

Ambition 25

Our Strategy

2021-2025





We believe every student at Southampton should:

- ✓ Feel happy, safe and part of a community
- ✓ Have a world-class academic experience
- ✓ Enjoy top quality extracurricular activities
- ✓ Be able to influence the world around them

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Introduction

As we emerge from one of the most challenging periods for SUSU in the last 50 years, launching a new strategic plan gives us an opportunity to reimagine what we stand for, what we do for our members and how we work.

It also gives us a chance to engage people in conversation about our organisation and how people would like to see us change as we move forward into a new future. We are excited about our ambition, our plans and the energy that work on this new strategy has generated.

We are mindful that the Students' Union at the University of Southampton (SUSU) is a complex organisation that offers a diverse range of services and activities, is a registered charity that operates in a quasi-public

sector environment and runs businesses that compete with the private sector. It is also an organisation that relies on strong relationships with University colleagues and other external partners and whose work is delivered by hundreds of student volunteers, backed up by a committed staff team.

We are also proud of our heritage, our unique student leadership governance model and the social good we have done over the decades and that we continue to do as we work in partnership to tackle the social justice issues of today.

We commend this strategic plan to you and thank the hundreds of people who had input into the two strategy reviews that were completed to inform its development.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Dolbear'.

Ben Dolbear
President and Chair
of the Board of Trustees



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Gardner'.

Jim Gardner
Chief Executive



Our Purpose is to:

- ✓ Help students form friendship groups
- ✓ Support students to complete their degrees
- ✓ Help students have a great time at University
- ✓ Give students a voice

Setting — the — Scene

SUSU is over 100 years old and has a proud history of representing students to the University and community, supporting students to complete their degrees, engaging students in a diverse range of activities and running events to ensure students have a great time at University.

Student Representation

We are known for our work on sustainability, social justice, and equality issues, for high levels of engagement in our activities, and the breadth of services we run. We also stand out as a students' union that has retained student leadership at its core and particularly for how our 300+ student groups have a high degree of autonomy and are led by their members.

COVID Impact

Our recent past was dominated by COVID, which severely impacted our ability to operate normal services. As a result, we scaled back activities and reduced our staff team from over 200 to below 75. Our income was also significantly affected by COVID restrictions, dropping by over 50%. Across the two financial years affected by COVID (so far), we achieved a break-even performance, which was an achievement given the pressure we faced.

COVID Recovery

As we move into the 2021/22 academic year, we are preparing for a more normal operating environment, re-opening bars and cafes, re-introducing large-scale events, and increasing our staff team back up to 200+.



Strategic Plan

Our last strategic plan ended in July 2020 and work to develop a new strategy commenced pre-COVID but was adapted due to the pandemic. Informed by the strategy consultation, we reviewed our vision, values, purpose, and missions and introduced a 'Bridging' Strategy to get us through the 2020/21 academic year. Much of the content of the Bridging Strategy remains relevant and so flows into our strategy for 2021-25. Notably, we have retained the Vision, Values and Statement of Purpose.

University Relationship

Over the last 18 months we've strengthened our relationship with the University of Southampton and a key objective in our new strategy is to build on this foundation and ensure our services complement and are aligned with University services, so that students have a seamless experience.

The University has increased student numbers, particularly International and Postgraduate Students. The University has also moved up league tables and aspires to continue to do so. The University and SUSU approved a joint Sustainability Strategy in 2020 and the University has placed sustainability centrally in its business strategy.

SUSU Refurb

Lastly, the University has committed to refurbishing SUSU's main building on the Highfield campus or building a new building. This will be a major project with enormous impacts on our services for the next 50 years. All these issues influence our new strategic plan.

「 Our Vision...
is that every student
loves their time at
Southampton 」



Strategy Consultation

We consulted widely in the development of our new strategy. This included the review conducted to inform our Bridging Strategy in 2020 and a more comprehensive consultation during 2021.

Across these consultations, around 2,000 students gave input, including a mix of undergraduates and postgraduates, home and international students and students from all Faculties and Campuses. We also consulted University management, our staff, and our Board of trustees. A full report of the review is available on the SUSU website www.susu.org.

