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**Individuals and Communities**

**Worcester Students’ Union**

**Strategic Plan 2014-2017**

**Introduction**

Worcester Students’ Union is an independent charity, registration number 1145192, which is devoted to the educational interests and welfare of its members. Its members are all students (full-time and part-time) registered for a course of study with the University of Worcester, unless they specifically choose to opt out of membership. Its activities and services are funded through a block grant from the University of Worcester and through trading surpluses from commercial services.

Like other students’ unions, its objects are the advancement of education of students at the University for the Public Benefit by:

* Promoting the interests and welfare of students and representing, supporting and advising students
* Being the recognised representative channel between students, the University and any other external bodies
* Providing social, cultural, sporting and recreational activities and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of students.

Worcester Students’ Union is affiliated to the National Union of Students (NUS) and is supported by the NUS.

The Students’ union has only a limited engagement with its students because the students at the university tend to fall into two streams. The first are those who are full time, active members of the university community who join clubs and societies, often live in Worcester or on campus and quite often fall into the traditional age bracket (18-22). The second group which is much larger consists of many mature students, part time students, professional students (teachers, nurses, midwives, and business) and students who will never come to Worcester unless they choose to come for their graduation as they study at one of our many partner colleges scattered across the country.

The students Union has a natural tendency to segment the students into communities by either mode of study, academic department, club and society membership, volunteers, course representatives, mature or by some university community link which binds people together as a stereotype, such as international students. In many cases the level of engagement with the students union is often linked into these communities and it would not be unusual hear that those most likely to vote in our elections are traditional, sports students who live in Worcester. If you accept this hypothesis then it is obvious that we are not treating all our students as individuals and that we are not catering for the needs of all out students.

In the past 4 years Worcester Students’ Union has taken the view that we constantly need to increase participation in whatever we do and we have embarked on a programme of inclusion. We have increased the numbers of students who are course representatives from about 50 that we knew about to around 500 and in 2013 one of our course representatives was honoured by the National Union of Students by being named Course Representative of the year. We have increased the numbers taking part in clubs and societies, the number of clubs and societies we offer and we have moved into the volunteering sector by encouraging our students to tell us of their volunteering and logging the number of hours they do.

The course representative system and volunteering by their nature allow us to work with students that we had not been able to engage in the past. Each of these students have their own individual objectives and goals and they show the students union that working with collective university communities is good but treating each student as an individual is as important.

The focus for our strategic plan 2014-2017 is to continue to help our internal student communities to thrive and grow but to treat all our students as individuals with personal aspirations and often conflicting needs. For each one of our strategic goals we have put a measure in place so we can track our progress year on year which will help us develop certain areas within our annual operational plans for each area of our work. We have broken our strategic goals down into different categories and intend to produce a one page summary of the plan in the form of a pictogram so our students and stakeholders can easily access our goals for the coming three years.

**Section A- Better Union**

1. **To increase participation in SU elections year on year**.

The annual election of our officers is one of the set piece measures of those students who wish to engage in the running of their Students’ Union. The turnout in elections measures how well the SU has done in capturing the attention and interest of the students and by making the activities of the SU relevant to each individual student it will be possible to follow our progress but looking at the turn out in elections and breaking down those numbers demographically we can see where we are doing the right things and where more work needs to be done.

**Measurement- total number of voters taking part in elections**

1. **Increase the numbers of clubs and societies each year**

Each year we will produce a report outlining which new clubs and societies have been formed in previous years. By reducing bureaucracy and selling the benefits of affiliating a new university community to its students union we can show that we are engaging with more students who have different interests and satisfying some of the social interests of more individual students

**Measurement- report on new clubs and societies formed each year in annual report**

1. **Increase the numbers of club and society members**

With the increased number of clubs and societies it seems obvious that the numbers of individual members will increase but we need to ensure that all our clubs and societies are run correctly and in the interests of its members to ensure that each group remains vibrant and that year on year they can all grow their membership.

**Measurement- Demographic report on membership data on annual basis**

1. **To ensure our clubs and societies are transparent about future costs of membership**

Worcester Students Union works with the University of Worcester to ensure that there are no hidden course costs in academic study. It is important that our clubs and societies apply the same principal to their membership. It is important that clubs and societies are transparent about the essential kit students will require to buy or how much training camps will cost and it is important the relevant staff and officers of the SU meet with the clubs regularly to ensure they adhering to an open and transparent policy.

