

# SUSU

Southampton University

Students' Union



# Ambition 25

Our Strategy

2021-2025

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We believe every student at Southampton should:

- feel part of a community, happy and safe
- have a world-class academic experience
- have access to top quality extra-curricular experiences
- be able to influence the world around them

## 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 thanks the hundreds of people who had input into the two strategy reviews that were completed to inform its development.



Ben Dolbear  
President and Chair of the Board of Trustees



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. 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.

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. 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+.

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. 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. 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 for the future 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 [here](#) (insert hyperlink). A summary of findings, which informed this strategy, is below:

1. **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'.
2. **Representation of all students** - all audience groups highlighted SUSU's role in representing students, as a total Southampton population and the needs of distinct groups. Currently certain segments of the student population do not feel well represented by SUSU.
3. **Mental health and 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.
4. **Sustainability** - the University is focused on 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.
5. **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.
6. **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.
7. **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, aren't strong and need developing.
8. **Equality, Diversity, and 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.
9. **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.
10. **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 part of a community and feel happy and safe
- experience a world-class academic programme
- be able to access top quality experiences outside the curriculum
- feel listened to, able to shape their University experience and influence the world around them

**Our Purpose** is to:

- 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** for the future is that every student loves their time at Southampton

**Our Values** are:

- *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 take action on the issues that matter to students and act with integrity; we continually work to be more sustainable, challenge discrimination and prejudice

**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

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## Mission 1 – Strengthen Student Voice

**Context** – SUSU has a comprehensive course representative system in place, a well-resourced Representation Department to support our student representatives and an active Union Council. 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 students at sites other than the main campus at Highfield and postgraduate students.

**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

We will:

- ✓ 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'.
- ✓ Streamline and enhance mechanisms for student feedback, ensuring we have simple and effective mechanisms for students to inform our student voice work.
- ✓ Ensure the voice of students from all backgrounds is heard within SUSU, and the University.
- ✓ Develop a monthly insight report to inform our student voice work.
- ✓ 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.

### Key Performance Indicator

<b>Measure</b>	<b>2021 Baseline</b>	<b>2025 Target</b>
Annual survey - Question 'SUSU effectively represents students'	54% agree	75% agree
Annual survey - Question 'every student member is respected, valued and treated equally'	73% agree	85% agree
National Student Survey - Question 26 'The students' union effectively represents students' academic interests'	50% agree	65% agree
Proportion of total student population who have engaged with our democratic systems over the course of the year	TBC	TBC

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## Mission 2 – Grow and Nurture Student Communities

**Context** – SUSU offers a diverse range of student activities, through its 320+ 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 intra-mural 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 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.

**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.

### Mission 2 Priorities

We will:

- ✓ 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.

**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.

### Key Performance Indicator

Measure	2021 Baseline	2025 Target
Annual survey - Question 'SUSU helps me feel part of a community of students'	55% agree	75% agree
Proportion of total student population who have engaged with our Activities Programme	TBC	75%
National Student Survey – Question 21 'I feel part of a community of staff and students'	59% agree	70% agree



## Mission 3 – Create a Memorable Student Experience

**Context** – SUSU’s bars, social spaces, events and freshers programme, our work on student safety and to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, 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

We will:

- ✓ Co-ordinate engaging and inclusive programmes of events and activities across all the Universities’ main 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.

**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.

### Key Performance Indicator

Measure	2021 Baseline	2025 Target
Annual survey - Question ‘SUSU positively adds to my experience of University’	62% agree	75% agree
Proportion of total student population who have engaged with our events programme	TBC	TBC
Number of events run at sites other than Highfield per annum	N/A	TBC

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## Mission 4 – Support Students to Complete their Studies

**Context** – SUSU’s Advice Centre, Lettings Agency, Nightline, 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

We will:

- ✓ Raise awareness of the full range of our support and advocacy services among all communities of students.
- ✓ Develop our Buddy Scheme, Lettings Agency and Nightline Service and 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,
- ✓ 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.

**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.

### Key Performance Indicator

Measure	2021 Baseline	2025 Target
Annual survey - Question ‘SUSU offers good support and advice to students’	54% agree	70% agree
Proportion of total student population who have engaged with one or more of our support and advocacy services	TBC	TBC

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## Mission 5 – Strong and 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

We will:

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.

**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.

### Key Performance Indicator

Measure	2021 Baseline	2025 Target
Maintain Net Current Assets of at least £1/3M throughout the life of the Strategy and grow our Net Current Assets by 2025	TBC	£1/2M
Employee Net Promoter Score	+1.5	>30
Annual survey - Question 'How sustainable do you feel SUSU is?' (scale of 0-10)	5.9	>7.5

## Enabling Strategies

Delivery of our Strategy 2021-25 is reliant on a series of 'enabling' strategies, as shown in the chart 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 of our work and our strategies are informed by our Values – to Stand Strong, Join Together and Take Responsibility.



Our Values are:

- Stand Strong
- Join Together
- Take Responsibility