

Greenwich Students' Union QSU verification report

Verified by Matthew Webber

Sep 15, 2021

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:

The Union has a strategy in place that went through extensive consultation with key stakeholders and has concluded work on a new plan for the future. All stakeholder groups spoke positively about the new strategy. There is a clear methodology based on continued research and insight from the student experience and consultation work with stakeholder groups.

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 values had been reviewed as part of development of the new strategy. There was a strong connection to the values from all key stakeholder groups. There had also been the opportunity for officers and staff to review them with a value changing as a result.

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 shared an extensive operating plan which set out key responsibilities across the GSU team. These objectives linked back to the overarching strategy. The document is clear, with direct lines of sight for all activities.

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:

The strategy was created with strong engagement from focus groups, various consultations, survey data and associated findings with some amendments made as a result. Close attention has been paid to the new University strategy to ensure, where appropriate, it compliments this.

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:

Capacity planning was spoken of positively with the addition of key Students' Union services at the Medway campus. There was reference to funding for projects rather than consistent longer-term funding in some instances, which may be an issue to address with the University to ensure continuity and stability of vital services to students.

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:

There was strong engagement with the development of the new strategy by all groups. Staff and elected officers, trustees and University staff had the opportunity to input into the new strategy. Staff reflected on sessions where they had been able to input. There was a shared feeling that the new plan was what Greenwich Students' Union needed for its future. One stakeholder, when reflecting on the new strategy, said there was a focus on students being life ready, equality and equity and sustainability at the heart of the new plan.

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 Union plan sets out clear priorities for the future stating clearly commitments to both students and its colleagues.

Relationships and Partnerships – Very Good

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 union can demonstrate that it values its relationships and connections with its members highly.

The union has considered forming relationships with unengaged members and deepening relationships with engaged members, including via digital engagement. It may have also made some decisive efforts to improve these relationships, but evidence to support the success of this work may not yet be available. In many cases unions will have plans in place to allocate time and resources to improving relationships with its members.

Verifier analysis:

The Union conducts regular member surveys to ascertain its impact. In addition, there are regular student assembly meetings that have engaged with a wide breadth of students. Digital engagement was consistently praised by students in stakeholder groups, with one student remarking that digital communications had got much better over the past couple of years with the website and social media use via Instagram particularly noted.

B. The union is aware of how it is perceived by key stakeholders and has a degree of self-awareness. The union will have supported this by undertaking some kind of opinion-gathering work that specifically tests perceptions. It may also have considered how it can manage and improve these perceptions, but the impact of this has yet to be felt.

Verifier analysis:

Regular research is undertaken into member views, and both the University and Students' Union view of one another was positively in tandem. Members feedback is regularly captured, and this has informed future planning for the new strategy. There is a recognition that there is good engagement with students who want to be involved but a challenge, not unfamiliar for many organisations, of engaging with those less involved. GSU is proactively trying to change this with officers focusing on different demographics and groups that are less engaged and targeted activity such as daytime events to reach out to mature students with children. Staff also reflected on how positive feedback had been from students during the pandemic and blended learning and that this was reflected in impact reporting.

C. The union can demonstrate that it has beneficial relationships or partnerships with a number of stakeholders and NUS. As a result, there are examples of union services or activities that have been delivered or undertaken in partnership with others. The union has also dedicated time and resources to effective networking beyond its immediate stakeholders. Internal relationships are managed to promote the delivery of union activities and the achievement of planned outcomes.

Verifier analysis:

There are clear examples of partnership working that serve to help Greenwich students and the organisation be effective. For example, work has been undertaken by the NUS Commercial and Trading Team on refits of commercial outlets at GSU. In addition, officers and Staff have made the most of access to learning and development and networking opportunities via NUS. Collaboration with other London-based Students' Unions is also valued. One example is a collaboration with KCLSU and Westminster Students' Unions to run a bespoke Train the Trainer programme.

D. 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 reviewed and provided input to the institution's strategy before finalising its own, recognising the importance of complementary plans. The institution has valued this, and both parties have had the opportunity to provide feedback on each other's plans whilst recognising both bodies are independent of one another.

