ÅGENDA

amsu
the association for managers in students' unions

06

INSIDE

Contents

Governance, Governance, Governance

Author: Mark Grayling
AMSU Chair

If there is an emerging common theme across the UK Students' Union movement then it has to be governance. It is enormously pleasing that, working with AMSU, NUS(UK) has taken the initiative in commissioning the briefing published towards the end of 2005 and that the document has been endorsed by Bill Rammel MP, the Minister for Higher Education. With all their experience, working in the not-for-profit and charity sectors, Bates Wells Braithwaite have produced a seminal document for us. It is worth noting that Lord Andrew Phillips, who is also Chancellor of the University of Essex, played a prominent role during the passage of the recent Charities Bill and is a founding partner of BWB.

It seems highly likely that we are at the onset of a sustained period of change in governance, as more and more Unions review their own arrangements, and as the introduction of new charity law gets closer.

AMSU will continue to encourage the debate in the context of our commitment to student leadership. The Charities Act 2005 is likely to have at least as deep an impact on Unions as the 1994 Education Act did but it will offer enormous opportunity to improve the way we operate as well. As always it is vital that any changes to the governance at a particular Union are made by that Union and not for it. The plethora of consultants and law firms currently taking an interest in our affairs will not necessarily present this view to parent institutions!

Unfortunately there have been a small number of Unions that have been or are still in crisis and in a number of cases the financial crash has followed a failure of governance. In addition, AMSU will look to organisations such as the Association for Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) and draw on the work they have undertaken on governance, looking at the wider community of not-for-profit organisations.

This edition of Agenda aims to further extend the governance debate and to continue the exchange that has been conducted over the last eighteen months. The Editorial Board is undertaking an enormously valuable exercise in maintaining a high profile for these matters. To demonstrate that some joined up thinking has been attempted, it appears at around the same time as the fourth in the series of NUS / NUS Services Ltd / AMSU seminars for managers and elected officers. These seminars have demonstrated just what can be achieved if the three organisations work closely together to create added value for member/shareholding Unions. This one examines the key relationship between the senior permanent member of staff and the lead office bearer and this is the point at which governance arrangements both define roles and are constantly scrutinised. The point where responsibility is taken for what goes on in the organisation; the point where the buck stops.

At their best, UK Students' Unions are a beacon. They demonstrate that democratic, membership led, organisations can deliver a complex mixture of activities, services and mutual trading based on an almost classical mixed economy model and be well run! All this whilst providing the ultimate leadership education for elected officers as well. Even in the rest of the not-for-profit sector Unions are unusual in terms of constitution, at least. Continued existence and future success will require Unions to address the current issues of governance and for us all to learn from good practice elsewhere.

Contributing to AGENDA

'Where would Agenda be without the diverse and challenging contributions of members?'

Recent developments in Agenda have received excellent feedback, and numerous contributors can take the credit for the success of the journal.

Agenda can only be as good as the articles it runs, and we would urge any reader with an idea to put pen to paper.

Perhaps you've just completed a new project and could offer some tips to others.

Maybe you feel strongly about one of our articles – whether you love it or hate it , tell us!

Perhaps you know something we don't – a useful web site for example.

Or perhaps you can spin a good yarn about a particular tricky moment in your union.

Whatever your ideas, Agenda is your forum.

For those of you who do want to put pen to paper, the following guidelines will help you structure your ideas.

Reports or Feature?

Reports will be largely factual and will give readers a general overview of the subject matter.

Reports should be a maximum of 700 words.

Features will be analytical pieces which give in depth consideration to the subject matter, and will be a maximum of 2000 words.

Adding Interest or Credibility

There are lots of techniques to help you add weight to your article:

• Statistics

How many people are affected by your topic?

How have things changed over the last x years?

For statistical information, try relevant web sites, legal briefing documents, the AMSU Finance survey or the general media.

• Quotes

Everyone likes to read what other people have to say and quotes add personality to articles. Quotes may be from colleagues, external figures or other publications or you may open with a particularly outrageous quote to argue against.

• Theories or Models

Does your situation or argument support a particular model? Or, even better, does your piece challenge a well respected model?

• Case Studies

Has this happened somewhere else? Was the outcome similar or totally different?

• Recommended Further Reading

Where can readers go to get more information?

• How will you add visual interest?

The Agenda design team do their best to supply graphics, but this is not always possible. The visual appeal of your article will affect how many people read it, and all contributors should make every effort to include at least one of the following :

• Your union logo
• A passport photograph of the group or activity you are writing about
• A diagram or graph
• A cartoon
• Copies of any promotional material that can be scanned

Submitting Contributions

Before you submit your article, please:

• Check the word length
• Check that you have included a photograph of yourself plus any other graphics
• Check that you have included a personal biography

Please submit your article by email to a member of the Agenda Editorial Board along with a hard copy in case of any IT problems.

What next?

Your article will be edited by a member of the Agenda Editorial Board. You will be given the opportunity to review the edited version but you must respond within 24 hours if you wish to make any amendments.

If you don't have time to write an article for agenda but can contribute ideas, please send an outline of your ideas to the Editor. The outline should include :

• The issue you would like to see covered
• The 'slant' of the article
• People who would be willing to be interviewed, or people who are particularly knowledgeable on this topic
• A brief case study

For further information please contact the AMSU Office or a member of the Agenda Editorial Board.

The Partial Smoking Ban
Which Route Will You Take?

Author: Andy Gilhooley
Marketing Communications Executive
of NUS Services

After the political merry-go round, with disagreements between current and previous Health Secretary's the Government has finally, (somehow) reached a proposal on smoking bans in England. After all the huffing and puffing we're right back where we started – with the original proposal! But what does this mean for Students' Unions?

Well, because the Government have opted for the partial ban of smoking in public places, as opposed to the total ban proposal, it means that Students' Unions are in the enviable position of choosing their own destiny. Or are we?

First of all, let me start off by explaining how this predicament of choice has come to pass. It will come as no surprise that many newspapers jumped on the loop-hole in the law which will allow members to continue smoking in their members' clubs. If you were in danger of believing that we would get an exemption then alas no, we're not that special in Westminster. But grass-roots level supporters of the big three parties certainly have the ability to send shivers down the spines of those walking the corridors of power in Whitehall. And that's the simple reason why the partial smoking ban policy allows Private Members Clubs the right to choose whether they should stub out their cigarettes and cigars.

Ex-Health Secretary John Reid ensured this was a stipulation in the proposal so he would not offend his strongest supporters. The cigar and brandy brigade all blew a huge collective sigh of relief when the Government decided to stick to its original proposal despite the best efforts of the new Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt. She has admitted though, on record, that it was only "a matter of time" before there was a complete ban introduced. She is a keen advocate of the total ban and will be doing her utmost to ensure that this will come to pass. In many ways she is correct as the partial ban will lead to a great degree of confusion for many customers and gives the hard-core smokers an excuse by thinking that a no-smoking bar was actually a smoking bar. A complete ban would have made policing the policy much easier. Under this scheme licensees will face a fine of £200 fine if they fail to enforce the ban. A £200 will also be issued if they fail to correctly display no smoking signs. Customers sparking up in a no smoking bar will be fined £50.

John McNamara, Chief Executive of the Bill is about as impressed with the new ban as Patricia Hewitt, but for different reasons. He said "Serving food should not preclude a premises from offering a smoking area. The new legislation will undoubtedly present a difficult choice for licensees and customers, and mean that the pub may lose its appeal to a wider audience. The Bill strongly opposes the proposal that members clubs are exempt from the ban. Allowing smoking in members' clubs would lead to a migration of drinkers from local pubs into the members' clubs. This loss of custom to small licensed premises could drive them out of business."

So the end result – Private Members Clubs escape and so do Students' Unions by virtue of the fact they are membership organisations. You do however, have to be in possession of a Club Premises Certificate (CFC) as opposed to a Premise Licence to be qualified as a Private Members Club.

As I eluded to in my opening gambit, we have the choice, or do we really? There are many variables to consider about the impending smoking ban in public places. Should the decision be made with your commercial head or your corporately social responsible heart? Just because you will have the opportunity to carry on smoking doesn't necessarily mean that it is the right decision to make. There will be a lot of executive meetings during 2006 which will need to address these questions.

It's always my main objective in any piece I write to present both sides of the argument, no matter what those arguments might be, in order to allow you, the reader, to make up

your own mind on the subject matter. So here's the argument for allowing smoking to continue and the argument for banning the habit.

Taking a stroll on the commercial side of life you'd be forgiven for thinking this smoking ban proposal is fantastic. All our competitors will be forced to change while we can continue on regardless. This would create a compelling competitive advantage that is difficult to ignore. Especially when you take a look at Wetherspoon's latest trading figures for their non-smoking bars. In their latest trading statement sales fell by 7.3 percent in its 47 non-smoking pubs in a 13 week period. Bar sales continued to experience sharp declines, but were being compensated for by a healthy increase in food sales. The statement added that Wetherspoon's would review the performance of non-smoking pubs and their future plans in this area when the group announces its half-year results in March 2006. Wetherspoon had already noted a seven percent sales decline in its non-smoking pubs at the time of its full year results announcement at the beginning of September.

Obviously, Wetherspoon are not on a level playing field as the majority of its competitors are smoking havens. Therefore, you cannot take their sales decreases as a basis of national decline should every bar be made to go smoke free.

But it is an incredibly important question to pose from a commercial point of view. What are the likely sales decreases or possible increases of running a smoke free bar? The closest comparison we can look to for enlightenment is the ban that the Irish have imposed which has now been operational since 29 March 2004. The Irish were quite sensible and opted to implement a complete smoking ban in public places. Therefore, smokers have no choice but to brave the elements and go outside. Many bars created outdoor smoking areas with purpose built gazebo style structures with plenty of outdoor heaters to cater for their smoking customers. These outdoor smoking areas have become so popular in Ireland that they are now a destination for young people to go. They've developed a bit of a reputation for becoming a good flirting zone. However, what impact has this had on wet sales? The answer is a stark nothing, which may come as a bit of a surprise depending on which newspapers you browse through. The undeniable truth is that sales are falling in Irish bars but is not because of the smoking ban. The graph below shows the continuing downward trend. If the smoking ban was to have had a significant impact the line would have dipped sharply after March 2004.

> " The closest comparison we can look to for enlightenment is the ban that the Irish have imposed which has now been operational since 29 March 2004."

Therefore, and rather unhelpfully, the impact of a partial no smoking ban in England is still an unknown quantity. One thing is for sure about the Irish ban, sales of patio heaters went through the roof and continue to sell faster than they can be made!

The latest stats on the number of students who smoke, which were taken in 2003, are
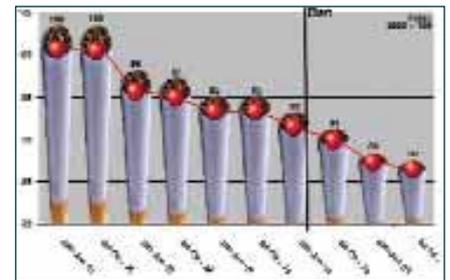
at 28 percent. I'm guessing that this is the figure you'll have to be accounting for when drawing up your strategic direction plans.

Time to move away from looking at the smoking ban purely as a commercial opportunity and onto a more corporate social responsibility outlook on life. The first question to ask is why the ban is being brought into effect in the first place. Taking aside the implementation of the legislation, the Government do have their heart in the right place; for the smoking ban in public places is all about making working environments safe and healthy for employees to work within. No one can argue against that being a worthy cause. Not just a worthy cause but an imperative aspect for many employers. Browsing through various pieces of legislation such as EU Council Directives 89/654/EEC and 92/85/EEC, the UK Employment Rights Act 1996 and UK Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, it will surely only be a matter of time before a hospitality worker successfully sues their employer for, unfortunately, falling victim to a smoking related disease through no fault of their own.

Students' Unions are often at the forefront of welfare and ethical issues and it could be argued that we should be pioneering the change to no smoking establishments as a matter of personal pride. One Union which has pioneered no smoking policies is

Glasgow Caledonian Students Association. Bill Blackstock has immersed himself into the ins and outs of a ban in preparation for March 2006 when Scotland follow Ireland's lead and implement a total smoking ban in public places.

Speaking at the recent NUS Services seminar in Birmingham on change management, Bill's main priority behind the smoking ban is to make GCUSA a better workplace for employees to work in. Feeling that the ban was inevitable Bill set to work on a full review which included the input from staff at every stage of the process. Initial market research undertaken with members revealed that 78 percent would like to see restrictions brought into force. He explained that it took four revisions to get the policy approved by the council. Smoke free areas were introduced in two bars until 4pm each day with no smoking allowed at the bar at all. £7,000 was spent on ventilation upgrades. The initial impact of the ban was minimal with no real problems encountered with students and no noticeable effects on sales. Prominent signs and reminders were placed throughout the bar and the policy was policed lightly if any breached.

Last year the policy was amended and the ban was extended to areas such as the games room. Counter space was given over to catering and sales of food rocketed by 34 percent. On the downside, pool table sales dropped by 12 percent. In light of the impending total ban, Bill is remaining proactive. The Executive are conducting a priority welfare campaign in early December on how to give up smoking. Staff members have also been given access to resources to help them give up too. Smoking restrictions have also been extended from 4pm to 7pm and tobacco vending machines are getting the push.

> " However, MPs don't have anything to be uncertain about as the Government's new smoking policy in the work place will not extend to the House of Commons."

After listening to Bill's speech I was inspired to gauge the opinion of what other Union's were considering after listening to the great smoking debate. So I grabbed a few people at the end of the seminar and thrust a microphone their way. Kathy Follen, Hospitality Manager, from APU Students' Union said she was in favour of a total ban; " Smoking is certainly a problem. I think a complete ban would be easier to implement in the Union. Letting students smoke outside of the building may just help a few people to give up".

Lee Royal, Commercial Services Manager from Royal Holloway, was in the same frame of mind as Kathy; " I wouldn't like to toy with various restrictions. I'd prefer to implement a full ban. I look at the debate purely from a health and safety aspect and would not look to exploit the Private Members loophole".

Tom Wormleighton, VP Finance & Democracy from Hull Union found the topic stimulating if not a little worrying; " The whole issue surrounding the smoking ban is very interesting, however I am now a little worried about our new bar development and the outdoor areas".