**Measurement- annual review of complaints from members regarding costs**

1. **To continue to work with the university and other partners to ensure our competitive sport is played at its highest level with well coached and equipped clubs**

In 2012 the university and students union set up the Board for Sport which selected a number of our sports clubs for extra coaching, conditioning and sports therapy. The aim of the performance sports programme is to get our top sports students working at the highest level we can and producing positive results in (predominately) BUCS competition. The success of these clubs and individuals will encourage others get involved with the programme and therefore expand our sporting influence in both the midlands and nationally. To ensure the success of sport at Worcester the Board of Sport has produced its own strategic plan outlining challenging targets for sport at Worcester. Working with the University of Worcester we aim to meet the targets set by the Board of Sport strategy. The easiest way to measure our overall success is to compare ourselves with other similar universities in terms of BUCS overall league position but also to look at the contribution of our individual athletes to the overall success of sport at Worcester.

**Measurement- BUCS league position annually compared to previous year**

1. **Work to increase recreational participation in sport**

Although working with high performance teams and individuals boosts the reputation of the university and attracts more elite athletes, it is important that we provide activity which enhances the health and well being of as many of our individual students as possible. The development of taster sessions of specific aerobic sessions or spin classes allow more of our students to access sport on their terms and improve their experience as a member of the university community. By associating Worcester Students Union with mass participation in physical activity the students can see that we are working for all their needs and not just the needs of the few.

**Measurement- count student numbers at organised events and feedback from activity survey.**

1. **Advance a volunteering strategy to increase the resources applied to volunteering**

Since 2012 Worcester Students Union has directed some resources toward volunteering. The ambition of the SU is to provide a full time member of staff in this area and provide financial resources to ensure we can develop our own in house volunteer projects as well as acting as a signposting agent for many local charities. We have invested in new technology to allow our students to easily log their hours and work towards the achievement certificates that could make the difference to employability after graduation. We need to encourage our students to log their hours so we can demonstrate to the local community that the students add extra value to the local area and are a force for good in helping those in most need.

**Measurement- number of V-records issued and returned. Number of volunteering hours logged**

1. **Produce a financial surplus each year.**

Financial sustainability is essential to the future prosperity of Worcester Students Union. Over the past three years we have reduced to the risk to our financial sustainability by reducing our own commercial activity especially in the bar. The new university library and change of use of the old library has not adversely affected the income from the shop and a cohesive strategy in both bar and shop has had a positive impact on the end of year accounts. The importance of having surplus each year has a positive effect on the confidence of the board of trustees and the university board of governors and that positive attitude creates opportunities for the SU and makes us a sound investment for outside organisations.

**Measurement- annual accounts**

1. **Research and development of our commercial services**

In the last four years we have seen major refurbishment work in the Students’ union building. This work could not have been completed with the resources supplied by the University of Worcester. It has been possible to rationalize some of our services and increase the floor space, stock range and income from our shop. The whole building has become an attractive place to come in to and sit whether you are a student, visitor or member of staff. It is important that in the coming years we continue to work to maximize the use from our space by looking for more external bookings, more internal events and more ideas on shop products and services. For example in 2013 our shop clothing sales has massively increased due to a concerted effort to original clothing with different designs such as the Worcester wonsie or the new sports jackets. The sales in these products show us that there is a market for new ideas and we need to capitalize on this and other areas of our work while scanning the horizon and checking what our colleagues in other unions are making work.

**Measurement – income from commercial activity**

1. **Develop and grow our relationships with our external commercial partners**

Having reduced the risk from our own commercial services, in the past few years we have increased our external financial risks by increasing our reliance on external companies providing income in exchange for access to our members. It is important that we continue to work with our external partners so we can gauge the risks we face and we can help them tailor their offer to best suit our members and therefore benefit both organisations.

**Measurement- income from commercial partner activity**

1. **Develop and engage our communities and individuals**

There are many reasons why our students would decide to join an organized group and just as many reasons for when they don’t. WSU needs to help our organized students groups to grow and as additional community involvement of our students helps retain them as students and improves their time as a student in Worcester. We do need to research the factors that trigger a student to either join or actively choose not to join a recognised group. We need to make the conditions right for those students to join groups or create their own based on their own interests. There will always be some students who will resist the whole notion of engagement with their representatives in the students union and we should work tirelessly to promote the work of the SU and how it benefits our student body as a whole as well as an individual.

**Measurement- number of candidates/voting at elections, participation in volunteering, StARs and student council**

1. **We will devise plans to ensure we talk to more students face to face on an individual basis**

It is much easier for the SU to communicate with students who are members of recognised groups but it much more valuable and meaningful to communicate with students as individuals with individual goals and agendas. This type of communication requires a great deal of hard work by a larger number of people than just the full time officers and must be worked through by all the permanent and student staff in the union as well as the key students from the student groups. By directing our time and resources to individual communications the results can be of benefit to the SU as well as the students themselves.

**Measurement- reports to council and trustees about individual contacts**

1. **To ensure the Board of Trustees continues to develop and remains at full capacity**

Since the inception of the current governance model the Board of trustees has worked well to establish its boundaries and take reports of activity from all over the organisation. The Board has worked hard to ensure the correct people with the right skills are in the team and in the next few years the Board requires to develop its internal committees and oversight powers to ensure we remain true to our mission and vision.