A summary of the findings, which informed this strategy are as follows:

Demand For Events

Although demand for online provision will continue, there is a strong desire from students to connect with each other. When asked what one thing SUSU could do to improve life at University, a quarter of students surveyed mentioned the word 'event'.

Mental Health & Support

The COVID pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the mental health and wellbeing of Southampton students. When asked what SUSU's main priorities should be, 'providing advice and support to students' was ranked the highest priority.

Postgraduate Students

SUSU has struggled in the past to connect with the postgraduate community. The current offer is perceived as undergraduate focused, with many postgraduates not understanding the relevance of SUSU.

Relationship With The University

Relations between SUSU's and the University's leadership teams have improved significantly over the last 18 months. However, relationships below the leadership level, and with some Faculties and departments, are not strong and need developing.

A Changing World

How the world will emerge from COVID is uncertain but some things that influence our strategy are clear: more importance on digital delivery; pent-up demand for in-person activity; greater volatility, uncertainty and complexity; risk of future COVID restrictions.

Representation Of All Students

All research groups highlighted SUSU's role in representing students as both a collective Southampton population and the needs of distinct groups.

Sustainability

The University is focused in delivery of its Sustainability Strategy and is looking for SUSU to be an active partner in the project. University staff agreed that SUSU should have a "big" and "pivotal" role on delivery of the Sustainability Strategy.

Graduate Employability

With the economic impacts from COVID expected to last for years, students are concerned about their careers. Student employment, during their studies and after graduation, are areas SUSU should focus on improving.

Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion (EDI)

EDI was highlighted as a key area for SUSU to focus on. Students were generally positive about SUSU's work on EDI, are passionate about EDI issues and keen to see SUSU more active in this space.

Delivering Quality Services

The University of Southampton is a top global University and its students deserve a quality students' union. SUSU needs to improve the quality of its operations and ensure it is clear about the impact it is trying to have on the world.

Summary Strategy

Our Belief

is that every student at Southampton should:

- Feel happy, safe and part of a community
- Experience a world class academic programme
- Be able to access top quality activities outside the curriculum
- Feel listened to, able to shape their University experience and influence the world around them

Our Purpose

- Help students form friendship groups
- Support students to complete their degree programmes
- Help students have a great time at University
- Give students a voice in the University and wider community

Our Vision

is that every student loves their time at Southampton

Our Values



Stand Strong we stand up for students and make sure their voice is heard; we stand strong when facing challenges and are not afraid to be different; we think big and work to achieve great things



Join Together we are an inclusive and diverse community of students and staff; we join together with each other, the University and the local community to make a positive difference



Take Responsibility we continually work to challenge discrimination and prejudice and be more sustainable; we strive to be a force for good for students and wider society.

Our Missions

are the work we do to deliver our purpose; they are to:

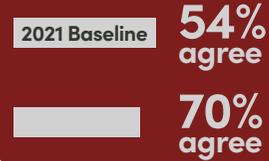
- **Strengthen** student voice
- **Grow and nurture** student communities
- **Create** a memorable student experience
- **Support** students to complete their studies
- Be a **strong and sustainable** organisation



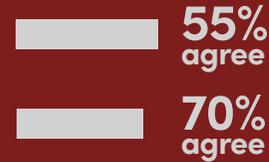
Strengthen Student Voice

Key Performance Indicator

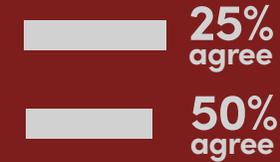
Annual Survey
SUSU effectively represents students



Annual Survey
SUSU effectively represents students' - proportion of PG respondents



Proportion of Total student population who engage with our democratic systems over the year



National Student Survey Q26
The students' union effectively represents students' academic interests



Context

SUSU has a comprehensive course representative system in place, a well-resourced Representation Department to support our student representatives and an active Union Senate.

Our sabbatical officers play a lead role in our student voice work and have a place on most University Committees, as well as access to local Government and Agencies.

We already play an active role in representing students to the University and wider society, but we are less effective at representing postgraduate students and students at sites other than Highfield campus.

Ambition

Students at Southampton deserve a strong students' union that has their backs, stands strong and helps give them a voice in the University and wider community.