To conclude I thought I might throw in a curve ball and revisit the question posed on choice. As Patricia Hewitt is going to champion all the way for a total smoking ban and is determined to get this partial ban kicked out at the earliest opportunity, will there be much choice after all? Forward-thinkers would suggest not. Coupled with the fact that the majority of your parent institutions will more than likely implement full bans, will they force you to do the same? Depending on your rights and who owns the Union building it may be a decision that is enforced by the University. Even if all of the above does not happen, and smoking is allowed in your building, I would bet that a motion would be placed by the minimum number of students each and every year to ballot on a smoking ban. Working on this basis would certainly lead to uncertain times especially when considering a bar redevelopment and all the associated costs that come with segregations and ventilation systems.

However, MPs don't have anything to be uncertain about as the Government's new smoking policy in the work place will not extend to the House of Commons or the House of Lords. When the ban comes into effect in 2007, MPs and peers will still be able to smoke and drink in some of the Palace of Westminster's eight bars as well as MP's offices.

A Regulatory Body for UK Students' Unions?
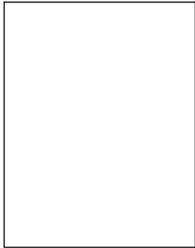
Author: Derfel Owen
NUS National Executive Committee

Readers of Agenda may be aware of the Charities Bill and that this will establish a regulatory body for UK Students' Unions for the first time. This article by Derfel Owen, (ex sabbatical at Hull University Students' Union and current member of the NUS National Executive Committee & NUS Services Board of Directors) is based upon the presentation given at the AMSU change management seminar[1] and discusses some of the challenges and opportunities involved. A full briefing on both the Charities Bill and governance reform are due to be published before this edition of Agenda and those briefings should be used as definitive guides rather than this article which is designed to be a thought provoking article.

The current regulation of Unions involves an overlapping and sometimes contradictory arrangement that includes the 1994 Education Act (making regulation the responsibility of individual institutions), the freedom of speech legislation from 1987 (described in Mike Day's historical article in this edition), a body of case law around ultra viries and, to a lesser extent, personnel and liability that are based upon charity law. It also includes the general legal framework for specific activities and operations such as health and safety, employment, and licensing etc. The net result is that the arrangements for the regulation of Unions are a mess and offer plenty of scope for confusion and mistakes, and cannot be regarded as something that will inspire public confidence.

Part of the confusion arises from the ambiguous legal status of Students' Unions. Few are registered charities or limited companies (although several incorporate a separate trading company) and most are defined as unincorporated associations with deemed exempt charitable status arising from being regarded as part of the university. This status is confusing and relatively rarely used outside Unions and it is not always understood or recognised by external organisations and it also, potentially, has problems with liability in the event of something going wrong. This is something that many of the Union governance reform initiatives[2] have sought to address and has also often been part of the concern of some universities that have sought to re-structure their Unions in recent years.

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[1] Anticipating a regulatory body by Matt Hyde and from the AMSU/NUS/NUS Services change management seminar for officer & managers held on November 21st & 22nd 2005. All the presentations given at this, including the one upon which this article is based are available at www.amsu.net/conferences/seminars/change management seminar

[2] Readers interested in governance issues may wish to look at Agenda 82 which includes articles on Code of Professional Conduct for senior managers, re-connecting with members, the good governance standard for public bodies and the governance review at Kings College Students' Union. Further information on the latter can be found at http://www.kclsu.org/governance.php

It is expected that the Charities Bill will be agreed in Parliament in February of 2006 with the changes coming into effect in October 2007[3]. The new Bill reasserts that Unions are exempt charities, as was defined in section 3 of the 1993 Charities Act, and thus do not need to register as charities but that they will start to be subject to the regulation of the charity commission[4]. The Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) declined to take on this responsibility. This is likely to mean that in practice SUs have to comply as if they were registered charities but avoiding the complications of the processes of registering.

A regulatory body is a body set up under the terms of an Act of Parliament or voluntarily to achieve the regulation of some industry or activity. The Charity Commission is established by law as the regulator and registrar for charities in England and Wales and its mission is:

"to provide the best possible regulation of charities in England and Wales in order to increase charities' effectiveness and public confidence and trust"[5]

We fulfil our role as regulator by:

- securing compliance with charity law, and **dealing with abuse and poor practice**

- enabling charities to work better within **an effective legal, accounting and governance framework**, keeping pace with developments in society, the economy and the law

- promoting sound governance and accountability[6]

Schedule 5 of the Charities Bill gives the Charities Commission regulatory powers over exempt charities "to exercise the same jurisdiction and powers as exercised by the High Court":

- they can call for any documents any time

- appoint, sack and suspend trustees

- investigate the administration of your work

The hallmarks of an effective charity as far as the Charity Commission are concerned is outlined in the principles of regulation as follows[7]:

CC60: Principles of Regulation

- Focus on impact and outcomes

- Fit for purpose

- Sound governance

- Maximises potential

- Accountable and transparent

- Flexible

Some may argue that we should carry on as before and fight against the introduction of regulation. I would respond by asking:

- Is this not public money?

- Do we not have a duty to all students to get better?

- What have we got to hide?

- Why do we think we're unique?

- Which of these principles used to judge charities is either theoretically or practically an insurmountable problem for Unions?

John Windle[8], has argued for many years for better regulation of Unions to improve quality and legitamacy[9] and a few years ago summarised this problem in the following phrase:

"The trouble with Students' Unions is that they've always marked their own exam papers"

I would argue that the principles used for regulating a charity are not incompatible with the mission and values of a Students' Union and that the best ones are already involved in various quality initiatives and activities that should make compliance a question of re-ordering existing activity rather than a need to start from scratch[10]. For other Unions that may need to improve to meet the standard, we need to support them by helping them achieve the standard rather than resist reasonable regulation. To do this we need to:

- Engage with the Charities Commission

- Support each other and share ideas

- Build on good practise locally

- NUS/AMSU/NUS Services collaborate to lead this process

- Develop self regulation

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[3] For more about the Charities Bill http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/spr/charbill.asp

[4] For more about the Charity Commission www.charity-commission.gov.uk

[5] For more about the Charity Commission www.charity-commission.gov.uk

[6] Ibid

[7] For more about the Hallmarks of an Effective Charity www.charity commission.gov.uk/publications/cc60.asp#6

[8] John Windle is the former General Manager of the Students' Union at the University of Sheffield and now is a part time freelance consultant, in which capacity he has been instrumental in several of the groundbreaking governance reviews within certain Unions

[9] See for example Are Students' Union legitimate organisations? Agenda 71 p14-19 published in October 2001

[10] Such as internal and external audit, ISO 9000, the Business Excellence Model Investors in People, the new Investors in Volunteers standard covered elsewhere in this edition, the Community Legal Standard in advice work, Best Bar None and soon standards for Unions regarding environmental & ethical standards. There is also an adapted version of the Business Excellence Model and a self-assessment questionnaire and a guide to benchmarking in the Resource library within the AMSU site www.amsu.net/resource library/quality

Establishing effective self-regulation will allow us to do things on our terms such as:

- Mediate between Unions and the Commission

- Balance the Commission's expectations with the values of the student movement

- Establish a task force to work on how to self-regulate in practice

- Develop a minimum standard to use for the certification of Unions

Some may say "Why should we bother?" I believe that if we don't prepare for this ourselves it will be prepared for us and done to us, and that scenario is much more likely to detract from the values that we care about. We have already seen this at a number of universities in the last few years where the Union has been subject to enforced change by the college

management and we must do something to prevent this spreading to more and more Unions. One of the ways to do this is for us to work together to put our own house in order.

At this stage it is hard to give definitive advice about the detailed impact of the Bill and there is some misinformation circulating suggesting that this will mean the end of sabbatical officers, trading outlets etc. None of these things are true and I urge Unions to wait for definitive advice from NUS before acting and to resist the premature interpretations of college management or anyone else. Unions may have to work hard at demonstrating how our arrangements, whilst being distinctive, do comply with the principles that the Charity Commissioners are concerned with and this process may involve some challenging debate and changes. Hopefully as a movement we have

not become totally frightened of challenging but necessary debate and I can assure you that NUS would not be involved in this process if it were merely an external attack upon the right of Unions to continue to be led by elected students and full-time sabbatical officers.

Handled correctly, the Charity Bill is an opportunity that we can use to assist with improving governance, enhancing quality, improving decision-making and ultimately improving our unions for students. NUS in partnership with AMSU and NUS Services and others is prepared to take a leading role in this process, so lets all use the Charities Bill as a springboard to actually do what we probably all know we should have been doing all along, and in the process prepare ourselves for a new era where Unions with an enhanced legitimacy should have a bigger role to play than ever before.

Charity Reporting for Students' Unions

Author: Jon Berg
AMSU Treasurer and
General Manager of the
University of Teesside Students' Union

This article by Jon Berg is drawn from presentations and articles in the Charity and Financial press. It is intended to be helpful guidance for students' unions in England and Wales about what compliance with charity law is likely to involve in respect to accounting and financial reporting but it is not definitive advice – please consult your auditors and other professional advisers when following up the ideas in this article.

Charity law and students' unions

Students' unions in England and Wales have charitable status derived from their parent institutions. They are generally referred to as "exempt" (from registration) charities under the Charities Act 1993. The Charities Bill will almost certainly lead to Unions being directly regulated by the Commission, this will be different to being monitored by a parent institution, and makes compliance with charity and trustee law obligatory, although the detail of this are yet to be decided.

The Constitution specifies the students' union/charity's objectives, powers, trustees, and other legally significant matters and is thus (in most students' unions) the "governing instrument" (the term used in regulation of charities). Direct regulation by the Charity Commission will raise a range of issues which are outside the scope of this article but are discussed elsewhere, however I hope that the "five things to think about" section of this article is helpful.

The trustees and their responsibilities

The students' union is a charity with a group of individuals who are individually and collectively responsible for its affairs. In many students' unions the executive officers will be identified as trustees and are responsible for every aspect of the charity. They must act together and control charity, but can delegate administration. They must keep full and accurate accounting records. They must manage the charity in a prudent manner, taking a long term and short term view in making decisions. They must always act in accordance with the governing instrument and in the best interest of the charity. The trustees must also obtain proper professional advice in areas where the trustees are not competent. This is more critical in students' unions as we elect our trustees as political representatives whereas most charities recruit and appoint trustees based on professional expertise. In the interests of good governance students' unions may need to mix student and non-student trustees to meet the requirements for particular expertise to be incorporated into the trustee group.[1]

The legal structure of students' unions

Most students' unions are unincorporated associations of all their members/students at the parent institution. These are seen as trusts for charity law, with the executive or another committee in the role of trustees. A few students' unions operate with companies limited by guarantee, an established model used by charities. Some have trading subsidiary companies, mainly for tax reasons (mainly where profit is derived from outside the membership, e.g. sales to the public or external companies). The new Charities Bill offers a new option, the Charitable Incorporated Organisation, that is worth considering.

Financial reporting – the Charities Regulations and Statement of Recommended Practice

The charitable status of almost all students' unions in England and Wales means that their annual financial statements should comply with the Charity Commission's requirements. Since the reporting requirements of the Charities Act 1993, Charities (Accounts and Reports)

[1] Readers interested in governance issues may wish to look at Agenda 82 which includes articles on Code of Professional Conduct for senior managers, re-connecting with members, the good governance standard for public bodies and the governance review at Kings College Students' Union. Further articles about governance are due to appear in the next few editions of Agenda.

Regulations 1995 and 2000, there is clear guidance on how to present financial reports for charities. An incorporated students' union will also have to look at the Companies Act's requirements, however the rest of this article looks specifically at unincorporated associations.[2]

The Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) for Charities sets out the key sections of a charity's annual accounts. This was controversial when introduced because it specified a standard layout for the diverse range of charitable organisations, but is now well established. The SORP was revised in 2005 (for financial year ends from 2006 onwards) and offers more detail on how to present financial reports for charities. When students' unions report directly to the Charity Commission, we will have to comply with the Charities SORP. I would recommend that all students' unions adopt the SORP as soon as possible.

The Charities SORP identifies the following sections in a charity's annual financial statements: the Trustees report, the Report of Auditors, the Statement of Financial Activities ("SOFA"), the Balance sheet, and the notes to the accounts. Even if they don't follow the Charities SORP, most students' unions' accounts will probably have a report of the executive committee and an audit report. There will be an income and expenditure account or a profit and loss account, but its layout may be specific to the interests of the membership and parent institution. The balance sheet will probably comply with the Companies Act headings for assets and liabilities, which can be

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RISK REGISTER

The Trustees report must (Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2000) confirm major risks have been considered and systems are in place to mitigate these risks. It should be a wide view of risks not just financial/profit. Student numbers (recruitment and retention) would be high for most Unions. Staying in touch with the needs of the majority of members is probably high on any list. Considering commercial income would give a list of specific risks on marketing and management. Governance risks e.g. attracting, inducting, and supporting officers/trustees. Consider reputation and relationship risks, the reliance on parent institution and need to keep their support.

For each major risk, the approach is Identify/Assess/Mitigate/ Monitor, best done by a team of the officers and managers. The outcome is a strategic risk register - list of major risks with inherent risk i.e. level of impact and likelihood, which officer/manager responsible for risk, controls in place for this risk, how risk is monitored and reported, and the residual risk (impact/likelihood).

Future issues of Agenda magazine will include articles with information about risk management, which is becoming a more commonly used tool in management.

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adapted to fit the requirements of a charity. But it is worth confirming that the accounting policies are consistent with generally accepted accounting practice, particularly in the valuation and classification of assets and liabilities.

The new **Trustees Report** includes:

Administrative details – name and reg/exempt status of charity, principle address; names of all trustees who served in period; names of advisers, including auditors/accountants, bankers, lawyers, investment managers; name of GM/CEO or other senior staff members with delegated responsibility for day to day management.

Structure, governance and management – how the charity is constituted, how trustees recruited, how decisions are made; which decisions taken by trustees and which are delegated to staff; how trustees are inducted and trained; information about the wider network of the charity, e.g. UK

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[2] In Agenda 84 p18-19 I wrote about Financial monitoring and reporting which describes current obligations in this respect.

Higher Education Institutions and students' unions; related parties and how these link to the Unions' charitable objectives, e.g. parent institution; confirmation that MAJOR RISKS have been reviewed and managed; any exemption on audit (gross income under 250k) and/or reporting due to size.

Objectives and activities – charity aims and their intended impact; main objectives for the coming year; strategies for achieving these objectives; activities that contribute to these objectives. Volunteer time – suggest this is approximate total number of hours per annum, not a value.

Achievements and performance – improved "review of activities" section from old SORP but same idea of giving the reader a clear idea of what the Union/charity achieved in the year and how effective it was. It should compare the achievements to the stated objectives for the year, which would have been in the section above in last year's trustees report. Performance in fundraising and investments.