E. The union can demonstrate that there is equity in the partnership with the institution and the partnership extends to all elected officers and beyond senior staff within the union.**Verifier analysis:**

Both stakeholders from the Union and University spoke warmly of the relationship between the two organisations with a genuine partnership and working together to improve student lives. The Union can provide challenge with an example cited around mental health provision and whether more staff support was required, and a desire for GSU to be involved in shaping the direction of this. There are informal and formal meetings between both organisations and cross-working groups that involve both GSU officers and staff. The Union supports the University in its work around accreditations, including the Athena Swan and Race Equality mark.

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 – Very Good

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 its membership is at the core of the majority of its activities and that the democratic principles of inclusiveness, student leadership, considered judgement and transparency are important to everything the union does.

Verifier analysis:

GSU went through an extensive democracy review that put members at the heart of decision making and influence of their Union. The removal of specific officer portfolios to enable the officers to prioritise student priorities through a student ballot alongside easy-to-call student assemblies has allowed the democratic elements to be agile and proactive.

B. The democratic system is sustainable in terms of its demands on union resources, but also appropriate in terms of its demands on the time and participation of the membership.

Verifier analysis:

Many stakeholders spoke positively of the changes in GSU's democracy and it being sustainable. The democracy review led to open remits for officer roles and additional resourcing in liberation representation activities. Stakeholders reflected that these had been good changes.

C. The union is able to show where it has attempted to ensure that members from under-represented groups become engaged in union elections, decision-making and working on issues that interest them.

Verifier analysis:

The democracy review led to open remits for officer roles which led to a significant increase in diversity of candidates and those within roles. The assembly and ballot options also offer more flexible ways to influence decision making. The organisation has also developed four liberation networks with staff and officer champions to support this work.

D. Students are able to influence the political and strategic direction of their students' union. In these two areas, members are enabled to participate in identifying problems and selecting solutions as part of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the union can demonstrate that decisions made by members are acted on in a timely way.

Verifier analysis:

Students spoke positively of the student assembly as a mechanism to influence the political direction of the organisation. Members are regularly surveyed, which has helped develop the organisation's strategic approach alongside the priority ballot that sets key activity in the political sphere for the next academic year.

E. Information about the union's democratic decision-making process is accessible, relevant and timely to ensure that members can contribute to the decision-making processes of the union in an informed way. Members are therefore able to make considered judgements when voting in elections and making decisions.

Verifier analysis:

Information around the democratic elements of the organisation were felt by students to be communicated strongly in the most recent year, with one student from Avery Hill citing there was a distinct improvement in information being shared. Email and social media messaging around the elections was beneficial.

F. Most of the members feel that they fully understand how to participate in union decision making, including but not limited to, becoming a trustee, voting, standing for election and submitting a proposal to be discussed and decided upon 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.

Verifier analysis:

There was a clear understanding from students about how they could engage in union decision making with the Student Assembly consistently praised. Training and continued support for students in leadership roles were available.

G. The union's democracy is not limited to elections or formal voting processes, allowing a greater range of students to participate in the development of the union and its work.

Verifier analysis:

GSU runs several student assemblies, which have allowed students to participate on issues that matter to them. One respondent summarised the student assemblies as being really powerful and an example of students gathering together.

H. The union can demonstrate how it promotes the developmental and educational benefits of participation in its democracy.

Verifier analysis:

The organisation sets out a number of training resources to support students participating in democracy and one-to-one mentoring for election candidates.

I. The union has digital spaces available (for example live streamed comment debates or 'big ideas' online voting boards) to enhance their members' ability to engage in the democratic process online with clearly defined regulations saying how this should be carried out and how this translates to union policy.

Verifier analysis:

The student priorities ballot is online and offers students the opportunity to shape the future direction of their Union. Input to develop these priorities is sought from students before the ballot takes place, and there is another check in on the priorities set early into the next academic year.

People – Very Good

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 union's strategic plan includes learning and development in various ways to achieve its aims. The union's leadership can identify how they have created a culture of continuous improvement.

Verifier analysis:

The Union's previous strategy and operating plan and the new strategy have learning and development embedded within. Leadership within GSU spoke about taking great pride in learning and development within the organisation. There is a toolkit for moving into management and a training toolkit developed by GSU staff with in-person and online delivery.

B. Expenditure on staffing in its entirety is reported and explained to stakeholders as well as through the union's structures in a way that is clear and understood.

