Bucks Students’ Union Strategic Plan 2019-22

# Making life better for students at Bucks

It is a really exciting time to be part of the Union and extremely rewarding to be able to launch this new strategic plan and to be part of making great things happen at Bucks.

Our purpose as a Students’ Union is to ‘make life better for students at Bucks’. Through dynamically supporting and representing our membership on a daily basis we aim to achieve this mission.

I know that without Bucks Students’ Union my university journey would have been far less rich and I’m not sure my outcomes would have been anywhere near as favourable, so I fully understand the value of our work and am passionate about driving the organisation forward, enabling us to have the same impact for many, many more students. This plan will enable us to do that.

We have engaged in extensive consultation with the membership and we believe this plan is taking us in the right direction to meet their expectations, ensuring that our offer represents the diverse interests and requirements of all our community and that both students and Union staff are properly equipped to have a positive impact on the Bucks experience.

Our plan not only gives us focus for the next three years but also enables us to clearly communicate our intent, which we hope will inspire an even greater level of engagement from the people around us.

I am fully confident that we will make good on our commitments and successfully deliver this plan ensuring that the Union continues to make positive change, is growing responsibly and in a sustainable fashion at the heart of the University’s offer. All while amplifying our members voice as the powerful and tenacious ‘critical friend’ the institution deserves. There is a lot of ground still to cover for Bucks New University, but you can rest assured that we will be with our institution throughout as a trusted ally, invaluable resource and a creative supporter.

I’m incredibly excited to have this opportunity to play my part in delivering on these commitments, and hope this plan inspires more people like me to get involved.

Tao Warburton

President and Chair of Trustee Board, Bucks Students’ Union 2019-20

While we are rightly proud of our achievements to date this document outlines our strategy for continuing progress, it is a series of commitments designed to build on the foundations we have established over recent years, and in keeping with our nature is ambitiously looking forward.

Once again it is not necessarily a radical departure from our previous work but does take us in new directions, sets fresh priorities and ensures we are responding to the changing environment and the evolving priorities of our membership.

We have shaped these commitments following thorough consultation with our stakeholders and having reflected on the outcomes and impact made during the period of our last plan, and every element has been informed by the membership. We are extremely confident that this approach will take us in the right direction to serve their needs whilst enabling us to remain agile, innovative and ambitious, meeting new challenges as and when they arise.

Our previous strategies successfully captured and defined the ‘character’ of the Union, and sharing this with our members, staff team and the wider community has been a key factor in our ongoing accomplishments. We have developed a credible brand and our stakeholders know what we stand for. It is now important that we continue to role model our values and strive to meet, and where possible exceed, the high standards we have set ourselves.

Detailed operational plans, focusing on how we will continue to improve our diverse services and overall offer, support the delivery of this strategy and I have every faith that our driven and dynamic team will continue to achieve great results.

We approach the next three years with renewed enthusiasm. We have high hopes for the development of the institution during this time and will work hard to inspire the next generation of Bucks students to enjoy the benefits of their membership, fully participate in the opportunity we provide, become influential in what we do and leaders in their chosen areas.

Thank you in advance to all who will be part of our onward journey and our sincere gratitude to those who have contributed so far.

Tristan Tipping

CEO, Bucks Students’ Union

# Bucks Students’ Union is an independent, dynamic and thriving membership organisation. Our primary purpose is to make life better for students at Bucks and build on our success as one of the highest-performing students’ unions in the UK.

This strategic plan, developed in close consultation with members, staff and stakeholders, outlines our key objectives and the initiatives we will undertake to enhance our members’ experience over the next three years.

# A vision for our members

## Where opportunity is never defeated by circumstance

Everything we do as an organisation will work towards achieving an environment where all members, regardless of background, can come together to create new communities based on shared interests and ideas. Where members are inspired to embrace and explore a broad variety of educational and social opportunities to help discover and influence their own destiny. Where members both create and exploit opportunities for each other in equal measure. Where the collective strength of the membership is recognised, respected and valued for its unique contribution both internally and externally. Where members are provided with essential training and support to lead their communities effectively, helping to positively shape and enrich their university experience.

# Our mission

## Making life better for students at Bucks

To achieve our vision, Bucks Students’ Union is wholly committed to the ongoing support and development of our members. We will equip our organisation with the technology and tools it needs to perform effectively and provide our staff with the knowledge and skills to reach their full potential. We will diversify our income to provide a stable financial base for our operations. We will build and demonstrate our credibility with partners and other stakeholders in order to more effectively support our members. We will reach out to our diverse membership to encourage broader participation so that we can better understand and represent them. We will work hard to show members the value of deeper engagement with Bucks Students’ Union through the scope of our activities and leadership opportunities. We will identify valuable new opportunities for all our members and provide a robust platform on which they can create more opportunities for each other. We will make life better for students at Bucks.