Financial Review – State your Unions RESERVES POLICY, this may be to have reserves of a certain amount or equal to a number of month's spending; Sources of funds e.g. income and borrowing; Investment policy - how/where and any ethical policy.

Future plans – Plans for future, key objectives for say 3-5 years; Key assumptions/specific factors that could affect the above.

The **Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA)** replaces the traditional income and expenditure or profit and loss account, but includes all income and expenditure. The SOFA analyses items under some headings that are initially confusing but are supported by good guidance notes, available from the Charity Commission website. It is likely to involve some changes in layout from the present annual accounts, but it will depend on the underlying accounting records. Some students' unions may need to alter the income and cost recording (nominal codes etc.) in their accounting records to fit the SORP headings, but this would also allow other reports to be produced including the income and expenditure account as an appendix. Adopting the SOFA will address the significant variation seen in the layout and detail of income and expenditure accounts across students' unions, giving more consistent and useable financial information for stakeholders.

The **SOFA** includes the following headings that will cover all students' union activities:

Incoming resources – Voluntary income (donations, block and other grants, membership subs, sponsorship); Generated funds (trading services, sponsorship that is not general/voluntary donation, rents and licensing of charitable property), investment income (interest, dividends, income from subsidiary service company – show each separately); Incoming resources from direct charitable activities (primary purpose trading); Other incoming resources e.g. gains on sale of assets/investments. Suggest do not value the free/peppercorn rent arrangement with parent institution in income. Instead note in the related party section of trustee report that students' unions gets premises and utilities provided free by university.

Resources expended – Costs of generating funds (voluntary income, fundraising and non-charity trading, investment management costs); costs of charitable activities – think about the headings in here as may need to refer to these figures in trustees report. Can show trading expenditure in enough detail by using notes; Governance costs, which replaces "management and admin" in old SOFA, is general running, not charity activities and is strategic rather than day to day; Other resources expended, not support costs which can be allocated to activities.

Transfers from/between funds – There are several types of fund for legal reasons. Unrestricted funds, some of which can be "designated" for future expenditure; Restricted funds where "earmarked by donor or by terms of the appeal for funds" – show each one separately in each part of the accounts; Endowment fund – given to Charity subject to restriction they are held as capital, e.g. a Building or other asset, these funds can be permanent or expendable.

Other gains and losses – on fixed assets and on investments. This would include pension schemes and the actuarial gains/losses on defined benefit (like SUSS) pension schemes. Advice suggests that SUSS notional liability under Financial Reporting Standard FRS17 must be noted but recommend don't quantify and don't include it in the SOFA.

Funds brought forward

FIVE STEPS TO BEING A BETTER CHARITY

- Adopt the Charities SORP as soon as possible, including the risk register (see box)

- Download Charity Commission's "the essential trustee" and "hallmarks of an effective charity" from http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/ and discuss them with the elected officers and managers at your students' union

- Make sure all candidates in your Executive Committee elections are aware of trustee eligibility criteria and sign a form to confirm they are eligible to be a charity trustee

- Talk about the new Charities Act with the elected officers and managers at your students' union, your parent institution, and your professional advisers

- Read the forthcoming report from NUS/AMSU/NUS Services Ltd on Students' Union Governance conducted by leading charity law experts Bates Wells Braithwaite

Five things you need to do before the Charity Commission asks:

1. Start a risk register and document the regular reviews and actions taken against the risks.

2. Clarify your mission and strategic goals, with systems to measure your delivery against them.

3. Review your systems and records of decision making and accountability. Ensure significant decisions are being made in the interests of the charity and its beneficiaries/members, after reviewing the implications and potential risks.

4. Establish a reserves policy and ensure that you are matching expenditure to available income. Do not budget for deficits.

5. Ensure all candidates for executive elections have read and signed a form to prove they are legally eligible to be a charity trustee. Discuss issues like conflicts of interest, related parties, and good faith early in their training. Make copies of the CC publications easily available to your trustees and ensure they understand them. Keep records of this for each officer/trustee.

Conclusion

With the forthcoming Charities Act, students' unions in England and Wales will be reporting directly to the Charity Commission within the next five years. We have an opportunity now to put our charitable affairs in order and this should be a priority in every students' union.

## Questions and answers about the SORP

Does our union need to adopt the Charities SORP?
Yes if it is a charity in England or Wales.

How much work is involved?
The main change for officers or senior managers is familiarisation with the new accounts layout, most of the work will be done by the students' union's finance office and auditors.

The Scottish Approach to Quality Assurance
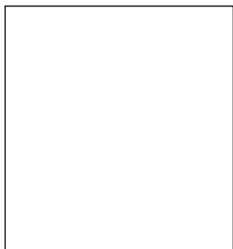
Author: Duncan Cockburn
Development Advisor, sparqs

Agenda has printed many articles over the last few years about the Quality Assurance Agency and the audit process[1] and AMSU has also worked in partnership with NUS and the QAA on a seminar programme called Quality Matters[2]. The last issue of Agenda featured an extensive section about this[3] and a collection of all the articles about this subject are now available to download from the AMSU website[4]. In the next edition we hope to have an article from the QAA Assistant Director David Cairns[5], which will in part be in response to those articles and this latest one. In this article Duncan Cockburn writes about the differences between how the QAA operates in Scotland as compared to England and Wales reviewing how the greater emphasis upon quality enhancement and not just quality assurance, and the even greater involvement of students in the processes (notably having a student member of the audit team), has translated in practice and assisted the development of better national support for course reps via the sparqs[6] initiative.

Mention the expression "quality assurance" to most students and the most likely response will be a blank look but explain what it means and how it affects their education and more, but by no means all, will be interested. Quality assurance does interest lots of students if explained the right way and if it will really make a difference. This raises the issue of to what degree the judgements of students, are accepted by staff, institutions and sector agencies because if they aren't, students may not engage with quality assurance process in the long term. To do this students have to be involved in quality enhancement and not just reactive quality assurance, and this is what the Scottish system attempts to do to a much greater extent than the system in England and Wales and appears to be seeing the benefits in terms of student involvement and improved outcomes.

To some extent learners have been involved in the management of quality since universities were established in Italy in the thirteenth century when groups of students decided which teachers to employ (and fire)[7]. Today's student involvement is less likely to exert itself through the firing of staff, but over the last thirty years or so, student involvement has increasingly been seen through the prisms of the committee and the questionnaire, and to be primarily retrospective and reactive, more like the deficiency model of quality used typically in a production process, which highlights problems after they have happened. Clearly this has limitations for students (who need it to be right first time) and limits involvement in the future development of the course and how to make it better rather than just respond to failings after they arise[8].

Within the Scottish higher education sector, over the last three years, student involvement beyond committees and questionnaires has been increasingly built

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[1] Articles in the following editions of Agenda; 73, 74, 75, 77, (extended supplement) 78, 79, 83 (extended supplement)

[2] the next seminar in this series is planned for, ….

[3] QAA; does it really make any difference Agenda 83 p 20-29

[4] A 4 part collection with an introductory essay including 32 items in total available at www.amsu.net/agenda/supplements/ student representation

[5] David Cairns has spoken at many of the seminars and his views have featured in Agenda 73 p16 & 75 p20 and are included in the collection

[6] sparqs is the Student Participation in Quality Scotland unit which was described in Agenda shortly after it was established in Liam Jarnecki's, Leading the way in Student representation: the new Scottish model in Agenda 77 p22-3 and also in the new collection

7 For more about early student representative systems see part 1 of Mike Day's history of student representation Toad under the Harrow in Agenda 76 p18 and collected together in the student representation collection

8 For a discussion of various quality models see Tim Dawson's Quality in Agenda 32 p10-12 (& collection) which discussed various quality models as applied to HE at the time of the establishment of the HEQC, the body responsible for quality before the QAA was established

into quality processes. When ministerial intervention ended the UK-wide regime of institutional and subject-level audits Scotland developed a quality enhancement framework that differs significantly to the review system developed in England. Individuals may have heard that institutional review teams in Scotland include a student member of the team as a full member. While this is a significant development it is not an isolated example of student involvement because the principle of partnership between sector agencies, institutions and, significantly, students is reflected in the five 'pillars' that underpin the system and are discussed below:

1. Quality assurance and enhancement should engage students actively and systematically. The emphasis in Scotland is on quality enhancement not assurance, enhancement being the process whereby institutions take deliberate steps to improve the quality of teaching and learning experiences for students. In such a model students have a greater role to play beyond raising things that are going wrong at staff-student liaison committee meetings or via satisfaction surveys after the event. Where an institution is obliged to enhance the learning experience it is obligated to discuss with students how things might be improved. This has led to a national development service for student representatives (sparqs) so that course and student representatives can activity engage with both quality assurance and enhancement. The Scottish survey of graduates also differs significantly from that carried out in England in

incorporating a longitudinal element, tracking a cohort of students over a period of five years to gain information on how they view their education at various points after they graduate as opposed to just a snap-shot after graduation.

2. The sector and institutions publish readily accessible information about quality in a manner that is accessible to potential students as well as current students to inform their choices about what and where to study and about what options to select once they have arrived at their institution. This is still under development and perhaps is most far reaching in terms of how it uses students to gather information and how students use information to make informed choices about their education.

3. There will be no external subject reviews or 'drilling down' to the subject level during institutional reviews, instead institutions are responsible for reviewing their own subject provision and have robust systems in place to do so. As part of the guidance that was issued to institutions on how they should review their subject provision it was suggested that institutions should consider how they involved students in their review method including as members of review teams. Thirteen institutions out of twenty in Scotland now have students as members of their review teams and in addition one institution invites and facilitates course representatives in the subject area devising their own submission to the review panel as with the English institutional review model.

4. Every four years each institution undertakes an enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR). There is no student submission as part of the process, instead the ELIR requires institutions to involve students in the development of the institution's own submission to the review panel and the EUR team assess the effectiveness of this involvement. The EUR team also includes a student member with the same status as the rest of the team. Some institutions were sceptical of this when it was proposed but after 3 years of this operating it is now accepted to have been positive and useful by them.

5. Issues that might be considered 'sector-wide' weaknesses should be explored together through Enhancement Themes. Over the last two years these themes have addressed issues including 'Assessment'; 'Responding to Student Needs'; 'Employability' and 'Flexible Delivery'. Each enhancement theme has a steering group that contains at least one student member. The themes provide an opportunity for staff and students to come together and discuss existing practice and share good practice between institutions (and internationally). This is produced as a series of conclusions and documents for individual institutions to use locally.

When the framework was devised it was agreed to contract a team of external evaluators to evaluate the impact of the framework and investigate different elements of it. During the last academic year it conducted a survey of course

representatives. One illustrative finding was that course representatives chief motivation for becoming course representatives was to see improvements in their courses rather than a desire to improve their curriculum vitae or develop their skills base (although this was mentioned by a significant minority).[9]

The aspect that has probably made the biggest impact on individual student representatives is their involvement in institutional reviews of other institutions and subject reviews in their own institutions. These representatives believe that they have gained a greater insight into the institution and how the student experience varies across different subjects. And institutional managers believe that students who have been part of internal subject review teams are much better placed to make effective contributions at institutional committee meetings. Student membership means that student concerns directly influence which areas the review will explore and what conclusions and recommendations will be drawn following the review and don't just give students input into someone else's framework and process.

Students who have been members of teams have found the experience hugely rewarding and feel that they are far more likely to know how to use the review team's meeting with students to influence the team to the maximum in the review of their own institution. The experience of reviewing how an institution manages quality allows them to see how and why their own institution's systems work, and as a result more able to use them to ensure a student voice is heard. Currently QAA Scotland receives more applications from students than they have reviews. The desire amongst student officers to become a reviewer appears largely to relate to the experience and knowledge gained from undertaking a review (and not for example the fact that they are paid for their involvement).

The aspect of the framework that student officers are most disappointed with are the enhancement themes. Student members of the steering groups feel that they have not been given enough of an opportunity to contribute as they might have been and in some instances it has been difficult to engage students in some of the discussions. However, the effect of the enhancement themes appears to have meant that many student sabbatical officers are far more likely to consider it their place to comment on issues within their institution than they might have previously. Now that the findings of the first enhancement themes are available, officers have an additional resource to draw upon in making their arguments on issues and it would appear that a number are making use of these sources of information[10].

It is probably still too early to discern the impact on institutions of enhanced student involvement and much still depends on the individual capacities and interests of student officers. Institutions certainly appear to be more willing to engage with students than previously and because of the emphasis on enhancement and active involvement of students, there appears to be a growing interest in representative models of student involvement rather than just questionnaires. This second factor may prove to be the most significant difference between the English and the Scottish models and one that simultaneously looks forward to the possible future role of Students' Unions (emphasising far more their representational function) but also looks back (in regards to approaches to quality) to the CNAA prior to 1992.[11] Perhaps we are going "Back to the Future" and one day students in the UK, especially if we ever get uncapped fees, will have the same rights as students in Italy 800 years ago!

Agenda magazine intends to continue its coverage of this subject and related themes and would welcome further contributions from Union staff or officers. If you wish to contribute see pages of this edition or visit www.amsu.net/agenda/contributing to Agenda for information.

[9] The full results are available at www.

[10] These reports can be read at www.

[11] The CNAA (Council for National Academic Awards) used to regulate and enhance quality in the old polytechnic sector and developed a remit to ensure genuine standardisation and comparability of quality but also pioneered work on quality enhancement that many students would probably find desirable today. With the end of the binary divide the polytechnics became universities and new agencies were established that tended to reflect the peer self regulation approach of the older universities with a reduced and more passive role for students

Outsourcing Advice Work

Author: Mark Horne
KUSU General Manager

The last edition of this magazine featured an article about outsourcing the accounts function[1]. We continue with the theme of looking at innovative use of outsourcing in Students' Unions by looking at how Kingston University Students' Union outsourced its advice service, Mark Horne, KUSU General Manager, takes up the story.

In 2003, Kingston University Students' Union faced a dilemma; the Union adviser had resigned a year earlier and despite advertising the post locally, nationally and in specialist media, no replacement had been appointed and a new academic year was imminent. Admittedly one of our adverts had been positioned directly opposite an article in the Advice Centre trade newsletter haranguing Students' Unions for their poor pay, but still we had expected a better response from three advertising campaigns. Other Unions also appeared to have difficulties recruiting into these roles and this seemed to relate to two factors; a lack of suitably trained staff who we would have

been comfortable leaving in charge of our Advice Service, and the gap between what we could afford to pay and what the going rate appeared to be.