Verifier analysis:

GSU budget for staffing and development is reported in the annual accounts. GSU had also undertaken work on pay gaps within the organisation and had published this on their website. This is something they intend to do annually.

C. There are a few examples where investments in learning and development can be shown to have had an impact towards the achievement of strategic objectives.

Verifier analysis:

Part of the appraisal system is to develop individual training plans. There are also wider cross-organisation training toolkits and sessions available. There are also templates for managers and employees to submit training requests to the CEO and HR for approval.

D. Recruitment processes are monitored to ensure equality of opportunity.

Verifier analysis:

There is a consistent process for recruitment with identifiable information omitted before shortlisting, with analysis undertaken at the end of each recruitment cycle.

E. There has clearly been an attempt at succession planning and development of talent across the organisation. Internally, managers have a good understanding of career progression and promotion.

Verifier analysis:

There was broad recognition of development within the organisation. One example cited was having senior coordinators, which gave both a new title and development and an enhanced salary banding. This supported progression and succession planning giving development opportunities to staff who were ready for the next step in their career.

F. Staff are engaged in the organisation. They feel they have a role in the development of the union and that they are consulted. The union's leadership feel that internal communication systems work well. As a result, all staff feel knowledgeable and able to contribute.

Verifier analysis:

Staff spoke positively of their engagement with the organisation, citing involvement in the new strategy and a refresh of the organisation's values as part of this process. There are formal and informal mechanisms for two-way communication with a termly staff engagement group, staff days three times a year and a fortnightly catch up. The verification took place shortly after Students' Union provision at the Medway campus had transferred to Greenwich Students' Union. Staff spoke positively of the transition citing how well it had been handled.

G. All staff have an annual opportunity to review their progress and discuss learning and development needs, so they are growing in their role. There is a culture that welcomes continuous learning and the development of staff equally.

Verifier analysis:

The appraisal system was built with staff from the organisation. Staff spoke warmly of the mechanisms in place to discuss progress but also the opportunity to review their role with their line manager if either party felt the role was going beyond the initial scope of the position.

H. Processes are in place to manage staff performance across most areas and these are up-to-date. Staff have access to these which can be in the form of a staff handbook.

Verifier analysis:

All staff have access to up-to-date policies and a handbook.

I. The union has some kind of reward and recognition process in place and it may be possible to identify how the process contributes to the motivation of staff.

Verifier analysis:

The organisation has set out a clear offer of how it goes beyond statutory benefits for employees. There is a commitment within the People strategy to further work around recognition.

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

Verifier analysis:

The organisation offers flexible working and a flexi scheme.

K. The union can demonstrate that volunteers are important to the organisation and they are appropriately trained for their role. There may also be evidence of development opportunities for some volunteers. Volunteers feel valued within their role(s).

Verifier analysis:

Trustees receive training led by the Chair of the Board. Other volunteer roles also receive appropriate training.

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L. The union has processes and support in place to help staff stay well and have good mental health at work. Regular 'return to work' conversations take place between line managers and staff to help support staff with their health and wellbeing and put in place supportive plans, if required. Line managers are equipped to have constructive and supportive open conversations with staff about their health and wellbeing. Staff may have access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Mental Health First Aiders or other forms of emergency support may be in place, which staff are aware of and use as needed.

Verifier analysis:

GSU has set up a well-being committee to support all staff within the organisation. Return to work interviews are undertaken after a day off sick to ensure necessary support is offered. In addition, all staff have access to an employee assistance programme. There are also staff activities throughout the year, and during the pandemic, a photography society was set up.

Liberation, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - 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 a policy outlining its approach to LEDI issues. There is an awareness of LEDI policies amongst staff and a plan to embed it into union culture.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has several policies that sets out a clear approach to LEDI issues. This is set out in induction to ensure staff are aware of and following these policies from the beginning of their time at GSU.

B. There are support mechanisms for victims of discrimination, bullying, and harassment and a care centred approach to making LEDI improvements, particularly for people from liberation groups. Staff feel supported to raise issues at their union to encourage the progression of LEDI inclusion.

Verifier analysis:

There are clear policies and procedures in place and regular monitoring within an annual NUS staff survey around measuring staff perceptions around being treated irrespective of ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion.

