

# **SUSU: University of Southampton Relationship Agreement**

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At the University of Southampton our students are central to all of our work. Crucial to that is the relationship between the university and students' union. Together, we are all engaged in transforming the lives of our students.

The key principles that underpin excellent working relationships between Higher Education Institutions and Students' Unions have been identified and formulated into a Relationship Agreement endorsed by various groups nationally. We have used this as the starting point for our own Relationship Agreement between SUSU and the University of Southampton. Through this agreement we expect students will receive a significantly improved university experience whilst at Southampton.

## Context

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Both SUSU and the university have identified strategies to deliver their missions and visions. This agreement is drafted within the context of the SUSU Union Plan to 2015 and the University Executive Group's strategic priorities. Fundamentally it ensures students are placed at the centre of the university experience.

### *SUSU Mission*

SUSU: Unlocking the potential and enriching the life of every student

### *University of Southampton Mission*

The University of Southampton is a research-led institution in which teaching and learning take place in an active research environment. We are committed to:

- **The advancement of knowledge** through critical and independent scholarship and research of international significance
- **The communication of knowledge** in an active learning environment involving staff at the forefront of their disciplines
- **The application of knowledge** for the benefit of society, both directly and by collaboration with other organisations.

## The Relationship Agreement

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The University has established that there will be a recognised Union of Students in its Statutes. SUSU has fulfilled that role since before the University Charter was established. The two parties have always enjoyed positive and respectful relationships. Moving forward we wish to strengthen those relationships at all levels of both organisations and see this agreement as an outline of what that means. The creation of this agreement is timely as we approach the first year of students paying £9,000 pa for their degree. A separate acknowledgement of the expectations between students and the University exists in the form of the Student Charter, which is developed with SUSU.

### *Strategic Partnership*

Together we ensure a spirit of partnership between the university and SUSU informing the strategic direction of both parties and informing service agreements.

We ensure informed engagement of SU representatives in institutional decision-making bodies as equals; this will be illustrated by SUSU representation on all university decision making bodies.

### *Consultation*

SUSU is consulted in a timely fashion, at the inception of ideas and before decisions are made about students and the university always ensures sufficient time is allowed in planning and decision making processes to achieve this. We will work together to agree appropriate consultation processes at the outset of each occasion.

## ***Openness & Trust***

There is consistent full, open, regular communication on relevant issues, in particular issues likely to have an impact on the other party, the student population and/or other joint stakeholders.

## ***Student Centred***

We have a shared commitment to developing and improving our students' experience of academia and the full range of extra-curricular aspects of their lives. We will place this interest in students at the heart of everything we do.

## ***Respect & Understanding***

We have clarity about, and a mutual understanding of, the distinct roles of the university and the SU and the value that each party brings to the relationship.

We see benefits in the disagreement and tension which opposing views can create; the appreciative enquiry of our work together on these matters strengthens the outcomes.

## ***Mutual Support & Commitment***

All of our interactions are constructive. There is demonstrable commitment to making the relationship work through investment of time and resources. Both parties ensure good relationships are secured and access is given to the right people and information.

## ***Independence***

We recognise the value of a strong, student-led Students' Union empowered to determine and manage its own affairs. This aligns with recognition of the need for the university to balance the interests of a range of stakeholders within an increasingly challenging external context.

## ***Accountability***

SUSU will be held accountable to the university as supervisor under the 1994 Education Act and as principal funder. This will operate within a mutually agreed framework which is robust, effective, efficient and compatible with the reporting requirements of other regulators (where relevant), such as The Charity Commission and Companies House.

The university acknowledges that SUSU is a major stakeholder and the primary body representing the student voice and as such will also present an annual report to students through SUSU's decision making and communication channels.

## ***Diversity & Equality***

We have a shared commitment to equality and diversity and we check the impact of changes to existing practice to ensure the fair treatment of all staff and students.

In signing this Relationship Agreement, both the university Vice Chancellor and the SUSU Union President acknowledge that we will work together to embed the principles across both organisations. This agreement will be reviewed annually (and amended if necessary) and signed by each President.

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**Professor Don Nutbeam**  
University Vice Chancellor

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**David Gilani**  
Union President 2013-14

## Practical Application

The relationships described operate on a number of different levels within both organisations:

- Governance
- Leadership
- Management and operational implementation

The way in which these come to life is fluid, with projects and partnerships appearing, developing and waning every year. We will create an annual cycle which ensures partners from both SUSU and the university will describe how we make the Relationship Agreement real throughout our organisations.

In practice this agreement translates into a partnership in three parts:

### **SUSU leads:**

- Representation of student opinion to inform university plans and decisions throughout the university
- Support to the myriad of student groups which our students create.
- An independent advice service for our students
- Support to all different cohorts of students
- Advice, guidance and campaigns to improve students' living arrangements
- A communication channel with the students.

### **Together we deliver:**

- Shared development of the education
- Enhanced student experience
- Employability support
- Student Development opportunities
- Welfare support
- Developing student focussed facilities

### **The University provides:**

- An annual block grant
- Use and occupation of various facilities and physical spaces
- Additional expertise and resource, for example Health & Safety
- Student membership of all university formal committees
- An agreement for student membership of all informal university committees.

- Community Volunteering
- Sporting opportunities
- Performing Arts
- Faith provision
- Accommodation support
- ... *and new projects all of the time...*

## Review, monitoring, development

During the course of every year we will ensure a series of meetings take place to allow all officers and the Vice Chancellor to meet with appropriate colleagues and discuss progress at the highest level. At the first meeting in July this will include a full review of this agreement in readiness for the annual signing.

In the late summer the UEG will meet with SUSU's Sabbatical Officers and senior leadership team to establish how the relationship agreement will be brought to life each year.

At the end of each year, we will produce a joint report to identify our achievements in the past year and opportunities for the next. This will be presented to all the relevant governing bodies of both organisations by the Vice Chancellor and Union President respectively.

### **SUSU Sabbaticals & Senior Leaders 2013-14:**

President **David Gilani**

VP Democracy & Creative Industries **David Martin**

VP Education **David Mendoza-Wolfson**

VP Engagement **Claire Gilbert**

VP Sports Development **Evan Whyte**

VP Student Communities **Oliver Coles**

VP Welfare **Rebecca Thomas**

Chief Executive

**Jaki Booth**

Head of Communications, Marketing & Technology

**Caroline Jessop**

Head of Commercial Development

**Tony Addison**

Head of Finance

**John Mills**

Head of Membership & Community Engagement

**Nickola Moore**

Head of People Development

**Gemma Beardsmore**