We considered whether we could justify virtually demolishing our pay structure to accommodate the provision of an Advisor of the calibre we needed, or whether we could operate an Advice Service offering only academic or representational support. Kate Robinson (our Membership Services Manager), recognised that the approach that we had applied to outsourcing our catering outlets to Subway – that if there was someone else who could provide a better

service than we could cost-effectively, with some student input – could be applied to our membership services.

The Citizens Advice Bureau has an unrivalled reputation as an advice service, and we were already referring some students to them. Therefore we had established a working relationship and the feedback from students was that they recognised and respected the CAB brand and had been dealt with well. With this feedback and the working relationship we had established, we approached the local CAB with a proposal to consider a joint operation housed within the Union Building.

[1] (Ben Elger. Outsourcing Accounting: the Reading experience Agenda 83 p10-13

It was surprising, given that we thought the Union and CAB were reasonably similar organisations, how long it took to get agreement from the CAB trustees and the amount of detail they wanted before making the decision – it made the Union look very flexible and fast moving in comparison! However, once everything is agreed using the painstaking attention to detail, you are confident that the CAB will deliver, and that you will be kept informed about how they are delivering. We were involved with the "recruitment" of Jackie, who was one of a choice of CAB staff offered to be our site worker, and who were interviewed by a recruitment panel from the Union.

In working out the costs we had to use the CAB accounting systems factoring in not just employment costs but also administrative support. This pushed the costs up and it ceased to be a cheap option but there were still many advantageous, especially given our apparent lack of alternatives.

The CAB is branded separately (it has a strong level of brand recognition), but housed within our support area, next to the VP Support. Within the support area, and all our literature we try and make sure there is a simple breakdown of the roles of each party, and the physical proximity makes it easy to point students in the right direction. I believe we have succeeded in creating the sense that the CAB sits firmly within the KUSU support offer.

Surprisingly when we introduced the CAB, university staff were the services largest users – we had to initially limit, and now remove the university staff's access to the service to ensure we could meet student demand.

The main advantages that have demonstrated the success of the CAB (based on client feedback and mine and Jackie's observations) are listed below.

● The CAB is an independent organisation, which tries to negotiate a fair resolution to a problem. This is an advantage in terms of how students perceive the service, as the Union advice service was not always considered truly independent from the university by students. The university also see it as a far more credible brand and have demonstrated a willingness to include the CAB in problem resolution that they rarely did with our in-house service. This may not appear to be an issue for some Unions, but for us, representation has always been strictly an officer role, so this is a positive step. However, there are clear guidelines in place over what constitutes a CAB issue and what constitutes a representational issue. However, it was agreed early on in our working relationship that the CAB would be willing to support academic cases by undertaking initial interviews in the absence of the sabbatical officers.

● We do not need to refer students to other agencies since the CAB already gives us access to specialised helplines. Additionally, the strength of the brand means many of the local solicitors are willing to give us free advice, whereas the Union had not always found solicitors so amenable. This is particularly useful in terms of housing issues at a university where the vast majority of students are in private accommodation in a high demand area.

● Previously more students were trying to use the local CAB than they could respond to so having an accessible service on their doorstep means students have a far better chance of getting representation, and this level of demand has increased footfall into the Union, and adds perceived value to the Union's services.

● We also believe that our success rate in dealing with traditional advice issues has

improved since the CAB was introduced, and officers feel more confident in being able to pass cases onto the CAB, because of its reputation. They also feel the CAB works as a credible support service to their own work in dealing with student enquiries. It seems that the words "the CAB says" are far more soothing in some instances than "the Union thinks".

- The CAB and Students' Unions are driven, in my opinion, by many shared values, and the "authority" that people generally associate with the CAB (which they may not perceive as applying to a mid-sized Union Advice Centre) adds a lot in Kingston to the students' voice. We are fortunate that with Jackie we also have a highly perceptive and keen individual who is happy to take on board the intricacies of working with both a Students' Union and university.

- The areas in which the CAB has the strongest reputation are exactly the ones which are increasingly impacting on students' lives – housing, financial issues and increasingly employment law. Although virtually all Student Advice Centres will have access to CAB information, they may not always have the access to external knowledge that seems to be available to the CAB itself – on a number of occasions Jackie has amazed us with the ease she has gained background information for us in a number of areas where we might lack the expertise. It may be the case that larger Student Advice Centres may be able to do that anyway – but for us in our situation, this has proved a revelation.

- The Union gains from working alongside an organisation which has such solid practices in place – we have been fortunate enough to mirror many of these practices in our own work, and this has particularly improved the levels of professionalism our members have benefited from in terms of sabbatical representation.

- It adds value to the university support services too – we are aware that a number of our referrals come directly from the University Student Support department, and the university quotes the availability of the service on its web site and in its support literature, in addition to the Union's representational role.

- We are also seeing a gradual increase in "non-traditional" students using the service – mature students and overseas students seem to have more confidence in the brand, which is bringing them into our building.

There have been few disadvantages but there were teething problems that take a while to bed down as you establish how to manage the external organisation within your organisation. The CAB report back to our officers formally in terms of casework completed, statistical breakdowns etc, but with Jackie raising operational issues directly with me as GM. These are then resolved where necessary with Jackie's line manager, who oversees the link with us. Jackie is also offered support and mentoring from the CAB itself, and has access to our staff meetings and in house and University training as well, should she wish to use it. This may appear a little clunky, but has worked well so far, and

generally Jackie is treated as a member of our staff, although obviously she is governed by CAB, not KUSU, terms and conditions.

Would I recommend it as an alternative model? There is no doubt that it has been a positive way of dealing with a specific issue, and it has brought a credibility to this aspect of our services that I am not convinced a Union of our size could match with it's own advisor. But that does not mean a union advisor is in any way inferior – we had specific needs and we couldn't meet them within the available staff pool. Having said that, there is no doubt that the CAB brand is a tremendous advantage in terms of being heard and having credibility, and we have seen increased usage of the service and received nothing but positive feedback.

At the time, it was a creative solution to a pressing problem, and I do not believe that our decision to outsource has undermined our independence or our ability to represent the needs of our members. If we were to start the process again, it's fair to say that we would start from those criteria and consider other areas such as cost effectiveness, although I would also throw in the one option that was considered and seen as unworkable then, but seems to be gaining support now – that of role sharing – could two local Union's share the cost of an advice worker?

Whatever happens, we at Kingston have learnt that sometimes looking "outside the box" really can work, and so far our experiments in outsourcing – the CAB and Subway - have been more positive than negative, and haven't undermined the identity of us as a Students' Union.

Salford and NUS Extra – From Scepticism to Success
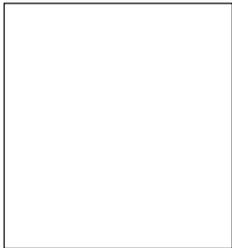
Author: Stephanie Winter
President of the University Salford Students' Union

Following the article from Jo Rukin about the NUS Extra pilot (Agenda 83 p05) Stephanie Winter, reflects on the way the Union participated in the NUS Extra trial, and how it ensured the product was successfully distributed to its members.

I was elected as President of Salford in February 2005, and as a delegate to NUS Conference, I became aware of the NUS Extra project. My predecessor, Tony Short, was a leading advocate of it involved, in promoting it in the North West region and supporting the work of Martyn Ings, National Treasurer. My first briefing about it was at Salford's NUS Conference delegates training, and then at both NUS Services Convention and National Conference I saw the momentum gathering that resulted in the decision to proceed with a trial.

Subsequently the North West was chosen as the trial region, and Salford was invited to take part in the trial. Last year's officers held different views on this and Phil Benton, the General Manager, was initially sceptical about our ability to successfully undertake the project. It was agreed to attend the Open Day and see what the Union would have to deliver if NUS Extra was to become a reality. The Open Day led to a Damascene conversion for the Union as we began to see that rather than an unnecessary burden on the Union, NUS Extra offered a fantastic opportunity for us to engage with our members in a new way in the opening days of the new academic year.

> " The Open Day led to a Damascene conversion for the Union as we began to see that rather than an unnecessary burden on the Union, NUS Extra offered a fantastic opportunity for us to engage with our members in a new way in the opening days of the new academic year."

From July our new sabbatical team was plunged into a planning process that would result in us distributing 5,300 NUS Extra cards by the end of October. Those figures were only achieved through our staff team being highly committed to the project's success, a series of regular planning meetings that constantly refined the procedures we were going to adopt, and a general sense that now we were committed to the trial we had a duty to do it justice and worry about the downsides during the feedback and review process that would follow.

The Infrastructure

Our first decision was how to distribute the cards. We felt unable to accurately estimate demand and were wary of being left with lots of unissued cards so we chose the online issuing process. This meant that each student who wanted an NUS Extra card had to fill in an online application, and then come back to the Union ten days later to be issued the card. Salford previously issued 8,000 traditional NUS cards in the first couple of weeks. Given it was expected to take 3 minutes to register for an NUS Extra card we knew that we could not keep pace with that level of demand. We also had to guess how many students would not pay £10 for the card. However we decided to go all out to prove that the card could be a success and set ourselves an ambitious target of issuing 5,000 cards.

We knew that a half-hearted approach just would not achieve this target. The key was going to be having an abundant supply of computer terminals and a team of staff willing to provide an excellent customer service experience.

Our IT set up was a bit hit and hope in its conception, but proved to be just about robust enough to cope. Our main registration point was in a University conference function room within our building. This had a wireless link to the University's network, enabling us to set up a 10-workstation registration base for credit or debit card payments. For cash payments we had two terminals outside our Finance Office so that we could collect and receipt payment prior to registration via a terminal. Our permanent staff had been

> " To achieve this figure we decided that a half hearted approach just would not work. The key was going to be having an abundant supply of computer terminals and a team of staff willing to provide an excellent customer service experience."

> " Those figures were only achieved through our staff team being highly committed to the project's success…and a general sense that now we were committed to the trial we had duty to do it as well as we possibly could and worry about the downsides during the feedback and review process that would follow.."

trained to a high standard over the summer and now we had to do the same with our student staff. Each terminal had a staff member to guide the student through the registration process but within the first week staff were able to manage two to three terminals simultaneously.

We decided to ensure students would find the registration room. Student staff were placed at critical points in the building from the front door to the registration room to promote the card to students entering the building. Just outside this room staff managed the queues checking that students had the credentials needed to register and to identify and direct cash payers to the Finance Office. We used almost 30 student staff in a variety of guises to help with the registration process in the first week.

Problems

This all sounds as though we had a relatively painless time registering students for the card. However, we did have a number of operating problems that we could not have foreseen in the planning process. Our key difficulty was with the University network. Although we got clearance to use the wireless network, occasionally it would cut off. It turned out to be the University's IT people panicking at the volume of traffic going via the wireless server from one connection. This led to them reducing our bandwidth and breaking our links. We called the person who had agreed our use of the

server, and the bandwidth was reinstated. Despite this the bandwidth reductions happened at least three times in the first week of registration, causing operations to grind to a halt, often at the busiest times.

We also underestimated how many students would want to pay cash. We geared our operation up to try and make it almost impossible to pay by cash but it was soon obvious that more students wanted to pay using this option, so we increased our two cash terminals to four. Of the 5,300 cards issued almost 30% have been cash transactions.

We also underestimated how popular the card would be after the Freshers' period was over. 4,600 were issued in the first two weeks but throughout October, we still issued an average of 30 cards a day. This has created additional pressure on our General Office function where the registration terminals are now sited, and this intensified once we got the cards back to distribute to students.

Distribution

Possibly the hardest part of the whole process has been distributing the actual cards to students. This may appear an easy task; a student turns up with their email confirmation of their card arriving, we look through the alphabetical list of cards to find theirs, we issue them the card, and they sign to acknowledge receipt. In practice, the process is complicated by a number of

> " We underestimated how many students would want to pay cash – of our 5,300 cards, almost 30% have been cash transactions."

factors we could not have foreseen. Firstly, the cards are returned at a rate relative to the speed at which students registered for them. The cards are returned twice a week. We started registering the week before Freshers' with part-time students in an attempt to dummy run the process. Therefore our first delivery of cards was only a batch of 70. Fortunately, they soon started to flood in. Our initial plan had been to have mass distributions twice a week. The volume of cards we had registered made this impossible so we had to use our student staff again to manage a distribution process for us. Then we came across the next hurdle. Each delivery was alpha sorted, in its own right, but due to the volume of cards we issued we received 4 or 5 deliveries of 700 cards, each in its own alpha sorted state. This
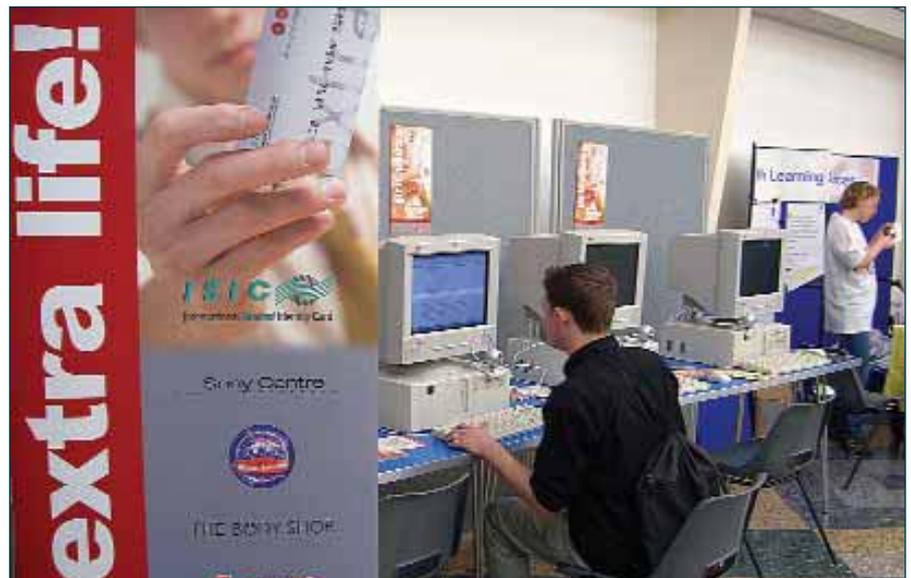
left us having to re-sort each delivery into a master, alpha sorted set of cards to be able to return them to the students.

Our final problem in distribution came from the students themselves. Some students have more than two names, and not all of them could remember which names they had put on the card, and thus help us locate them in the alphabetical list. One Mexican student had seven names, and we ended up checking several combinations of them before we found the card.