C. The union can demonstrate that line managers are supported to increase their understanding of, and to engage with, LEDI.

Verifier analysis:

Line managers have access to a range of training linked to LEDI. The staff group, which included line managers, spoke confidently around LEDI and the work being undertaken and support in place.

D. The union acknowledges the value of learning and staff development on LEDI issues. There is a general awareness of LEDI issues amongst staff. Staff can identify gaps in their LEDI knowledge and look to the union to provide an opportunity for learning.

Verifier analysis:

Part of the training for staff has included unconscious bias and race equity training. There was shared and deep reflection from the staff group around LEDI and that the organisation is taking a number of actions to create a positive LEDI culture. There is currently race equity planning underway which will support further enhancements led by the Deputy Chief Executive at GSU.

E. There is a recognised LEDI champion on the board and/or in the senior leadership team.

Verifier analysis:

There is a widespread commitment to LEDI within the organisation and this is championed by senior leaders. At the recommendation of the Deputy CEO, several staff at GSU have taken part in the NUS RISE programme, including the CEO. Staff who attended the RISE programme were given the opportunity to share what they had learnt with the wider staff team.

F. The union collects diversity monitoring information for people across the union (including staff, officers, volunteers and trustees) to track the diversity of their applications during recruitment and elections.

Verifier analysis:

Recruitment data is recorded at the point of recruitment, and election data shows a continued positive trajectory of a more broad and diverse level of engagement with Greenwich students. MSL data is also used to understand the diversity engagement at key activities such as Freshers' Fair.

G. The union acknowledges its culture is at the start of engaging with LEDI. The union can identify approaches to LEDI and staff feel that the culture needs some improvement to implement LEDI but there is willingness to achieve this at all levels.

Verifier analysis:

LEDI is very much a priority area for GSU from speaking to different stakeholder groups and taking into account the written evidence provided by GSU. Staff undertake unconscious bias training and race equity training with trustees also taking part in the latter. There are various events for staff linked to liberation activity for example, a pride bake-off in LGBT History Month.

Communication - Very Good

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.

A. The union demonstrates that it gives information to, and seeks the views of, its members and stakeholders in a considered way. The union has a section within its strategic plan that specifically addresses communication and includes digital engagement. As a result, communication is planned and conveys key messages.

Verifier analysis:

There were a number of examples of the union seeking views of its members and stakeholders in a considered way. There was regular surveying of students and check-in phone calls provided a regular pulse of what students were saying. Communication is referenced in both the outgoing and new strategy. Students spoke positively of how they received messages from GSU. GSU also has internal planning mechanisms to help staff plan communications using a 'Communications Request System.'

B. Members feel that that know what is happening in their union. The membership as a whole has an understanding and knowledge of the union's activities, operations and key messages. Across the entire membership this understanding is notably stronger among engaged members. Additionally, this awareness is often far stronger in some area than others, typically around events. There is widespread knowledge among the union's members of its feedback mechanisms. Members feel that the union acts in a way that is mostly open and transparent and that their views are listened to and generally acted upon.

Verifier analysis:

Students cited receiving good information which is helpful and supportive from GSU. There was a theme of the website having particularly improved with information being readily accessible with an example cited by one student that all welcome and induction events were readily available, so you knew what was going on. Students spoke positively about the student assemblies and elected officers being ways for them to provide feedback.

C. The effectiveness of the union's communication is apparent due to level of general awareness among its members. Various communication channels are used, including digital ones, however, their effectiveness is not quantified or measured against any targets. As a result, knowledge of the value of particular communication mechanisms or the success of particular messages is not known.

Verifier analysis:

A range of communication channels were cited in the evidence and verification. There is a multi-faceted approach to communications with targeted communications to specific groups. There are marketing and social media strategies underpinning work. While there are evolved communication techniques around email, social media, and website, staff members also recognised the value of providing students with wall planners setting out key milestones throughout the year.

D. The union typically uses tailored communication methods based on contexts and messages designed to reach different groups of students. There are examples of the union planning or trialling new methods to improve its communication with under-represented groups, including digitally.