We will work to ensure that all students, regardless of level of study, year, or campus, are fully represented by us and that students from all backgrounds have a voice in the University and wider society.



Mission 1 Priorities

- ✓ **Improve** the representation of postgraduate taught and research students.
- ✓ **Review** the portfolios of our sabbatical officers, ensuring they reflect the student leadership requirements of our broad membership.
- ✓ **Develop** the representation of students based at campuses other than Highfield, informed by a dedicated 'Sites Strategy'.
- ✓ **Develop** a monthly insight report to inform our student voice work.
- ✓ **Improve** and simplify mechanisms for student feedback to enhance our student voice work.
- ✓ **Ensure** the voice of students from all backgrounds is heard within SUSU, and the University.
- ✓ **Improve** our engagement with local government and agencies, ensuring students are effectively represented in the wider community as well as the University.

Impact: by 2025...

Students will feel listened to, able to shape their University experience and influence the world around them.



MISSION 2

Grow & Nurture Student Communities

Context

SUSU offers a diverse range of student activities, through its 350+ clubs and societies, RAG, and student media outlets.

In a normal year, around 50% of the student population engage in one or more of the Union's student groups. A significant number of students also participate through our intramural sport league. Our student activities are instrumental in building student communities and supporting students to form friendship groups.

We also know that participation in extra-curricular activities has a positive impact on student retention and academic attainment. Although overall participation in

Ambition

Every student should have ample opportunity to engage in high quality, well resourced and supported extra- or 'co'-curricular activities.

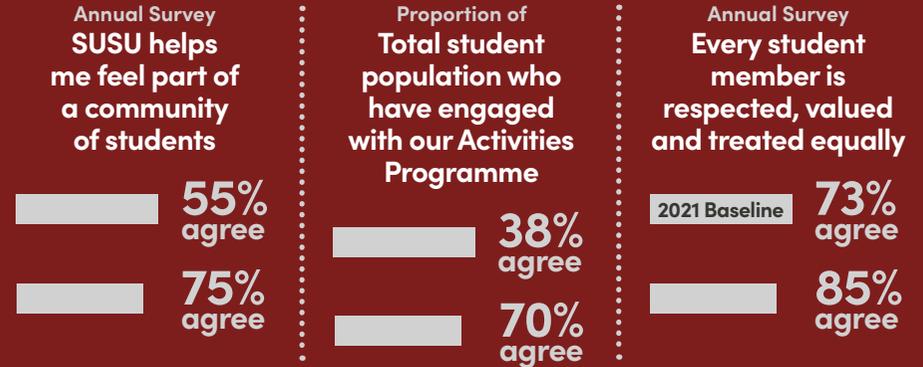
We will develop the quality of our existing activities and develop provision to engage those groups of students who currently do not engage.

our activities is high, thousands of students do not engage with our activities programme, particularly postgraduate students and students based at sites other than Highfield.

Mission 2 Priorities

- ✓ **Empower** clubs and societies through robust governance, training, and a fit-for-purpose financial management system.
- ✓ **Provide** accessible and engaging activities throughout the year to allow students to meet each other and form friendship groups.
- ✓ **Use insight** to review the engagement of all students with our offer and adapt our approach in response to ensure activities are as accessible and appealing as possible.
- ✓ **Develop** networking and community-building opportunities for students of all backgrounds and levels of study.
- ✓ **Recognise** and celebrate the achievements of all our volunteers.
- ✓ **Introduce** new activities programmes and build on existing programmes to engage groups of students who don't currently engage in our activities.

Key Performance Indicator



Impact: by 2025...

Students from all areas of the University and at all sites will recognise that they have access to a broad, engaging, and high-quality range of co-curricular activities.



MISSION **3**

Create A Memorable Experience

Context

SUSU's bars, social spaces, events and freshers programme, our work on student safety and to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion, all play an instrumental role in creating an outstanding student experience at Southampton.

Students have fun, form friendships for life, and relax in our spaces and at our events. We support students to be safe, who they want to be, and part of an inclusive community.

We need to build on this history, develop the quality of events, improve student safety on campus and in the wider community and ensure we meet the needs of all our members.