Reflections

With hindsight, I am really proud of the way we approached the trial, and here are my thoughts on the issues that made a difference to us:

● **Teamwork.** Once we were committed to the trial, we took a whole Union team approach to delivering it successfully. Officers and staff worked together in planning meetings and implementation

teams to make the project happen. It took a while for everyone to get behind the

> "Another underestimation was how popular the card would be after the Freshers' period was over…during October, we still issued an average of 30 cards a day."

vision of delivering the card, and our target of 5,000 sign ups, but without commitment from everyone who had a stake in an element of the registration and distribution process, it just wouldn't have worked. Everybody involved had clear responsibilities of what they had to deliver, and the work was co-ordinated via a planning group chaired by the General Manager.

● **Good IT.** Once we had committed to the trial, the first port of call was to get a good IT infrastructure in place. The Union did does not have a dedicated IT employee but the project group members responsible for IT had a clear goal of what was needed and they worked tirelessly to get the infrastructure up and running, and to keep it going.

> " Quite possibly the hardest part of the whole process has been distributing the cards to the students."

● **Good admin procedures.** It is inevitable that some students will want to pay by cash. We adapted to the higher than expected demand very quickly, but still kept the same controls in place to account for the flow of cash into the Finance Office.

● **Excellent student staff.** The student staff made a big difference to the take up of the card by acting as champions of the brand to their peers. I think it gave other students confidence that the card was being promoted to them by students.

● **Placing the emphasis on customer service.** We made a decision to go overboard on the face-to-face customer service we provided to students registering for the card. They got clear explanations of the card before they got to sit at a terminal, and then they were guided through the registration process by staff. The permanent staff involved in this have consistently commented on how much

better it was registering students for NUS Extra than our former mass production line approach of the old NUS cards. They felt as though they got to speak to students for longer, promote not only the card but also the Union, and that many students left with a very positive image of us as an organisation.

● **Adding value to the card.** In planning the project, one of our concerns was how students would react to not receiving a card having registered and paid ten pounds. To smooth this over, and to add value to the card, we produced our own Union based discount vouchers to give to students upon completing registration. If students used every voucher they would earn their £10 back within the Union itself. The key driver was the voucher to save money on our end of Freshers' week event. This led to many second and third years taking the card in order to save money on what would be a sell out event. Other entertainment vouchers were also given out for savings on the Christmas end of term party and Graduation Ball, again encouraging returning students to take the card.

● **Doing distribution differently.** The one area I would like to see changed is the way cards are distributed. We almost made a rod for our own backs in registering so many students for the card and then having to cope with the reality of distributing those cards back to the students en-masse. As a Union, we would have preferred it if the cards were posted out direct to the students, particularly if this meant that they could get them sooner.

I am really glad that we took part in the trial; we have earned a nice slice of extra income

for the Union, but more importantly planning the project enabled us to change several long held assumptions about how we organised NUS Card distribution. We have increased the level of service we give our members, in what for many is their first and sometimes

> "One of our concerns was how students would react to not receiving a card having registered and paid ten pounds (so) we produced our own Union based discount vouchers that were handed out to the students after completing the registration process. If students used every voucher on the sheet we gave out, they would earn their £10 back within the Union itself."

only interaction with the Union. I am really pleased that we proved that the card is something that students want, need, and will happily pay for. I really do hope that as a movement we don't waste this opportunity to redefine what an NUS card does and means to students. If we do waste it, the North West trial will probably prove to someone else that there's a market to be picked off if they want it. Let's hope that for once, we can put aside our blinkers, misgivings and preconceptions and do the right thing.

Benchmarking Democracy
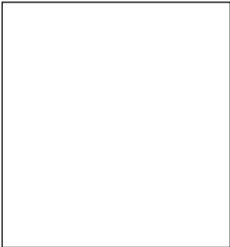
Author: Colin Wood
Director and co-founder of
Uniservity

Most students have never had the opportunity to vote when they arrive at university.

You have around 20 weeks to teach them!

In this article Colin Wood, argues that e-voting can provide an efficient, effective best practise process which can allow unions to devote more time and resources into concentrating on the "Why should I?" of elections.

When looking holistically at the election process, it really begins as soon as the student enters university and begins absorbing all the messages transmitted by the Students' Union about its culture, its contradictions, its language, what it does and why students are involved.

Uniservity have a growing number of case studies and in most cases we can say that the use of e-voting does generate a higher electoral turnout because it is effectively able to deliver a personal ballot box to every member, irrespective of where they are or what time of day it is.

Accessibility though is not the whole story, its not even the biggest part of the story. Uniservity recently convened an e-voting workshop as part of our objective to help define what best practise in elections means and the group settled on a four stage process that can be characterised as the Four P's.

- **The Point –** Why someone should vote, the whole process of motivating a student to vote.

- **The Process –** Getting the administration of the election right. Does it comply with the Education Act, can everybody who is eligible stand, is it secure, is it anonymous, is it fair and rigorous, can all students access the process, can the Union get feedback about which groups engage and which don't?

- **The Promotion –** How is the student made aware of elections! When are they going on and how can they access the election online?

- **The Participation –** How does the student actually go about voting, what instruction or practise is required to ensure they understand a process that may be unfamiliar to them?

The Point

There are many exciting reasons to adopt electronic voting, but first you must ensure that you have an active, accurate, up-to-date and authenticated database of members. With this in place communication can start the moment the student arrives and the key to a successful election is communicating

the value and educating the membership of the reasons why they should vote. This message has to be communicated effectively to unleash the full potential of e-voting and your turnout.

One of the advantages of an online system is that the costs and staff resources used up by the process are pretty low. E-voting provides a more efficient process of running an election and administrating the votes, this coupled with a detailed database of the constituency, means a union can spend more time driving the point home. We can also afford to give students more opportunity to practice on a range of minor elections such as club or society positions or fun opportunities such as "student most likely to be a millionaire" or "best dressed in each class", all contributing to driving the point home to, more and more often, the not so average student.

The Process

The process refers to 'how does it work' for your organisation, does it meet all the requirements of our elections process, does it fit the constitution and does it add any value?

The system randomises the order of the candidates, automatically thanks the student for the vote, provides the full manifesto for each candidate and then gives you the user name of every voter to analyse the demographics and monitor who voted. Administratively this all happens automatically. This would be quite an effort exercising this level of administration with an offline system.

Cost savings

It appears elections processes have similar costs from union to union; the variable seemed to be the amount spent on the promotion or the 'bribes' to get the students' to vote. Staffing, resources and printing are the main cost areas around the administration of an election, these costs can be reduced with the automation of the statistics gathering and can clearly be addressed using electronic voting.

Measuring your success

Our clients that use the e-voting system now have a record of all voters, across all elections, in all ballots. This data enables the union to identify whom in the union are actively democratic and those who aren't. This over time will build a trend, which is essential when tracking the wider picture.

The Promotion

It is often the case that students show little interest in their union's elections, or even who their sabbatical officers are. As a result of this apathy, or more accurately a lack of understanding, many ballots go uncontested. It would appear that only unions that have high levels of general student participation generate enough interest to contest every position.

Promoting the sabbaticals

With an average of 4-6 sabbatical positions, to have uncontested elections with a constituency of several thousand is one of the major problems. An electronic voting system that focuses around a detailed database of your constituency

Anonymity

It is important that you do not know the voting preference for each voter, as this has to be anonymous. The data collected after the event allows you to target voters and non-voters and grow participation year-on-year. You can instantly see the campus they voted from, their gender, their course, age, year of study, ethnicity, mode of study and tailor your promotional activity accordingly – but not know their candidate preference.

Security and integrity

Could unions introduce a system that was absolutely 100% guaranteed to be secure? I thought this was a huge expectation when the existing systems were anything but secure. We tried to ensure the system met every security fear that existed with the current offline system but our principle was that the system was designed to be more secure than the existing process. In the event of an enquiry all ballot papers can be printed and counted manually.

enables you to identify the relevant reasons and the purpose of each elected officer, and which ballots would be of most interest to them when polling opens.

Promoting the election

As the title of this article suggests, your marketing and promotion should not start in the run up to the elections but as soon as your relationship with the students' starts, during freshers week. For example, members of sports clubs have a compelling reason to vote for their VP Sports and likewise the mature student who doesn't use the union for much has a compelling reason to vote for their Mature Student Rep, they just don't know it. It is therefore important to promote the elections correctly to the correct audience as soon as it's possible.

Promoting the voting

With e-voting the union can continue to promote each election during polling through to the close. The system can identify the students that have voted in which ballot but not whom they voted for. This enables you every opportunity to convince the sporty students that haven't yet voted for their VP Sports to vote right up until voting closes. Traditional offline methods typically rely on the footfall to promote elections once the polling stations are open.

Building a promotions plan

An often unconsidered advantage of e-voting is the automation of the statistics gathering. To be able to identify not only who voted but which campus, faculty, age, involvement with the union, ethnicity,

country of origin, etc did the votes come from. Unions armed with this knowledge, start to set targets for voting year-on-year and launch a fully comprehensive marketing plan based on facts from previous years voting. Over time this will give you clear trends in the turnout.

The Participation

Students it seems are generally unfamiliar with voting, most having probably had little opportunity if ever to participate in democratic elections prior to coming to university. This will be equally true of traditional ballot systems as for e-voting. Once we have a process that is easy and effective to role out, we can role it out more often and give our students more opportunities to get used to using it so that by the time we get to the big set piece election in March, a lot more people already know what to do. E-voting provides a consistent and comprehensive method to run many elections to the same standard and structure to the main event, this is a huge advantage as unions increasingly have budget and resource constraints.

I am not advocating that unions change their democratic process, introducing lots of referendums unless they consciously want to, but I am advocating using e-voting systems for lots of the smaller elections such as course reps, clubs and society officers as well as polling students in a more recreational way, Student Most likely to Succeed, Coolest Dude, Best Dressed etc to begin the process of familiarisation

and engagement with the process of voting itself. This has proven very successful with some of our clients using it this way.

Electronic voting can make the process of voting easier for the student, they can vote from their home or the library as well as being able to vote from the students' union at the virtual polling station as before. This compliments the problem a lot of unions are suffering from now of students spending less time on campus and therefore less likely to be passing the polling station.

Conclusion

If we can motivate our students about how change is delivered though a democratic process and how the choice between different candidates can influence this.

If we can use a 'best' process that creates the capacity for our organisations to promote our democracy more effectively and deliver easy and convenient opportunities for all students to vote.

If we can use a system which can improve the effectiveness around the promotion of an election and if we can give students enough experience of voting so that when it really matters democratically, it is second nature we should see electoral turnouts climb and by association the legitimacy of students unions strengthened.

Some comments:

The student officer's view:

The most important thing that e-voting has achieved has been to take the pain out of participation. Students are busy people, and do not want the little spare time they have to be taken up with unnecessarily time consuming activities.

The simple fact of the matter is, that standing in line waiting for your turn to fill in a ballot paper is not an attractive proposition, and whilst some individuals may feel it is worthwhile, a great many do not. The answer therefore, is to make it easier for them. In higher education today, you are never far from a web-connected computer, and so participation in the democratic system can become something you just click.

At BUSU we have seen much higher turnout in both our Sabbatical and our secondary elections since the implementation of e-voting. As union clubs and societies have begun to see the benefits of using online voting, they have steadily migrated on to the system.

**VP Communication and Democracy
Dave Boddington**

The returning Officer

As returning officer at Bath University Students' Union I saw e-voting as an essential development for democracy within our diverse student membership. In the past we always had issues with accessibility of services to our members' and elections are a critical part of the members' engagement with the union.

There was no convenient way for distance learners, part time students, placement students or in fact any student that didn't happen to pass a polling station during voting hours to vote. E-voting has made the election more accessible to more people.

The reduction in admin has made this process more efficient and transparent reducing costs, enhancing communications and as returning officer is generally less of a burden than the traditional offline approach.

Enhanced communications and the ability to monitor participation during polling have enabled BUSU to maximise awareness and the opportunity for participation in the weak areas of membership. We are able to communicate with members on a daily basis through email and text messaging as they vote.

Year on year now BUSU is able to identify the strong and the weak areas of participation and address them specifically through the elections committee, this is something that we can analyse and review as part of our widening participation agenda across the entire organisation.

It would also be fair to add that I do not miss the typical 7-hour count for NUS delegation that would see us up till the small hours.

**Ian Robinson
General Manager & Returning Officer
Bath University Students' Union**

In Praise of Student Volunteering

Author: Matt Hyde
General Manager of
Goldsmiths College Students' Union

This month's Agenda supplement focuses on student volunteering in students' unions. Matt Hyde, General Manager, Goldsmiths College Students' Union and a Board Member of Student Volunteering England, introduces some of the key themes currently facing student volunteering and the volunteering sector, arguing that there is still an important role for students' unions to play in providing student volunteering opportunities in a variable fees higher education system.

Student volunteering is not a recent phenomenon. Students have been actively involved in volunteering for at least 100 years. The offices of Student Volunteering England (once known to many of us as SCADU) are based in a building used by Oxford University students in the 19th century helping the poor of London. Those good old Victorian philanthropic values have evolved over the years and today there are over 42,000 active student volunteers in higher education throughout the country.

In recent years, student volunteering has seen a lot of change. I think I voice the thoughts of many colleagues when I write that the emergence of the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) in 2002 was something of a double-edged sword for students' unions. On the one hand, approximately £27 million of public money (from HEFCE and the Home Office) was allocated to Higher Education Institutions specifically for the purpose of increasing volunteering opportunities. On the other hand, the good work that had been done for years by students' unions and student-led volunteering was in many instances undermined, as HEIs recruited staff members to develop volunteering initiatives and many students' unions saw little or none of the HEACF money. 'Some thanks!' many of us thought, for the sustained development of student community action initiatives in local students' unions throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s. To make matters worse, many of us had to witness our parent institutions making a hash of things where students' unions had demonstrated a clear area of expertise. Yes, there are lots of areas that as students' unions we probably haven't been very good at, and that HEIs could have taken off us, but student volunteering shouldn't have been one of them.

This only tells part of the story, of course, as many other students' unions benefited handsomely from the HE Active Community Fund with parent institutions passing large chunks, or the total amount, of money they had received to their students' unions to develop or enhance existing volunteering provision. Phase Two of the continuation funding meant that two more years funding was to be provided, but at a reduced rate. And more recently, HEFCE announced that there will be Phase Three funding for a further two years, but that the amount will be reduced again.

The above has happened at a time of strategic change for students' unions with concerns about declining income streams and revisions in thinking about the students' union 'offer'.