Verifier analysis:

There were examples of tailored communications. Segmentation of messaging is prompted at the point of registration for newsletters with GSU with students being able to self-select various communications based on their interests. Avery Hill had a bespoke employed student staff member looking after communications, allowing for a more personalised approach to this campus.

E. The union is able to demonstrate effective and constructive two-way communications with its key stakeholders.

Verifier analysis:

The retention project with over 13,000 calls has served a proactive, personal communication element with students to both support and understand them and was valued by a range of stakeholders throughout the verification visit. Communication from students around their views and experiences also then form the student priorities ballot. Additionally, the Union works closely with the University on shared communication where it best serves students such as a town hall-style discussion with the Vice-Chancellor and the Students' Union to answer students' questions during the pandemic.

F. There are definite consistencies or patterns within the union's communications, indicating that thought has been given to the union's brand. Members are able to recognise the union's brand.

Verifier analysis:

Students consistently praised email communication, website and social media through Instagram as key communication channels. Within GSU's own planning, there are clear distinctions around colour and branding to differentiate from the other communications to students.

Services – Very Good

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. There are examples of services that have been created, adjusted or developed in response to member feedback. At least some services are consciously operated in direct response to member needs.

Verifier analysis:

There were some really strong examples of this picked up through the verification and evidence. As a result of the pandemic, a COVID Retention and Wellbeing Check phone call project was launched with additional funding from the university, a new complimentary service for GSU to check in on student wellbeing and signpost where appropriate to additional services.

B. Where the union is restricted (in its space, finances or other restriction), it has considered alternative ways of offering services. The services that the union offers are well used by its members.

Verifier analysis:

The Union worked with students on what they wanted from a commercial outlet, 'The Lower Deck', closing the venue at weekends to enable a 3rd party provider to run events and activities and changing the food offer based on student feedback.

C. The union demonstrates the quality of its services by using user or income data that is routinely recorded and reported. There may also be some user feedback on the overall quality of a service or elements of a service but there is only limited evidence of substantive actions in response to this feedback.

Verifier analysis:

The Union collects feedback from students for its services. Impact reports highlight strong satisfaction with GSU services. Staff and students spoke positively about services and how students could actively provide feedback through social media polls as well as more traditional surveys.

D. The union monitors the performance of most of its services, often using hard indicators such as income or participation numbers. In advice services (where these exist), the union should be able to describe the profile of its advice casework including issues and demographics. The union has set out some expectations for the performance of its services based around these hard indicators. As a result, there is scrutiny of performance through the union's governance structures, which has ensured appropriate remedial actions where services were failing to meet expectations.

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Verifier analysis:

There is a clear long term and short-term plan in place with specific measures around services. Trustees spoke positively of the data provided and felt there was appropriate levels of scrutiny of commercial data.

E. There are examples where the union has opted to work in partnership within other organisations or companies to develop the quality of its services (for example by undertaking a commercial health check with NUS' trading support team). As a result, the union is able to demonstrate that its members receive a better service. The union is able to demonstrate some level of input over the quality of services that it has passed over to a third party.

Verifier analysis:

There was clear evidence of GSU working in partnership with other organisations to support its services. By working with NUS for a Commercial Health Check service, improvements were made in commercial outlets.

F. There is a degree of connection between the majority of services and activities that the union operates directly and facilitates indirectly. The union can demonstrate areas where the way its services are run, support its representation, campaigning and partnership work.

Verifier analysis:

The services and activities consistently correlate with representation, campaigning and partnership work. One example of this was during the wellbeing check in's there were issues with financial support that GSU worked closely with the University to then resolve.

G. Where realistic, services are available remotely for students (for example online advice sessions, club and society membership processes, union shop etc.) and the union is willing to try out new initiatives, platforms and services as they become available.

Verifier analysis:

Services continued to be offered remotely to students particularly around advice appointments virtually and the wellbeing check in service. Students and staff felt the organisation had done a good job in offering remote provision during the pandemic.

Participation – Very Good

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 can demonstrate that it provides a wide range of participation opportunities to its members and actively promotes them. As a result, members have a good awareness of participation opportunities.

Verifier analysis:

GSU operates a number of participation opportunities that students had a good awareness of, with many speaking positively of the opportunities available to them as they returned to campus. Students and officers spoke particularly positively of the four liberation networks. The Union pays students for their time when involved in consultation activities, recognising and respecting their time and expertise.