# Our core values and cornerstones of our work

These core values not only lie at the heart of our identity, but also form the characteristics and personality of the organisation and represent the behaviours we expect and encourage from our staff, volunteers and wider membership:

## Dynamic

We are a fast-moving, progressive and flexible organisation which is agile in responding to and meeting our members’ needs.

## Inspiring

We inspire our members to actively participate in the broad range of Union services, including opportunities to help and motivate others, making their time at university a valuable experience which broadens their horizons.

## Tenacious

The Union campaigns in a committed, determined and respected way to consistently deliver the best for our members.

## Responsible

Our team will value responsibility in all elements of their work with us. We will always be mindful of the consequences and effects of our decision-making and actions; the Union will endeavour to take the most responsible approach available and consider sustainability and impact throughout.

## Coherent

Communication with our members is relevant, accurate and timely. We ensure that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of our work, its purpose and the proactive steps they can take to influence our activities.

## Professional

We take pride in doing things the right way, challenging and developing ourselves whilst developing mutually beneficial and productive relationships with our stakeholders.

## Inclusive and friendly

We pride ourselves on our inclusive, approachable and friendly culture which supports and builds a strong university community where all members can find their place to participate, develop and thrive. We are member led at all times, committed to representing the diverse views and requirements of our student body with equality.

## Passionate

We harness the passion and interests of our members and staff, carrying out all our activities with drive and enthusiasm.

## Innovative

We are ambitious when planning for the future and seek creative solutions to meet our members’ needs.

# Making and measuring our impact

Our strategic themes and goals are chosen carefully. They represent the key tenets of our mission and align to our vision to enhance the lives of the students whom we represent.

As a high-performing organisation, we have set ambitious and challenging objectives. We know these goals are achievable - our steady determination, collaborative approach and stakeholder engagement ensure that we can be trusted to deliver on our commitments, both ethically and responsibly.

To make our Union the best that it can be, we will be transparent and accountable. Each department will develop plans which outline how their specific actions will contribute to the Union’s overall strategic goals.

Measurable targets will be agreed and progress will be tracked at both a strategic and operational level. Our Trustee Board and management team will take responsibility for overseeing our performance. We will communicate our progress in an open way so that our members and stakeholders can track our impact and performance.

## Maintaining excellence

We are committed to maintaining and where possible exceeding the high standards we have set and will put in place robust measures to ensure that we use our current performance as a platform for future success and greater achievements

## Preparing work ready graduates

We will develop a valued and effective co-curricular programme and a strong support network that prepares our graduates for life beyond university.

## Supporting student success

Creating a vibrant campus experience through a first-rate extracurricular programme, building strong inclusive student communities and providing the support our members need to navigate university life.

## Investing in our people

Our members, staff and stakeholders are our most important asset, they drive the Union forward and we will invest our time and resource wisely to ensure all parties are willing and able to help us achieve our organisational goals.

## Being fit for purpose

Ensure the Students’ Union is relevant and fit for purpose by planning effectively for our future, managing our resources and taking a dynamic approach to the development of our offer to members.

## Developing and sharing an understanding of our value and impact

The Union will constructively engage with the students of Bucks to improve the understanding of the benefits of membership as well as sharing with our wider stakeholder groups the positive impact of our work.

# Maintaining excellence

Over the past six years the organisation has worked hard to improve in many areas: finding new ways to operate efficiently and responsibly, strengthening our governance, enhancing our brand, communicating effectively and becoming more consultative, introducing a more robust planning cycle, creating a supportive environment for our people and endeavouring to ensure the Union and its resources are fit for
purpose in a constantly changing environment.

We are pleased with our progress and delighted with recent successes and we remain committed to maintaining, and where possible exceeding, the high standards we have set in order to best serve the membership.

We believe the bar can be set higher and we still have many exciting challenges ahead, with a commitment to innovate and meet these challenges head on, reacting dynamically to the evolving environment in which we work the Union will go from strength to strength. We also acknowledge that to be truly successful we will have to become increasingly more effective in our role as the University’s critical friend, tenaciously representing the student body and partnering with the institution to improve the experience and ensure our members get unprecedented value for their investment.

## The Union commits to:

* consolidating our place as one of the top 10 ranked students’ unions in the National Student Survey by remaining relevant to our membership and delivering highly valued, first rate support and services.
* a robust review cycle of our performance, systems, policies and processes to ensure they are fit for purpose and meeting ambitious targets.
* continuously benchmarking our organisation against appropriate organisations and sectors, looking externally for new ways of working and potential areas for improvement, growth and development.
* high performance in externally audited accreditations across the various areas of our work, ensuring we are employing best practice throughout.
* outperforming the sector in levels of engagement from our staff team and membership.
* building and developing a robust and sustainable business plan that will allow the Union the resource to support and grow its activities at the high standards our membership deserves.