So this leads us to ask some fundamental questions, given the strategic issues we are facing, including the advent of variable fees;

- Should students' unions continue to offer student volunteering opportunities?
- If so, how do students' unions continue to fund student volunteering (particularly if funding ceases after HEACF 3)?
- If we can answer the two questions above positively, how do we ensure continuous improvements in our volunteering provision for students?

We have four excellent articles which hopefully go some way to shaping a response to the questions above.

Graham Allcott, Director of Student Volunteering England, writes about the challenges for student volunteering and the volunteering sector, highlighting the potentially enormous impact of the Russell Commission, established to significantly increase volunteering opportunities for young people across the country, and the need to plan now for life after HEACF 3.

John Gilfillan, Membership Services Manager at Essex University Students' Union, focuses on a theme which we have touched on in Agenda previously[1] – how to secure external fundraising for projects, introducing us to ways in which students' unions have already sought external funding to enhance their student volunteering provision.

Building on this theme, **Tom Wilcox,** once a sabbatical officer at Queen Mary and Westfield College Students' Union in the mid-1990s and now **General Manager of the Whitechapel Art Gallery,** offers an insight in to how to build capacity in your organisation to improve your fundraising capability.

Finally, **Jane Curbishley,** formally Membership Services Manager at Kent University Students' Union, and now **Investing in Volunteers Manager at Volunteering England,** writes about the new quality standard for volunteer involving organisations – Investing in Volunteers – which, like Investors in People, is a quality standard that students' unions could undertake, to improve the volunteering experience for students and not just in community volunteering.

But, before you get stuck in to these articles, I'll endeavour to answer the first question – whether or not students' unions should still be undertaking student volunteering as part of their portfolio of activities.

Many Unions will be re-evaluating their services over the next few years as they face declining income streams and,

accordingly, will look to save costs which may involve examining the viability of services and activities. In these instances, it may be useful to use a broad brush approach to pose the following questions about those activities before you apply financial tests:

- Is it of clear benefit to students?
- Is it of clear benefit to the students' union?
- Is it of clear benefit to the parent institution?

Running volunteering schemes or projects simply because it's a good thing to do, isn't a robust enough answer. Therefore, the criteria detailed above might, in the first instance, help to determine whether a particular project is worth doing or otherwise (before one gets in to the nitty gritty of resourcing these initiatives).

Let's talk in general terms about student volunteering and apply the three tests above.

Is it of clear benefit to students?

Anyone involved in membership services (and many staff and officers in students' unions) will have a clear understanding of the benefits to students as a result of student volunteering initiatives. Transferable skills, an improved CV and employability prospects, exposure to different parts of society, meeting altruistic needs, expanded knowledge and horizons and the 'feel good' factor are just some of the benefits to be derived for students. So in many ways this

is a pretty straightforward question, warranting a straightforward answer.

However, we could be slightly more analytical in our response to this question. Individual projects will need to be selected on the basis of localised criteria. For example, a project may involve only a few students, but be sufficiently rewarding to those students and to the beneficiaries as to warrant continuing. However, other Unions may decide that a volunteering project involving hundreds of volunteers, offering a limited amount of time, may be of more importance. Equally, one may decide to define measurements to evaluate the quality of the volunteering experience. Having 100 volunteers on your books may count for nothing if they all perceive their experiences not to have been of value or have had a positive/significant impact.

In spite of the above, it is clear to me, having spoken to students and gathered quantitative and qualitative data on this area that the benefits of student volunteering to the student themselves are vast, incredible and, in many instances, life changing – both for the students, beneficiaries and wider society (see table one for evidence of this).

Is it of benefit to the students' union?

I think this depends on the project, but broadly speaking student volunteering could have several benefits in addition to the fact that it is helping your members. From a purely financial perspective, it can be a source of fundraising as outlined in later articles. It can also put you in to

[1] See 'Deepening Participation…' article by Matt Hyde and Robin Pitt in Agenda 77

contact with student groups whom students' unions have been traditionally bad at engaging. At Goldsmiths, we have found that through our volunteering projects we have attracted students of a different profile compared to many of our activities – for instance, mature students, postgraduates and students from BME groups. Whilst the number of participants is lower than, say, clubs and societies, it nevertheless puts us in contact with a student demographic that we have to engage with if we are aiming to meet the needs of as many of our members as possible. There are also significant benefits in terms of PR with the parent institution – in many cases overwhelmingly the major source of income[2] for a students' union.

Does it benefit the parent institution?

A Vice-Chancellor recently told me that the main reasons an institution was engaged with the local community was for the benefit of the reputation of the institution, potential for new income streams and knowledge transfer (application of academic thinking and establishing linkages with business and local organisations). If we take this honest insight as true and students' union volunteering projects deliver on these three drivers then there are clear benefits to the parent institution. And that's before you move on to the obvious advantages in respect of furthering the parent institution's recruitment and

Table One

The '2003 National Student Volunteering Survey'[3] conducted by Student Volunteering England found that:

- There are over 42,000 student volunteers participating in organised volunteering programmes at their HEI
- Student volunteers gave 3,459,653 hours to their communities, contributing £42 million to the economy
- Each student volunteer gives on average 82 hours per year to their community, contributing nearly £1,000 per year to the economy
- The most popular type of project are those involving children and young people with:
  - 35% of student volunteers involved with young people
  - 17.5% with children
  - 5.5% environmental projects
  - 5.3% with adults

retention strategies (at Goldsmiths we know of at least one student who came to the College because of our Inmates Prison-visiting scheme), compliance with OFFA agreements and potential synergies with widening participation strategies.

So clearly students' unions still have a role in providing student volunteering and, if anything, this becomes even more important in the light of the strategic issues now facing students' unions. We should not lose sight of the fact, however that it is student-led projects that has been our expertise for years and this emphasis should play a central role in what

volunteering opportunities we offer in the future as we will always do this volunteering better than our parent bodies due to our governance, values and representative framework.

Hopefully, that explains why, in my opinion, we should still be running student volunteering schemes, now we just need to pay for them!

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2 See John Berg's article 'Evidence of worrying financial trends for SU's from the AMSU Survey' in Agenda 82 which demonstrated that on average institutional funding made up 69% of Union's income.
3 'Student Volunteering: The National Survey 2003' Student Volunteering England 2004

Plan Now to Reap the Longer Rewards

Author: Graham Allcott
Director of Student Volunteering
England

Graham Allcott, Director of Student Volunteering England, expands on the theme of why students' unions should continue to run volunteering schemes, explains some of the opportunities that are on the horizon and argues that we should plan now to preserve our projects for the future.

Sometimes the moments that change your life don't seem to be anything special at the time. I remember vividly during my first year at university being asked to join a volunteering project for disadvantaged kids in Birmingham. They asked me to help. I just said "yes". Several weeks of my life and several trips to Dudley Zoo later, and I was lucky enough to carry on my association with volunteering as part of a paid role at Birmingham University Guild of Students.

Two things always stick out when I think back to that moment: the first is that I had left my student halls that morning with no intention of volunteering and had come back part of a volunteering team, where students were quietly setting about the difficult but pleasurable task of changing the world. I had very little hesitation in wanting to get involved, but importantly, someone still had to ask me in the first place.

The second thing looking back is just how much that moment did change me: I experienced leadership, I saw my life through a much more balanced perspective, it helped me to develop an understanding of the university and made me see how lucky I was to have the opportunity to study there and it ultimately got me my first job. It was by far the most profound learning experience I gained at university, and I have been lucky that my work has allowed me to spread the message to hundreds of students since!

As Matt Hyde, suggests in his introduction, student volunteering ticks all the right boxes: it empowers students to get involved in making changes in society, the students learn about the communities they live in, and the communities benefit from their skills. The university can use volunteering as a positive PR tool, to help widen participation, and to increase retention rates. Unions, too, can use volunteering to demonstrate to their universities a track record of delivery, and a keenness for mutually beneficial partnerships, as a mechanism to engage students in other activities, and perhaps even to demonstrate their own social responsibility goes way beyond token gestures to help extend alcohol licencing hours.

So why, when until recently we faced uncertainty around an HE-ACF3, were we so worried? Why does there always seem to be uncertainty in funding something that isn't just a worthwhile community activity, but one that has such tangible benefits to the universities, and students, as well as to society?

There are a number of reasons why the future didn't look so bright. I still think that unless we all address these issues, we might be back in the same boat in three years' time, worrying over the possibilities of HEFCE cutting the funding, of where the next big initiative is coming from, and wondering why we hadn't started worrying and planning that little bit earlier. So what are the issues and how can we address them?

Firstly, universities simply don't know the extent of the volunteering activity that takes place. The chances are that if they did, and I mean really knew of all the benefits, they would find it easier to support it financially rather than just paying lip service. Often, its because 'they' are not told. I have witnessed a number of unions who have developed close working relationships with vice chancellors and university senior managers in recent years, but there is much still to do here. But when you look at retention, widening participation, personal development planning, PR and marketing, contributions to key skills, and increasingly course-based learning too, surely within that list there must be the wherewithal to extract a relatively small amount of budget to help increase and maintain activity?

Secondly, HEFCE continue to offer very little monitoring of their HE-ACF funding, and there is still a perception that some universities have wasted their money by diverting it away from community activities. This makes lobbying nationally for new funding streams to add value to HE-ACF more difficult, but of course we have some golden opportunities as a result of the Russell Commission[1] report (established to engage one million new young people in volunteering and community action over the next five years), and the current DfES Green Paper, Youth Matters.

Thirdly, student volunteering groups themselves have become over-reliant on HEFCE funding in many institutions. Yes, it is tempting to do so, as it means more time can be spent maintaining or expanding the service, but lets be clear: student volunteering is not a 'HEFCE initiative', its something that unions and universities need to take ownership of. Even if it's a new thing in your own institution, nationally there is a long history of student community action activities, and it survived for decades without HE-ACF, and there's no reason why successful projects can't survive post-HEACF3. The important missing link is fundraising. Developing a culture for responsibly raising funds, as well as responsibly spending them is going to be crucial to unions over the next three years if we want to avoid the same uncertainty.

[1] www.russellcommission.org

There is one simple ingredient to making this happen: time. And lots of it. Rome wasn't built in a day, but by spending time developing the skills, and assessing what funding is out there, it might just rub off on helping other areas of the union's activities find extra funding too.

HEFCE have made clear that in the longer term they want to see volunteering embedded as part of the culture of each institution, and a similar recommendation was made by Ian Russell in his report, which importantly also cited the lack of infrastructure and opportunity in FE Colleges, too.

To make sure these important services survive, and that those with a number of years' experience in the job are able to continue their amazing work, we must be much more bold in our assertions that volunteering really does change lives, and is valuable not just to those communities who benefit, but to the students and institutions taking part, too. Our report published in 2004 found that student volunteers in HE contributed over £42 million to the UK economy and I'm sure that figure has risen since then.

We must be more proactive. Not just waiting for the next announcement of the next national initiative, because just when you're least expecting it, the next announcement won't arrive. We must build up fundraising expertise, both on a local and national level, and first we need to make sure that enough organisational time is allocated to developing such capacity.

I think finally its worth mentioning that the Russell Commission's new implementation body is soon to be launched, and next year will see them embark on an ambitious plan to create a 'step change' in youth volunteering. I believe strongly that students' unions and student community action groups have a lot to contribute in helping this 'step change' occur: there are relatively few organisations who have truly mastered the art of young-person led activity, and over the coming months we can use the Russell Commission recommendations as a way of showcasing the ethos and capabilities of student activism. The Russell Commission recommends involving private companies as funding partners, and where better for companies to go than student volunteering groups – they get to fund some excellent, innovative and important work, as well as profiling their brands to those prospective customers and future employees.

There's an old Chinese proverb which says, "Work with one hand, and wave with the other", and it might well be those who can demonstrate their success and importance over the coming year who are ultimately the most successful.

www.studentvolunteering.org.uk

Student Volunteering Week takes place 20-26 February 2006.

The National Student Volunteering Conference takes place 3-5 March 2006.

What Next for Volunteering

Author: John Gilfillan
Membership Services Manager of
Essex University Students' Union

John Gilfillan, Membership Services Manager of Essex University Students' Union explains how some students' unions have sought external funding to expand their volunteering provision.

Over many years, students across the country have been involved in a number of projects, engaging with the local communities of which they are a part. This was, for a considerable time, banded under a collective name of Student Community Action (SCA). And all was well. Apart for the places where a culture of volunteering hadn't taken a hold. In 2001 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) launched a scheme to better

"enhance the key role played by Higher Education Institutions in their local community, by supporting volunteering by students and staff."

To this end the Higher Education Active Communities Fund (HEACF) was established and £26.75m was distributed on a pro rata basis (students and staff numbers). The goal was to create 14,000 new opportunities for volunteering, and to facilitate one million more people to volunteer (an 8% increase nationally). Each institution had targets in terms of opportunities created, and those participating. And all was well. Until the money ended and ACF round 2 (2004-2006) came to the rescue – almost. ACF2 saw £9.875m distributed across the same institutions on the same simple pro rata basis over 2 years. £6.125m designated to support and maintain 10000 of the opportunities created under ACF1. The remaining funds were designated to generate a further 2500 opportunities.

Students' Unions, many of whom ran existing SCA units were trusted with some of these funds by some institutions. Others saw this as a stream of funding that could be diverted to support other services with a more 'flexible' interpretation of volunteering. Nationwide, this was the biggest investment in student volunteering.

As the second wave of ACF funds enters its final year, the huge developments and expansion in provision is threatened. At the time of writing there has been an announcement that ACF will be extended for a further two years. The previous funding rounds indicate a reduced allocation. If the allocation criteria remain the same there will be a question of viability on a number of campuses as the cash allocation falls below the required amount to meet costs for operating activities (including staff salaries).

Concerns deal with 2 main problems: 1) our responsibility (in some instances) as employers of project workers charged with developing these activities, 2) the huge detrimental impact of the absence of these programmes in those communities where an HEI is resident.

Essex is in a marginally different position than this introduction may portray, mostly due to the extended provision from extra funds from the Home Office for additional projects. The problem of continuation funding is exacerbated with a dependence on external funds to provide these services (and the more money coming in, the bigger the problem). We see external funding as one (most likely) option to be developed further and in the absence of a commitment from the parent institution to guarantee this provision, the next 6-9 months will be identifying potential sources of funding, the drafting of bids and the nervous wait for yes/no/ more information please?

A massive problem faced across the voluntary/ charity sector is this inefficiency, where for a third of the time a project is running, funding is being sought for continuation of the project. The challenge we may face is to how best avoid this situation, but getting guaranteed funding with no end date is akin to winning the lottery – highly unlikely!