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B. Most of the union's groups and individual members have some understanding of how to contribute to its decision-making processes.

Verifier analysis:

Students and officers spoke particularly positively of the four liberation networks. The Union pays students for their time when involved in consultation activities recognising and respecting their time and expertise.

C. The union assists members to volunteer and supports them in doing so by providing training and support. While the union may not have achieved the Investors in Volunteers standard, there is evidence of its achievements in some of the indicator areas.

Verifier analysis:

Volunteers had clear support in their role with training available to them. A student participant reflected there is an offer of help and support and success is celebrated through awards and fun activity days.

D. The union encourages students to design their own opportunities and attempts to make processes as easy to use as possible.

Verifier analysis:

The Union offers a range of opportunities and students were positive about the opportunities to shape and influence these.

E. Where the union supports student media, the teams are connected with the national student media groups and (if resource allows) members of the Student Radio Association, Student Publication Association & National Student Television Association.

Verifier analysis:

The Union has a range of bespoke media training resources available on its website for its student media groups.

F. The union is taking action to improve the quality of member participation. The union can demonstrate that it supports members who wish to participate in national campaigns and link to appropriate national organisations. Members feel that they have a strong input into aspects of the running of the union.

Verifier analysis:

Students and officers reflected on how they have strong input into the running of the Union. Within the audit, there were clear evaluative papers on improving the quality of member participation, including an extensive review paper on the elections in 2021, which had clear lines of sight on engagement and key actions to undertake to improve student voter engagement in future years.

G. Student leaders are encouraged and supported to record and reflect on the skills and experiences developed through their participation with the students' union.

Verifier analysis:

Student leaders receive extensive training with explicit linkage to how they accumulate valuable skills that will be looked on favourably by future employers. A student interviewed reflected that training was good and that (as someone highly involved, they had seen) training to be a rep, committee members and volunteer all available.

Representation and Campaigning – Very Good

At the heart of great students' unions are functions to represent students and create change with – and for – them. Students' unions should use a range of channels to represent its members to the institution, the local community and nationally.

A. The union has developed materials for course representatives that communicate the main aspects of the role. Comprehensive training is provided and well attended by representatives. As a result, course representatives are aware of the main aspects of their role and how to undertake their activities. There is specific staff support for the academic representation system.

Verifier analysis:

The Union works in partnership with the University on the course representation system. However, the University run the course representation system, with GSU providing training. This may be an area the University and GSU wish to revisit. The trend is moving towards Students' Union managing the system with some form of service level agreement with the University to ensure both parties expectations are being met. Training for volunteers was spoken of positively by several stakeholders, and there was an understanding of a representative's positive impact. There was a recognition by some stakeholders that the course representation system worked better in some areas than others in the University.

B. The union can demonstrate that its students input into a number of institution committee meetings at different levels of decision making.

Verifier analysis:

There is student representation at all levels of decision making. This includes seats on formal committees as well as the President being a member of the governing body. There is also involvement in working groups and there is a sense by a number of stakeholders that there is value added through student representatives and students being active participants of these groups.

C. It can also demonstrate that the representatives are able to make strong representations at these meetings as a result of preparation, including research into the issues under discussion. As a result, student perspectives are communicated and considered when major decisions are made.

Verifier analysis:

The quality of student representation at meetings was consistently reflected positively in discussions with stakeholders. A 'No detriment policy' was considered very successful in terms of GSU's influence, input and lobbying.

D. The union can show evidence to demonstrate that its elected officers participate in national campaigns, participate in networking with other officers, and attend relevant national events.

Verifier analysis:

Officers spoke passionately about national campaigns and initiatives they were involved in. This included an 'Equal Access to University' campaign lobbying the government to develop an alternative funding approach for Muslim students, which involved a peaceful demonstration and a 'Students against fees' campaign work.

E. The union supports individual members and groups of members to campaign and can demonstrate examples of where it has helped to improve the effectiveness of member-led campaigns.

