an interactive feedback activity where hundreds of students gave their opinions and thoughts on what we'd come up with so far. Finally, using all this information, we have made some final tweaks (including the addition of three new values) and written the plan that you now see.

The goals UEA students have set for their Union are not easy to accomplish, but by working in partnership with the University of East Anglia, the local community and the student movement nationally, we believe we can achieve our aim: To become the best student union in the country.

# Context

Over the last few years there have been a number of changes in the HE sector; HE has a new funding model with a greater burden falling on individual students, with institutions having to diversify their income streams in order to grow. Student habits have changed, they tend to work harder as a good degree becomes ever more important for an individual's career prospects

Changes in behaviour have had a significant impact on the Union's financial model. Our reliance on the sale of alcohol has left us financially vulnerable and whilst we are seeking to diversify our income it is unlikely that these ventures will plug the gap left by declining alcohol sales. Accordingly we believe that the future of the Union lies in developing an alternative funding model with UEA.

Similarly, our building was built over forty years ago and no longer meets the needs of our students. We believe that the union is an asset to UEA and can significantly aid recruitment and satisfaction, but our spaces need significant investment.

We recognise the growing importance of the academic experience and extra-curricular skills in improving employability. Our last strategic plan emphasised the importance of developing new initiatives and resources in these areas and as a consequence we introduced a new recruitment process for Faculty Convenors and a bursary system to reward their work. Both the Union and the University have increased funding into student activities; we have grown volunteering, and introduced enterprise, activities and employability workshops.

Our research has demonstrated that some groups of students don't engage with the union. As the demographic makeup of our membership evolves so must our services. We need to fully understand the wants and needs of these 'hard to reach' groups so that we can tailor our services to meet them.

We also need to develop stronger avenues of communication with our members. Our website has become outdated and we will be launching a new website made specifically for student unions that will enable more of our members to engage with us and make it easier for them to do the things they want to do.

# Aim

“To be the best students’ union in the country.”

Our aim is undeniably aspirational; over the next three years we wish to always be striving to achieve this aim. We do not wish to offer our students a second rate service, so we are aiming to be the best.

We will measure our success using three key indicators:

1. **Participation:** The Union provides a number of services for students to enjoy and activities for members to take part in. Participation, whether in a club or society, attending an event, or voting in an election will become one of our three critical measures of success to becoming the best students union in the country. We will not only measure the numbers of student participating but also examine the types of students to ensure that participation reflects the wide diversity of our membership
2. **Engagement:** Being member led, we want the organisation to be shaped by our members. We will measure and develop ways in which our members shape the union and their academic experience, whether it's being nominated for election, becoming a committee member or undertaking our market research activity we aim to engage as many members as possible. We also aim to empower our members and elected officers to effectively shape their education and academic experience through representation at school, faculty and committee level.
3. **Satisfaction:** If we are to become the best Students’ Union in the country then we need to provide services of the highest quality. We will establish key indicators from the National Student Survey, our Annual Student Survey and departmental feedback to demonstrate improvement and compare our performance with other Unions’. We will also seek nationally recognised awards to build upon our Green Impact Gold Award, Best Bar None Bronze and SUEI Bronze Awards

## **Purpose**

### **“To enrich the life of every UEA student”**

The Union should always be working to improve the experience of all UEA students. This includes providing sports to promote our members living healthily; societies, club nights and gigs to facilitate students socialising and making friends; supporting students in difficulty using our Advice Centre, and Home Run and all the other services that we provide. We are here to help students have the best experience possible during their time at UEA and to help each student develop in ways that will be beneficial to them even after they leave university.

## **Values**

Our values shape the way that we, as a Union, conduct ourselves; the values in this plan are based on what students told us they believed were the most important to them, they were then added to as a result of The Discussion.

The Union’s values reflect the power that students have in the organisation, our dedication to the inclusion of all members, and the requirement to make our activities accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

## collectivism, n.

**Pronunciation:** /kə'lektivɪz(ə)m/

The people collectively, for the benefit of the people as a whole.

## diversity, n.

**Pronunciation:** /di'vers:ɪti/ /daɪ-/

The condition or quality of being diverse, different, or varied.

## equality, n.

**Pronunciation:** /i'kwɒləti/

The quality or condition of being equal.

## fun, n.

**Pronunciation:** /fʌn/

Diversion, amusement, sport; Also, a source or cause of amusement or pleasure.

## empowerment, n.

**Pronunciation:** /em'paʊəmənt/

The action of empowering; the state of being empowered.

## sustainability, n.

**Pronunciation:** Brit. /sə'steɪnə'bɪləti/

the degree to which a process or enterprise is able to be maintained or continued while avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources.

## democracy, n.

**Pronunciation:** /di'mɒkrəsi/

Government by the people; power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised either directly by them or by officers elected by them.