These discussions get further complicated by the climate that (most of) England's Higher Education Sector is in at this moment. Many HEIs waiting for the fresh injection of cash from the first wave of variable fees due from Autumn 2006 whilst building a burgeoning list of expenditure from all elements of their respective

institutions. For many, this relatively small amount of money (a few £million) could be spent many times over. The other challenge is to justify the use of this money to support volunteering projects over and above extra recruitment of academics to increase quality of education, build new academic buildings to increase capacity or extra specialist provision/ research bursaries to increase prestige. There may even be a business model that supports the extra expenditure on marketing functions for Universities.

The challenge to us all is to use the best parts of our volunteers' commitment and experiences into the HEIs agendas. At the recent ACUI/ AMSU conference in Cork, a GM from the South-West told a number of people that their advice from their parent institution was "If it isn't relevant to the recruitment and retention agenda of the University – don't bother asking for it". For many of us we will be forced to fold our claims as to the value of continuation funding into this agenda. Not too difficult a task for most of us, but for others, no

matter how well this argument is made, no matter how much logic is applied and no matter the high quality of projects involved, we must be prepared to accept that some Universities will see other priorities above our claims.

Essex and Newcastle SUs were successful applicants for Home Office funding last year, namely, the Volunteer Recruitment Fund. These funds and many others like them are distributed on a regional basis from whichever Government department or Directorate is disbursing the funds. Depending on the scope of the projects run, it may be advisable to register a profile on www.governmentfunding.com along the lines of your volunteer activities. From time to time e-mails will be dispatched, informing the organisation of funds matching their profile, criteria and a closing date for applications. Whilst areas such as London and the North West could see huge competition for these funds with other major organisations from the voluntary sector, the East Anglian region is relatively less competitive. Traditionally SUs have

been quite secretive when pots of cash have been identified. Perhaps the best strategy to overcome the funding challenge will also be a massive challenge to this culture. If SUs are to pursue the course of applying for funding from Government agencies other than the HEFCE, we have to devise a strategy that gives us the best chances for success. On this topic we'll be more dependent than ever to share information on funding availability, criteria to be met and how some bidders are more successful than others. There may even be scope for partnerships across institutions and SUs to develop joint bids, or to combine with other partners from the voluntary sector. If we can put these strategies together, it may even see SUs as the major players in applying to these agencies.

There may be another (even less reliable) source of funds. Colleagues are considering links from private business with certain projects to provide a 'nice' image and buy a far better presence in local media than a full page ad in the local paper could possibly generate. This may be an accessible means to continue some mainstream projects, but would be far harder to generate funds for more challenging (progressive) projects, such as the prison visiting undertaken by Goldsmiths, or the language sessions for refugees by many (including Essex). Whatever route you take, it is clear that students' unions will have to look to new sources of fundraising if they are to continue running volunteering schemes to the same (or greater) level than is currently the case.

Ensuring Quality Volunteers

Author: Jane Curbishley
Investors in Volunteers Manager at
Volunteering England

Jane Curbishley, Investors in Volunteers Manager at Volunteering England, explains how the Investors in Volunteers accreditation can help students' unions to improve the volunteer experience for all students volunteering in whatever a capacity in their union.

With the emphasis in recent years being placed on quality in community volunteering, have 'union' volunteers in the shape of officers, chairs, captains and committee members been forgotten?

There is little doubt that funding through the Higher Education Active Community Fund and the role of volunteering in the citizenship agenda have improved the standards in the management of community-based volunteers. Where volunteer policies, health and safety policies, CRB checks etc may not have existed previously, they do now and community volunteers are better monitored, protected, supported and trained because of them. Has the formalisation of practice for community and project based volunteers meant that core union volunteering roles have been left behind?

Several Students' Unions have enquired about the Investing in Volunteers Standard. One of the first questions they are asked is: 'How many volunteers do you have?' Volunteering England defines volunteering as, 'an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups.'[1] Students' Unions therefore have an interesting dilemma – who are they counting? The Higher Education Active Community Fund forced Institutions to link the name 'volunteer' to those working in and with the community and yet it's clear that union volunteering reaches far further.

Investing in Volunteers is the UK wide quality mark for all organisations that involve volunteers. For Unions considering working to achieve the standard it raises some interesting questions for how comparable student's experiences are between being a volunteer for community-based projects and volunteering as an officer or society chair.

The Investing in Volunteers standard focuses on how volunteers are recruited, supported and celebrated within an organisation. All materials to support achieving the standard are web based and the full standard can be downloaded from **www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk** for free.

Organisations registering are matched with a trained Assessor who works with them through to Assessment. Assessors will meet with a range of staff, trustees and volunteers to talk with them to get an

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1 Compact Code of Practice on Volunteering, Volunteering England, April 2005

impression of how volunteers are viewed within the organisation, how policies work in practice and how comparable the experience of volunteers in different roles is. A written report from the Assessor goes through a rigorous Quality Assurance Process before going to the UK Volunteering Forum, Awarding Body for the Investing in Volunteers Standard.

Many Unions have gained Investors in People, however this focuses on employment practice and Unions who have already achieved the standard may have found that the Assessor was unsure where to draw the line at who to talk to! Even 'volunteer' trustees could be considered to sit outside of the practices that Investors in People assess. Students' Unions could stand to benefit greatly from working to achieve Investing in Volunteers.

Joe Cooper, Student Activities Manager at Kent Union, hopes that gaining Investing in Volunteers for the whole Union will help the best practice and expertise in volunteer management learnt and developed through the HEACF projects. For Joe, the standard offers a useful tool to support changes in practice and to bring the whole Student Activities department together with shared policies.

Kings College London Students' Union are using the standard to benchmark their current practice against, finding it an invaluable strategic planning tool. By identifying how close different activities are to meeting the standards indicators, it's easy to see where work is needed and, from this position, prioritise actions for the coming year.

Organisations already working towards and having achieved Investing in Volunteers include hospices, literacy projects, charities and NHS Trusts. The reported benefits for these organisations have included increased retention rates of volunteers, improved diversity of volunteers and greater lobbying power for resources for volunteers. Volunteers report that they feel more valued by the organisation, that their status is raised within the organisation and that therefore greater opportunities for role development have been made available to them.

All of these points match well into the issues facing Unions. Retention of students as volunteers beyond their initial interest at Freshers Fairs is key to sustaining activities and to maintaining healthy accounts. Diversity is certainly an issue in democratic structures where elected representatives rarely represent the cultural diversity of the institution. As the end draws nigh on funding for community volunteering schemes, obtaining the quality mark itself may be key to future funding.

It is easy in education to talk in the language of Quality Standards, decision makers understand is. Investing in Volunteers is also getting recognition in some significant places, including being written into the Olympic Volunteering Strategy

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Investing in Volunteers Standard

. . . the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games will ensure the highest standards in the recruitment and management of volunteers, and will become an accredited Investing in Volunteers organisation at the earliest opportunity . . .

From London 2012 Volunteer Strategy

Investing in Volunteers is recommended by the Russell Commission as, 'the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve [young] volunteers in their work.' Can Unions afford not to get their work recognised by the Investing in Volunteers standard? Both long and short term, local and national funding opportunities relating to young volunteers and sport as well as any future funding through the Home Office may be linked to holding the standard.

Whether Unions were recipients of Higher Education Active Community Funds or not, the status and quality management of community volunteering projects within Unions has risen over recent years. This has strengthened relationships between Institutions, students and their communities. There is little doubt that sharing the practice learnt and developed in this field with all student activities would benefit students, the Union and wider recruitment and retention at the Institution. If you are interested in finding out more about Investing in Volunteers and how it can be used as a tool to share policies, raise standards, recognise volunteer management practice and link to funding register on the website at **www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk** or contact Jane Curbishley, Investing in Volunteers Manager, directly at **jane.curbishley@volunteeringengland.org**

Enhancing Students' Union's Fundraising Capabilities

Author: Tom Wilcox
General Manager of Whitechapel Art Gallery

Tom Wilcox, a former student officer and now General Manager at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, discusses some of the ways in which a students' union can enhance its fundraising capability.

The vast majority of income for students' unions has historically come from the core grant provided by the institution, supplemented by surpluses from commercial services. Increasingly some unions are now looking at other sources of income to fund their student volunteering and community-focused activities, including grants from trusts/foundations and public funding. While the benefits of funding these activities with new income streams are obvious, many unions may not have the skills or experience to fundraise and administer those funds effectively and could lose out as a result. So how does the students' union movement join the rest of the voluntary sector in becoming successful at fundraising?

Before jumping straight into a fundraising application it is worth thinking about whether or not it would really be a good use of time doing so. Student volunteering, community, access and welfare activities are the most obvious 'fit' with the criteria of most trusts/foundations and public funders, so if these areas are small in a particular union, or principally operated by the institution, then the need for, or capacity to, fundraise is limited. Funders are attracted by demonstrations of what extra outputs their contribution can facilitate. Simply applying to fund an existing activity, that is not changing in scope or frequency, is unlikely to be successful.

Having established that your union would like to undertake a new or expanded activity that may be attractive to funders, the issue of how to manage the fundraising work arises. Recruiting specialist fundraisers is problematic in an organisation without extensive fundraising experience because a designated fundraiser has to raise a lot of money to be economical. As a rule the best person to lead on fundraising is the person who is managing the project for which the funds are needed, assisted by senior managers as necessary. Although fundraising expertise is lacking as a rule in the students' union sector, it is a skill that can be acquired through practical experience and training. Helping colleagues to develop these skills has financial and career development benefits. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Independent Theatre Council (ITC) run affordable fundraising training courses.

Practically all funding applications comprise a budget and a textual explanation of the proposed activity and its benefits. In compiling the budget both direct costs – i.e 10% of the Student Activities Manager staff costs – and overheads need to be incorporated. Generally funders are tolerant of a certain level of overheads that can be justified as relating to the activity in question. Policies vary over this but as a rule no more than 20% of a project funding application should be taken up by overheads. Without making some provision for overheads a union could take on

numerous extra work without any extra resources to cover office costs and the opportunity cost of staff time.

There are thousands of grant-giving charitable trusts/foundations in the UK. Each one has its own rules, criteria and priorities for giving. Legally students' unions are exempt charities; with the charity status derived from the parent institution. The majority of trusts/foundations will only give grants to charities; some will insist that these are registered charities, in which case unions cannot apply so it is worth establishing this before making an application, however I understand that the Charities Bill could change this situation. The Directory of Social change publishes a directory of trusts/foundations and their funding criteria.

Government funding is almost as diverse as trusts/foundations, with funds channelled through numerous departmental schemes and agencies. A good initial source of project funding is Awards for All, which distributes lottery grants of between £500 and £5,000 to community activities. The best way of researching others pots is through the Internet as they change so frequently.

When making an application there are a few basic guidelines to follow:

(i)   Make sure that your union and the activity you wish to fund are eligible with the funder you are applying to.

(ii)   Read the funder's guidelines carefully and ensure that you understand them before attempting the application.

(iii)   If possible, and if allowed by the funder, try and speak to the relevant person at the funder to make sure you understand the guidelines and that you are eligible.

(iv)   Accentuate what the outputs of the project will achieve and explicitly link them to the criteria of the funder, i.e. if a trust gives grants for the 'education of the poor', clearly explain how your project does that.

(v)   Tell the funder what is new or additional about this project so that they know they are not funding existing activities that already have funding.

(vi)   When preparing a project budget for an application, be very clear about what each expenditure item is for.

(vii)   Include some overheads where you feel it can be justified.

(viii) Show partnership funding; where the union or other funder is making a contribution to the costs of the project, this can be support in kind such as permanent staff time. Some funders require a percentage of partnership funding.

(ix)   Sell your organisation's record of successfully delivering similar projects.

(x)   When you are awarded funding, strictly follow all of the funders' conditions, which often include written progress reports.

Although some of this advice may seem obvious, a vast number of applications fail because of these things not being done properly. A funder will look for any excuse to reject your application.

Having received funding it is best practice to maintain good relations with the funder. Do invite them to key events of the funded project, keep them informed of developments and make sure you recognise their support where appropriate, for example in the annual report and on publicity materials. As use of most project funding is restricted to the purpose for which it was given, keeping clear financial records is essential. Use separate income and expenditure codes on the accounting system for each restricted project. The unspent grant balances at the financial year-end will need to be carried forward as restricted reserves on the balance sheet. Many organisations in the voluntary sector have lost the goodwill of funders, many of whom talk to each other, due to bad reporting and administration of grants.

There is a lot of money for good cases out there that - in general - the students' union movement has not tapped into. The investment of some management time in fundraising could significantly enhance non-commercial activities, if it is approached in the right way.

Tom Wilcox is General Manager of Whitechapel Art Gallery and a consultant to charities. He is formerly a sabbatical officer at Queen Mary Students' Union, University of London.

Links:

History

Author: Mike Day

Recent incidents at Middlesex, Lancaster and Edinburgh indicates that the debate over freedom of speech on campus is back on the agenda Mike Day takes a look at the way the history of how the relevant clauses of the 1986 Education Act came about.

Regulations relating to "Freedom of Speech" on campus form part of the Education (No2) Act 1986: section 43 places a duty upon the institution to have a code of practice in place that will, as far as is reasonably practical, ensure that all members of the institution and visiting speakers enjoy freedom of speech and further that the use of premises is not denied to groups on the basis of the views they hold.

If it is thought likely that the meeting may be controversial then it become a "designated" event and, as a consequence subject to additional costs and organisational requirements to ensure that the college fulfils its' obligations. But where did the act come from? Students have always demonstrated and college authorities and government often less than happy about it. Some of the debates and demonstrations of the late sixties and seventies went to the very heart of the argument over which groups should be able to influence the way in which colleges were run. The 1986 Act finds its antecedents in what became known as the "no platform" policy.