Ambition

Every student should have access to social spaces, and an exciting programme of events and activities, that form a core part of their student experience.

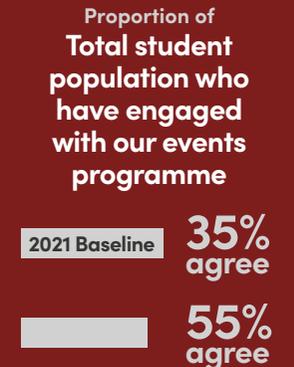
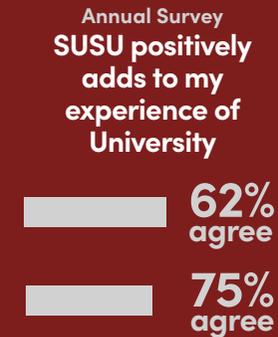
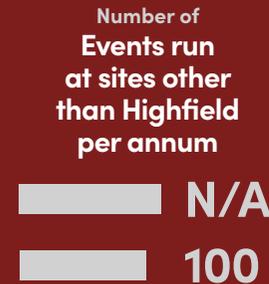
Students should feel safe and able to participate in events and activities. We will develop our events and activities and expand our approach for sites other than Highfield.

We will introduce a comprehensive approach to student safety on-campus and work with local government and agencies to improve student safety in the community.

Mission 3 Priorities

- ✓ **Co-ordinate** engaging and inclusive programmes of events and activities across University sites for Freshers and Refreshers each year.
- ✓ **Implement** our new Social Enterprise Strategy, repositioning our shops, bars and cafes around our values and core Business Strategy and embedding student feedback in their operation.
- ✓ **Develop** our events and entertainment offer for students in halls and based at campuses other than Highfield, informed by our new 'Sites Strategy'
- ✓ **Deliver** an engaging, inclusive, and diverse programme of events throughout the year.
- ✓ **Review** and improve our events and activities offer for PGT and PGR students.
- ✓ **Implement** a Zero Tolerance to Harassment programme in our own outlets as part of a comprehensive approach to student safety on-campus and in the wider community.
- ✓ **Implement** our EDI Strategy and support our Liberation Officers to create a more inclusive University community.

Key Performance Indicator



Impact: by 2025...

Students will have a positive and memorable student experience

that has been influenced by SUSU's engaging and inclusive events and activities programme and our comprehensive approach to student safety.



MISSION 4

Support Students To Complete Their Studies

Context

SUSU's Advice Centre, Lettings Agency, Buddy Scheme and range of other support services are instrumental in supporting hundreds of students every year to complete their degree programmes and fulfil their potential at University.

The University also provides a range of well resourced and professional support services. We need to ensure students have access to a seamless, integrated, and comprehensive package of advice, support and advocacy.

We need to raise awareness of our services, professionalise our newer, student-led services and improve the reach of our services, particularly at sites and for postgraduate students.

Ambition

Every student should have access to a comprehensive, integrated, and accessible programme of support, advice, and advocacy to help ensure they get the most out of their University experience and can complete their degree programme.

We will ensure that our support services are aligned with and complementary to the University's and Community's, and that they are high quality, inclusive and accessible to all our members.

Mission 4 Priorities

- ✓ **Raise** awareness of the full range of our support and advocacy services among all communities of students.
- ✓ **Develop** our Buddy Scheme and Lettings Agency to ensure they are integrated with our other support services.
- ✓ **Develop** the accessibility of our support services by reviewing our digital offer as well as our in-person provision and ensuring the right balance is provided and that both offers are high quality.
- ✓ **Work** with appropriate University colleagues to ensure that our support and advocacy services are aligned with, and complementary to, University services.
- ✓ **Achieve** accreditation for our Advice Centre, through the Customer Service Excellence Framework or an equivalent quality assurance standard.
- ✓ **Review** opportunities to collaborate with the University Careers Department and explore the possibility of establishing a student employment agency.