# Business Sustainability

The trading environment for the Union is becoming ever more difficult. Traditionally we have relied on the profitability of alcohol sales to fund our other activities. Changes in students' social habits combined with the general economic downturn have led to a sizeable reduction in our income.

As social trends continue to change so do the development needs of our members and staff; we recognise the need for a highly trained workforce to deliver effective services. As well as sustainability in our commercial operations we seek to operate on an environmental and ethical basis too. In recent years we have significantly cut our utility usage and moved our finances to a more ethical bank.

## Our big ideas

### **1) Diversification of business income**

In order to maintain a sustainable commercial income the Union will diversify its income portfolio, exploring new and different ways to generate income to fund our charitable activities. The University is making a significant investment in the Union retail operations, allowing us to combine most of our retail operation into a larger, more fiscally efficient outlet.

### **2) Staff Training and Development**

We will continue to invest in our staff particularly in training and development. We aim to have more staff attending national NUS staff events to learn from other Unions and share best practice. We will develop our bar team to deliver accredited training to student staff. We will continue to invest in the development of our managers to help lead the organisation for the future

### **3) Environmental and Ethical Sustainability**

This year we significantly improved our NUS Green Impact Award score to maintain our Gold Standard, we aim to continue to drive down utility use to preserve natural resources and develop our ethical purchasing options, particularly through NUS.

# Academic Experience

We recognise the importance of the academic experience to the university and our members. In a £9k fee regime we believe that students will have greater expectations from their university and seek to work in partnership with UEA to ensure their academic experience is second to none.

## Our Big Ideas

### **1) Develop a first class School representation support system**

Improve the resources, training and support we give to course representatives. Where possible course representatives will be elected by their peers and better supported by online resources and training.

### **2) Improve our research into the Student Academic Experience**

To improve the resources we put into researching your academic experience to support representatives at university committees and build on the work of the Union's annual Student Experience Report.

### **3) Improve the Union's links with Faculties**

To develop Faculty Convenors and improve the Unions relationship with Deans of faculty to work in partnership with schools and faculties to increase student engagement with module feedback and other forms of research.

# Activities and Activism

By increasing resources and developing strategic partnership with the Research and Enterprise office and external organisations we will create more opportunities for engaging our members. We know that the graduate employment market is tougher than ever before and our members recognise the need to gain extra-curricular skills that will set them apart in the graduate employment market. We hope to offer students the chance to develop these skills.

## Our Big Ideas

### **1) Enterprise and Volunteering**

We will increase the resources and support available for individuals, groups, and societies to engage in enterprise and volunteering activities.

### **2) Make it easier to run activities**

Through the development of our online resources and our Centre for Activities, Volunteering and Enterprise (C.A.V.E.), we will make it easier for our committee members and activists to run their clubs, societies and campaigns.

### **3) Help our members become more employable**

By more effective training and development opportunities we will empower our members to achieve their aims and to understand how our activities can develop their employable skills

# Student Welfare

The welfare of our members is at the heart of what we do. Alongside our excellent advice centre and our work with the Dean of Student Office we want all our members to enjoy our activities, services and feel at home on their campus.

## Our big ideas

### **1) Improve the experience of hard to reach groups**

We aim to research how and which of our members use the union and look at ways of improving our outreach to 'hard to reach' groups.

### **2) Empower our part time officers to more effectively represent their constituents**

We will better improve our training and development of our part time officer so that they may represent their constituents more effectively. We will work with external partners and improve our in-house training capacity and put more resources into helping our part time officers

### **3) To develop safe spaces on campus**

We aim to work with the university to improve the availability of alcohol free special spaces and we look into making certain events on campus available only to our members and their guests. As part of any internal refurbishment plans we will include gender neutral toilets in Union House.

# Union Communications

From our market research it has become apparent that a significant number of students don't fully understand the complex range of services we offer or the benefits of membership to the Union. Many are not even aware that they are members. If we are to be effective in servicing the needs of our members then they have to understand better the diversity of our services and activities.

## Our big ideas

### **1) Improve our communications to members**

We must work to better inform students of the services we offer, and the outcomes we deliver. We will achieve this by better resourcing communications and marketing activities dedicated to delivering our many messages to the student population effectively.

### **2) Improve the Union's online presence**

We will be releasing a new website that is more functional and accessible, making it easier for our members to use. It will have areas specific to student activities and will more clearly deliver information about the activities and services that occurring on campus. We will also work to improve our social media presence, working to involve students in developing our interaction with social networking sites so that we might better interact informally with members.

### **3) Help students understand our services**

We hope to make it clearer to students the services we provide and the ways that these services are linked. Money spent in our commercial ventures are directly linked to the services we offer, and we need to make that clearer. We will establish this link whilst simultaneously offering rewards and benefits to students.