First agreed at NUS Conference in April 1974 "no platform" was developed against a backdrop of increased racial tension; the views expressed by Enoch Powell were attracting support and the National Front had polled 4.7% in the Newham South by-election. Government increases in overseas student fees was seen by many as highly discriminatory. The NUS policy was modified at an Extraordinary Conference the following June. In opening the conference President John Randall attacked the Press for the way in which they had misrepresented NUS discussions, "The record of the media on this subject has not been impressive. True, there has been an honourable attempt by many newspapers to maintain a fair balance of comment. However, they scarcely outweigh the blatant lies of the Daily Mail, now the subject of a formal complaint by NUS to the Press Council….) or the editorial witch-hunting indulged in by the Guardian. By comparison with attacks mounted against NUS by that newspaper the editorial pronouncements of the Daily Telegraph appear as vague intellectual ramblings of the apocryphal Hampstead Liberal[1]". Such was the level of interest the BBC and ITN turned up to film the debates. The conference took place on the same day as a planned National Front march through London; many delegates and observers were keen to join the counter demonstration and left; for those that remained regular reports were relayed to them[2]. At one stage a blood stained delegate appeared in the hall whilst another brought news that the tactics he had seen used by the police were the worst he had ever seen. The debate centred on how far the policy should extend, with some delegates arguing that Conservative politicians should be included. Charles Clarke, then National Treasurer, defeated this move by arguing that what was needed was a precise policy that took an uncompromising stand against declared racists and fascists, Randall summed up the debate with a question "To achieve this general freedom it became necessary on many occasions to constrain some of the absolute freedoms of individuals. What was the greater freedom? An abstract notion of absolute freedom of speech, or a right to live in freedom from fear of persecution?[3]"

Elsewhere in Red Lion Square, London the day had ended in tragedy. Kevin Gately a student at Warwick University had been killed on the demonstration trying to prevent a National Front rally from taking place. NUS denounced the subsequent

[1] Minutes of NUS Extraordinary Conference. 15 June 1974. Page 11.

[2] Minutes of NUS Extraordinary Conference. 15 June 1974. Page 36.

[3] Minutes of NUS Extraordinary Conference. 15 June 1974.

enquiry by Lord Scarman as a whitewash, the net result was to stiffen the resolve of those who supported "no platform" it was seen as a crucial tool in the fight against racism and ones position on the issue was, for some, a definitive guide to one's anti-racist credentials[4]. The case was not helped by local activists ignoring NUS guidelines and seeking to include student societies, Conservative and Jewish groups in particular. During her time as President, Sue Slipman (1977 – 1978) successfully argued for a change in emphasis from "no platform" to "no invitation", speakers weren't barred they just wouldn't be asked to speak[5]. This change won a number of plaudits from the press[6] but it did not last, the position was reversed the following year, Labour students (NOLS) were trying to create some "clear red water" between themselves and the rest of the Broad Left, and championed the "no platform" cause in what President Trevor Phillips saw as a "grossly opportunistic position[7]. The same conference also saw Keith Joseph spat at and jostled when he sought to observe a debate, an act that did little to build bridges with the future Secretary of State for Education. Attacks on the policy were coming at the same time as government legislation to change, and they hoped, restrict students' union funding as well as some backbench activity that sought to abolish automatic membership. Conservative students (FCS) eagerly highlighted instances of what they saw as

84 DAY HISTORY OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH ON CAMPUS – PULLOUT EXTRACTS

1. Randall "To achieve this general freedom it became necessary on many occasions to constrain some of the absolute freedoms of individuals. What was the greater freedom? An abstract notion of absolute freedom of speech, or a right to live in freedom from fear of persecution"

2. John Carlisle "It is a message to the vice-chancellors that they must put their own house in order . . . it is a message to the students and students' union. The House and British tax-payer will not tolerate no-platform polices… it is a message for those extremists - who are intent on putting their views across and preventing others from putting forward views with which they disagree."

3. Vicky Philips "There is a more sinister side to this legislation…. What it will do is force colleges and students' unions to give money and facilities to the National Front and the British Movement, organisations who see colleges as fertile recruiting grounds for their abhorrent racist ideas. Organisations whose rationale is to incite racial hatred and to break the law. Students have opposed these groups in the past not just on ideological grounds but because their existence threatens the safety and security of Black, Asian and Jewish students and their ability to study free from intimidation and physical violence. The Government should legislate to protect the ethnic groups in our society and not give facilities to the organisations which threaten and attack them."

4. Students' unions have frequently been vilified in the media for upholding a "no platform" policies that sought to protect minorities, yet with new anti-terror proposals the government and some sections of the press are travelling the same road.

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7. The same conference also saw Keith Joseph spat at and jostled when he sought to observe a debate, an act that did little to build bridges with the future Secretary of State for Education.

8. President John Randall "the editorial witch-hunting indulged in by the Guardian. By comparison with attacks mounted against NUS by that newspaper the editorial pronouncements of the Daily Telegraph appear as vague intellectual ramblings of the apocryphal Hampstead Liberal".

9. NUS argued that their "no platform" policy was complementary and supportive of the Public Order Act of 1936, which made it an offence to use abusive and threatening language or stir feelings of racial hatred, but the government were in no mood to listen.

[4] Correspondence with Steve Parry. April 2001

[5] Lancaster University, Scan, issue 10, 6 December 1977

[6] Thorn, op cit., p95

[7] Interview by Nick Thorn with Trevor Philips carried out 22 July 1991. Quoted in Thorn, op cit., p102

political bias or intolerance and if the left were keen to broaden the scope of the policy they were just as keen to misrepresent it. Visits made by MP's to colleges that ended in disruption were seen as evidence of the policy in practice despite the fact that they had been invited and scheduled to speak. When Leon Brittain visited Manchester in 1985 the students' union did all it could to ensure the meeting went ahead. John Carlisle MP an apologist for the apartheid regime in South Africa visited various campuses prompting NUS President Phil Woolas to claim that he and others were deliberately trying to "provoke incidents"[8]. Demonstrations and boycotts resulted in negative headlines for NUS and students' unions and demands for action by the press. The theme was picked up in 1985 with the publication of the government green paper "The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s". Amongst other issues freedom of speech was highlighted along with an indication that if institutions took no action legislation would follow.

In response the CVCP and CDP produced codes of practice that indicated that lawful freedom of speech should be upheld. This was not enough for Fred Silvester, MP for Manchester Withington who in February 1986 moved a Private Member's Bill on "Freedom of Speech". The codes, he said, "had too many doors through which the activist can bolt."[9], his Bill was not taken but

the issue was taken up by Baroness Cox in the Lords who withdrew her amendment having received assurance by government whips that the issue would be addressed in the final text that went to the commons. The government amendment caused a furore and, after strong pressure in the Lords, was withdrawn and a revised amendment devised with the CVCP[10]. NUS argued that their "no platform" policy was complementary and supportive of the Public Order Act of 1936 which made it an offence to use abusive and threatening language or stir feelings of racial hatred, but the government were in no mood to listen. At the final stage of the Bill John Carlisle spoke in support, "It is a message to the vice-chancellors that they must put their own house in order . . . it is a message to the students and students' union. The House and British tax-payer will not tolerate no-platform polices… it is a message for those extremists – who are intent on putting their views across and preventing others from putting forward views with which they disagree."[11] Speaking on Channel 4, Vicky Philips, NUS Vice President Welfare said, "There is a more sinister side to this legislation…. What it will do is force colleges and students' unions to give money and facilities to the National Front and the British Movement, organisations who see colleges as fertile recruiting grounds for their abhorrent racist ideas. Organisations whose rationale is to incite

racial hatred and to break the law. Students have opposed these groups in the past not just on ideological grounds but because their existence threatens the safety and security of Black, Asian and Jewish students and their ability to study free from intimidation and physical violence. The Government should legislate to protect the ethic groups in our society and not give facilities to the organisations which threaten and attack them."[12]

The onus was now on institutions to draw up codes of conduct in the knowledge that there would be penalties if a college did not see that the code was upheld. John Carlisle was eventually advised by his doctor to stop visiting college campuses[13]. Within weeks Bristol Conservatives were reported to be thinking of inviting a speaker from the National Front to test the effectiveness of the new law[14]. The effect of the legislation in the Education (No 2) Act was, as NUS had predicted, to create a greater degree of caution amongst university and college authorities[15]. Students' unions have frequently been vilified in the media for upholding a "no platform" policies that sought to protect minorities, yet with new anti-terror proposals the government and some sections of the press are travelling the same road. With student groups and organisations keen to put their views across it seems the debate over how far our freedom to speak reaches is far from over.

[8] NUS News, vol 5, issue 18, Monday 10 June 1985

[9] Quoted in Defend Your Union (NUS), Autumn 1986

[10] Letter from Maurice Shock, Chair of the CVCP, to Kenneth Baker, dated 3 May 1986

[11] John Carlisle, Hansard 21 October 1986, Column 1101

[12] Vicky Philips, Channel 4, 12 August 1986

[13] Report in Today newspaper, 16 October 1986

[14] Guardian, 27 October 1986

[15] Correspondence between Phil Woolas and Lord McIntosh, 2 June 1986

Book Review – How to Win Campaigns

Author: Mal Edgson
General Manager, Buckinghamshire
Chilterns Students' Union

Effective Campaigns are better executed by showing rather than arguing, by motivation rather than education and by mobilisation rather than accumulating knowledge.

As for the message:
- Keep it short and simple
- Be visual
- Create events
- Tell stories with real people
- Be proactive – don't just respond
- Get your communication in the right order
- Communicate in the agenda of the outside world - don't export the internal agenda, plan, jargon or 'message'

Start from where your audience is, from something they are already interested in or concerned about. The bigger the audience the simpler the message.

Advice from Chris Rose in How to Win Campaigns, 100 steps to success. £15.99

Chris Rose, is a passionate environmental campaigner and for him campaigning is the new sphere of political activity that can engage the public. Many of the motivational tools he talks about strike at the same issues that our officers struggle with in our own attempts to engage with students on our campuses.

[1] Hurst, The secret of successful Campaigning Agenda 79 p12-13

At heart this book is all about communication and Unions could learn much from it. A systematic step-by-step guide to running successful campaigns it builds on the article by Phil Hurst in Agenda 79[1], but it goes further, and challenges us to address the mass of conflicting messages we send out to our members and the wider world.

"Everything your organisation says and does and everything said about it will be added to the mental mix alongside your carefully planned campaign messages".

The book is in effect a series of thinking tools, some familiar some new, it's the sort of book that you can start anywhere and is packed full of 'flashes of the obvious', thought provoking insight and simple practical advice.

He talks about successful communication in terms of finding the Red Thread, the vital line that runs through an issue. Finding this and discarding other possibilities is the hardest but the most pivotal step in organising a campaign concept. Simplicity is achieved by understanding the complexity, identifying the key part that can be changed to strategic advantage and designing a campaign that deals only with that single element.

Campaigns are pieces of communication designed to influence behaviour not educate people about an issue.

> **IF YOU FIND A FIRE**
> 1 Network with your neighbours
> 2 Explain the issues and processes of ignition, fuel effects, oxidation and ion plasmas, and address the social and economic justice dimensions
> 3 Educate decision makers regarding the establishment of an adequately resourced fire brigade and fire prevention culture, ask your neighbours to join in

This alternative fire safety notice communicates the wrong thing. A real fire safety notice, like the one below, goes through a process: Awareness, Alignment, Engagement, Action. It is carefully designed to get a result, to save lives. Everything else is superfluous and confusing:

> **IF YOU FIND A FIRE**
> 1 Raise the alarm
> 2 Go immediately to a place of safety
> 3 Call the Fire Brigade

Communicating the wrong thing says Rose, is the most common reason for campaign failure and can happen when:

- **an internal agenda is communicated to the outside world –** surely never in students' unions!!!
- **a policy or plan is transmitted as the message –** well that would never happen!!
- **everyone has a say and the message mentions every important issue –** yes…………..!
- **there is an attempt to educate rather than motivate –** all the time…!!

If like me your organisation's communication culture scored 4 out of 4 of these common mistakes it is definitely time to read this book.

Chris Rose has worked for Greenpeace, where he was a leader of the successful campaign that stopped the sinking of the Brent Spar oil platform in the north Atlantic, Friends of the Earth, WWF International and a host of other organisations and incidentally also addressed the 1991 AMSU Conference in Cardiff. From memory not a lot of people attended his two sessions so the chances of getting him again may be slim!

Any Other Cheese & Biscuits

Not the Minutes of the Meeting

What if minutes included what actually happened as well as decisions? In fact, why minute decisions at all?

Not the Minutes of the meeting of a Students' Union Executive held on the 23rd October two thousand and oatcake.

The President opened the meeting in his usual pompous style. A couple of office-bearers had resigned for reasons too tedious to note and they were thanked for their work insincerely.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Factual Corrections

In spite of insisting that all minutes were e-mailed to members at least five days prior to the meeting, no-one had actually read them. The members started frantically reading so as to be the first to point out any typing errors or mis-numberings. The Vice-President (Communications) won as usual. After a satisfactory number had been found the committee moved on to:

Matters Arising

As usual the President had been too busy to do any of his actions points.

As usual the Vice-President (Volunteers and Activities) had been too lazy to do any of hers.

As usual the Vice-President (Entertainments) had been too drunk to do any of his.

As usual the Vice-President (Communications) had been too cunning to have any action points.

Administration Business

The General Manager went on for what seemed hours about a problem that the Union was having, and in spite of his supreme management skills, amazing intellect and phenomenal work effort, had always been a problem in the past, was still a problem and was likely to continue to be a problem. He pointed out that from his extensive knowledge of other student unions gained at numerous conferences, training courses and visits, they also had this problem and it was a lot worse.

The Executive approved a visit or a conference or a training event for him to attend. He had cleverly arranged for the President to be invited so there was no danger of it not being approved.

President's Business

There is every possibility that some of the interminable number of University meetings and NUS events attended were useful, but the minute taker was unable to tell as the loud snores of other members of the Executive made it difficult to hear.

Vice-President (Volunteers and Activities) Business

The Vice-President (Volunteers and Activities) gave her usual report on the excellent work that had been done in her department. As usual none of it had been done by her but by other office-bearers and staff. She was thanked for her efforts as no other (polite) response was possible.

Vice-President (Entertainments) Business

In a copycat performance from numerous previous meetings (and previous Vice-Presidents), the Vice-President (Entertainments) described how amazingly successful all ents had been and how chronically sort of money they were. A further tranche of money was agreed.

Vice-President (Communications) Business

The Vice-President (Communications) described the things she had been doing since the last meeting in Proustian detail. Never in the history of student unions had so much been made of so little. She was thanked for her efforts in order to avoid any further discourse.

Treasurer's Business

Some student had complained about something in the Union. It was felt that the student was not a typical customer and their complaint could safely be ignored. It was almost agreed that the Vice-President (Communications) should write to the student however in the end it was decided that this was not necessary.

AOCB

The Vice-President (Communications) was cock-a-hoop. She had found a further error in the last meeting's Minutes not previously noticed. The President ruled this out of order as the minutes had already been approved because he had been waiting to make this ruling from his first day in office and was unlikely to get a better opportunity. The Vice-President (Communications) asked how it was possible to approve minutes that were inaccurate. Everybody laughed.

Closure

The meeting did not so much close as fizzle out as tedious anecdotes started to be told about behaviour at the previous night's volunteers party.

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