Key Performance Indicator

Annual Survey
SUSU offers good support and advice to students

54% agree

70% agree

Proportion of Total student population who engage with our support & advocacy services over the year

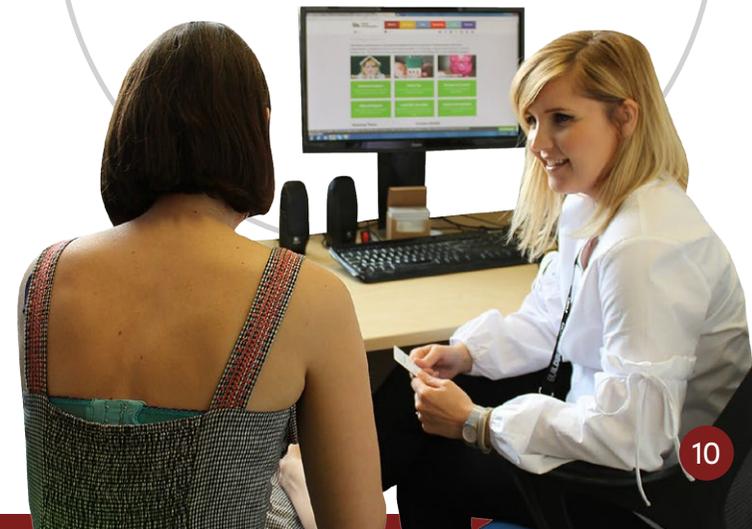
<10%

20%

Impact: by 2025...

Students will be clear about the range of support services offered by SUSU,

they will recognise these services as high quality and complementary to University services and the full breadth of students will feel that SUSU's services meet their particular needs.



MISSION **5**

Strong & Sustainable Organisation

Context

SUSU employs 200+ people who are critical to delivering the quality services we aspire to provide.

The breadth of student-led activities we run, particularly outdoor pursuits, along with bars, events, and catering operations, creates health and safety risks requiring careful management.

Our finances are solid, and we responded strongly to the financial challenges created by COVID. Our pre-COVID resourcing in, and use of, digital and information technologies was weak. Our buildings are dated and unfit for purpose and the University has committed to a major refurbishment.

Ambition

As a top-100 global University, Southampton and its students deserve a top-quality students' union that delivers world-class services and facilities.

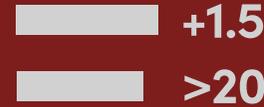
To achieve this ambition, we need to maintain our financial health, develop into an outstanding employer, improve health and safety management and make better use of digital and information technologies. We also need to become a more environmentally sustainable organisation and complete the building refurbishment programme.

Mission 5 Priorities

- ✓ **Secure** our financial health and sustainability through implementation of our new Finance Strategy and Social Enterprise Strategy.
- ✓ **Become** an outstanding employer, that prioritises the employment of students and has a high-performance culture, through implementation of our new People Strategy.
- ✓ **Confirm** plans and secure funding for our new building and commence building works by the end of the strategy.
- ✓ **Ensure** robust governance that complies with best practice and facilitates delivery of our strategy.
- ✓ **Strengthen** our digital offer and use of information technology through implementation of our new Digital Strategy.
- ✓ **Provide** a safe environment for our staff, students, and visitors; implement the Health & Safety Audit Action Plan completed in 2020 and invest in dedicated health and safety staff resource.
- ✓ **Play** a key part in delivery of the University's Sustainability Strategy and take action in our own areas to significantly improve our environmental sustainability credentials.

Key Performance Indicator

Employee
Net Promoter Score
(from internal staff
satisfaction survey)



Annual Survey
How sustainable do
you feel SUSU is?
(scale of 0-10)



Maintain Net
Current Assets
of £1/3M throughout
the Strategy and
grow Net Current
Assets by 2025



Impact: by 2025...

We will be in a strong and stable position

and thus able to deliver the quality services that the University of Southampton community deserves and expects.



Enabling Strategies

Delivery of our Strategy 2021-2025 is reliant on a series of 'enabling' strategies, as shown in the diagram below.

All these strategies cover the same 4-year period, and many are inter-related, for example, our Finance Strategy relies on successful delivery of our Social Enterprise Strategy, whilst our EDI Strategy is integral to our People Strategy. Our Business Strategy and the enabling strategies are all focused on delivery of our vision, and our statement of charitable purpose.

All our work and our strategies are informed by our Values:

-  **Stand Strong**
-  **Join Together**
-  **Take Responsibility**