**Measurement- minutes of trustee meetings showing progress**

1. **To review the effectiveness and rewards for part time officers and research current trends in other SUs to ensure best practice**

For many years the executive committee with full and part time officers had acted as the board of trustees for the SU. With the reorganization of the governance of the SU the executive committee has become somewhat irrelevant and the part time officers in particular have lost many of their decision making powers. Over the next three years we need to review the part time officer roles to make them both relevant to students but also to ensure they have meaningful roles in the democracy and governance of their students union.

**Measurement- annual report on part time executive members’ activity**

1. **To review our democratic structures to ensure they are best fit for our members needs**

It is important to not only look at the job roles of our part time officers but also the totality of our democratic structures. We will review the effectiveness of our elections, induction for new officers, annual review of student council places, the democratic procedures for meetings such a review of outmoded and outdated ways of getting a students ideas to form part of SU policy, harnessing technology to help with decision making and then we will review again as the demographics and needs of our members change.

**Measurement- section in annual activity report outlining work done**

**Section B- Better University**

1. **Reduce our reliance on the university financially year on year**

In 2013 the Students union took the unusual step of asking for a reduction in its university block grant (the amount of money the university gives the SU to run its core democratic services). This is first step in a drive to reduce our reliance on the university block grant to ensure the SU can remain a critical friend of the University. Students must be sure that we are working in their best interests and not in the interests of the block grant from the university. The SU will work with the university in the coming years to continue this process.

**Measurement- annual accounts**

1. **Work with the university to ensure all the Student Academic Representative system is working as effectively as possible.**

Over the last 4 years the number of StARs has increased from a low base to the 500 or so we have now. It is essential that we continue to work with the university to ensure that all those who have been elected to serve as StARs appear on the system so that we can contact, train and retain their services, so we can encourage them to fill in their volunteering record and so we can work with them and the university to make a better place for students to study courses relevant to them

**Measurement- Report on progress to relevant university committee and student council**

1. **Run effective campaigns on issues that students think are important**

Every year the focus for student lead campaigns changes and each year it is important for the SU to lead students on campaign education and to provide a suitable platform where students can suggest campaigns for the SU to direct resources. As campaigns vary from year to year we need to develop a campaigns toolkit which students and officers can use to ensure that campaigns are run effectively for the benefit of our students. Over the next three years WSU will develop such a tool kit and will encourage students from all over the university to put forward their ideas.

**Measurement- Report on campaign activity in annual report**

**Section C- Better Worcester**

1. **Increase the number of volunteering organisations we partner year on year**

In order to satisfy the needs of our students in community volunteering and to ensure we record the hours that our student volunteers carry out it is important that we increase our links with as many organisations that provide volunteering as possible. This allows us to supply suitable volunteers to these organisations and at the same time we know our students are being assessed for awards and their hours are being verified by our charitable partners.

**Measurement- Annual volunteering report on activity**

1. **Work with local community groups to enhance the image of our students in the community**

Students are often seen as a large stereotypical group which is easy to attack by local community groups and the media. It is important that the positive things that students bring to the local community are communicated to local organised groups, the media and the local community in general. By putting accent on our students’ positive contribution to Worcester, and St John’s in particular we can help dispel the myths around the contribution, or lack of, that students make to their chosen living area. We should also act as a conduit for suggestions and complaints from local residents regarding their student neighbours and work with all those involved to ensure we enhance the reputation of students at the University of Worcester.

**Measurement- Report on meetings with local groups with minutes where appropriate**

**Section D- Better world**

1. **Ensure our work always has sustainability in mind**

Worcester Students’ union is proud of the awards it has won in recent years, particularly the Green Impact Gold Award in 2013. The Students’ Union understands that the vast majority of our students have an interest in the environmental damage that the human population is doing to our planet and we understand that every little step we make in functioning in a more sustainable fashion goes a little way to making our planet better for us and those who come after us. We will continue to work with Green Impact and Best Bar None and we will create our own policies and procedures to ensure we do not waste the finite resources of the planet.

**Measurement- report on schemes and awards each year in annual report**

1. **Continue to improve our understanding of the issues facing our international students and will work with them to integrate our international students with our home students.**

Our international students are a welcome addition to our diverse population of students and the Students’ Union must continue to work with the international office and the international students themselves to better integrate them into student life at Worcester. There is so much our “home” students can learn about the culture and lives of our international students while at the same time the “home” students can help to enrich the lives of our international students and give them the experience that many have come to the UK to learn as well as their academic studies. It is incumbent upon the SU to work with all groups to make sure this process is natural and unforced but benefits all the students at the university.

**Measurement- annual report**