Verifier analysis:

There was support given to a disabled student in a campaign to provide greater levels of lift access which received the support of the Union and other students. The Student Assembly was also cited as a key way for members to bring forward policy with a recent example referenced around Israel and Palestine and boycott divestment sanctions. The Student Assembly based on stakeholders' perceptions whilst relatively new is an effective way of bringing students together with any member able to call a meeting provided 30 members want the meeting to take place. The student priorities ballot also curates key campaigning activity based on student experiences and data for students to determine key campaigning priorities for the organisation.

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 is working toward Green Impact.

Insight and Learning – Very Good

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 is an aspect of the governance, leadership and management of the union. As a result, the union has an understanding of its performance in key, strategically important areas such as finance.

Verifier analysis:

There are clear review mechanisms in place for all aspects of governance, leadership and management of the Union. There are clear short and longer performance metrics set for the organisation, with documents shared within the verification submission showing clear lines of accountability. Trustees spoke positively of their review and evaluation in this area, citing the use of committees to do this effectively. In terms of finances, the annual accounts that have been externally audited go through two levels of internal board scrutiny by both a sub-committee and a full board before going to an annual members meeting.

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B. The union can demonstrate that it has mechanisms to collect data and create comparisons over set time periods to enable effect governance.

Verifier analysis:

During the pandemic, GSU showed considerable foresight and asked some specific questions at various intervals as part of its Covid-19 Pandemic Survey to understand the student experience and how best to support their members both directly and through feeding back any key issues to the University. Beyond this, the organisation captures data consistently, which has informed its new strategic plan. The capturing of this data also informs issues that go onto the student priorities ballot. This data is also used in key impact and performance reporting documentation to the GSU Trustee Board.

C. The union uses KPIs or other comparable measurement tools in conjunction with narrative reporting to provide an assessment of its performance, both internally and externally. The union have given consideration to developing mechanisms to identify, review and evaluate its soft impacts.

Verifier analysis:

Board members spoke positively about the comparative data used to help assess performance and support decision making.

D. The union's members feel that they understand how their union is performing overall.

Verifier analysis:

The annual survey tests members understanding of GSU's performance with both this survey and the Covid-19 Pandemic Survey showing a strong understanding from members of the Union's performance.

E. The union has mechanisms in place to routinely analyse its members' wants, needs and perceptions. These mechanisms typically range from large-scale opinion polling to the informal gathering of individuals' views. As a result, the union has a detailed understanding of the majority of its members, rooted in evidence.

Verifier analysis:

A student survey takes place annually supported by a third-party Icarus, which explores many topics, including demographics, student communities, GSU strategy, health and well-being, influencing, SU functions & services, and employability. The annualised nature of the survey enables the organisation to have baseline figures for comparative analysis.

Verifier statement

I wish to note and thank Mel Miles, as QSU Lead for Greenwich Students' Union, for their work in putting together the verification documentation and their time prior to and during the verification. In addition, I would like to note thanks to GSU officers, staff, and volunteers for their work before and during the verification and the University of Greenwich staff members, including the Vice-Chancellor, who kindly participated in the verification interviews. Finally, I would also like to thank Jo Thomas for supporting the assessment as an observer.

The verification was incredibly positive. Greenwich Students' Union can be very proud of its continued impact on the University of Greenwich students. Many stakeholders remarked positively on the significant upward trajectory of the organisation over the past few years and the excitement around a new, bold strategy to implement. All stakeholders hold the organisation in high regard, and this is a credit to all individuals involved directly or as a valued stakeholder who supports the Students' Union.

Matt Webber
QSU Verifier

Summary

Strategy

Self-assessment level: Very Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

Recommendation

There was reference to funding for projects rather than consistent longer-term funding in some instances, which may be an issue to address with the University to ensure continuity and stability of vital services to students.

Relationships and Partnerships

Self-assessment level: Very Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

Democracy

Self-assessment level: Very Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

People

Self-assessment level: Very Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

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LEDI

Self-assessment level: Good

Verifier Assessment level: Good

Communication

Self-assessment level: Very Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

Services

Self-assessment level: Very Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

Participation

Self-assessment level: Very Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

Representation and Campaigning

Self-assessment level: Very Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good

Recommendation

Consider a move towards Students' Union managing the course representation system with some form of service level agreement with the University to ensure both parties expectations are being met.

Sustainability

Self-assessment level: Good

Verifier Assessment level: Good

Insight and Learning

Self-assessment level: Good

Verifier Assessment level: Very Good