# Preparing work ready graduates

We will develop a valued and effective co-curricular programme and a strong support network that prepares our graduates for life beyond university.

## Expand the range of volunteering and leadership opportunities offered to grow the confidence of students and enable them to build competencies

We will identify and continuously pursue new volunteering opportunities to support our members to reach their full potential, improving their experience and enhancing their knowledge and skills. Through the Leadership Academy we will identify the routes to obtaining and succeeding in leadership roles and support participants through a programme of developmental activity.

## Enhance the employability of our membership and prepare students to be ready to succeed in the world of work

We will continue to build and promote an attractive co-curricular programme of taster sessions, workshops and certified courses which align with the core skills and competencies required by the industries and sectors served by the University’s degree programmes. Our members recognise that their degree is only part of their journey to future employment and that transferable skills will enhance their success in the employment market.

## Helping students in to their next opportunity

The Union will embed the Bucks Award, helping our members record their achievements and experience, working with them so they can articulate their value and present themselves effectively to future employers. We will develop our relationships with local business and trade organisations whilst we grow our JobShop to offer a greater number of students paid work and opportunities to engage with industry so they are more ready for life beyond university.

## Build strong and collaborative relationships with academic teams

We will proactively seek opportunities to work on shared projects with our academic colleagues. This will enable us to shape our offer to best meet the needs of the student body. A closer working relationship with academics and supporting their understanding of students’ needs will lead to the programme being more relevant and the Union benefiting from academic colleagues promoting the relevance of engagement with our organisation.

# Supporting student success

Creating a vibrant campus experience through a first-rate extracurricular programme, building strong inclusive student communities and providing the support our members need to navigate university life.

## Provide academic support and advice, alongside an effective representation system, maximising our members’ potential to succeed

Our Union will support the membership in all aspects of their education, through professional, knowledgeable and experienced staff in our Advice Centres to a well-trained, properly briefed and highly motivated network of student reps. At Bucks, all students will feel they have excellent guidance with people prepared to fight their corner and an opportunity to get their voices heard.

## Support our members’ wellbeing through advice, support and guidance

We will provide a first-rate, accessible and independent service through our Advice Centres to support our members in dealing with any challenges they encounter and remove barriers to progression and success.

## Create an exciting and developmental extracurricular programme

Support student success by building student communities through high-quality social interaction in safe and inclusive environments. Strong friendships help to support student retention with extracurricular activities serving as an excellent way to combat the stress and challenge of study and promote a healthy ‘work-life’ balance.

## Support students as they begin their journey into higher education

We acknowledge that the transition into higher education is challenging so we will find ways to adapt our co-curricular programme to provide students with the skills and capabilities they need to succeed. Our extracurricular additional skills and developmental programmes will help our members to progress through university and reach their potential.

## Create opportunities to provide vibrant, accessible and diverse student communities

We will offer all members the opportunity to take part in a wide range of societies, clubs, teams, special interest groups, collective activities and community initiatives which will allow them to form friendships, grow experience and benefit from a supportive and inclusive environment.

## Foster student pride and a sense of belonging through shared experiences

We will seek high levels of participation from our membership in our popular extracurricular programme and series of showpiece events such as Freshers’ Fortnight, Varsity, Union Awards, FestiBall and student charity events. We will share our successes to build institutional pride which will support retention.

# Investing in our people

Our members, staff and stakeholders are our most important assets. They drive the Union forward and we must invest our time and resource wisely to ensure all parties are willing and able to help us achieve our organisational goals.

## Develop our people

Continuous professional and personal development will be encouraged through ensuring all career staff have a bespoke plan in place that is regularly reviewed and development opportunities are explored and maximised. We will consistently support cross-departmental collaboration, mentoring and coaching from within the Union which will be monitored and reviewed through the performance management system.

## Engage our employees

Through the promotion of a culture of inclusivity, positivity and high trust, staff will feel empowered to make decisions, develop the areas they are responsible for, innovate appropriately and be inspired to make positive change for the benefit of our members. All employees will be provided with the resources, training and support required for their roles and we will communicate consistently with employees to ensure clarity, commitment and consultation of all relevant policies and procedures.

## Attract the best talent for our organisation

We will continue to be an employer of choice through a commitment to sharing our sector leading brand, our success and the benefits of joining our team. Encouraging applications from a diverse talent pool will support our aim of a workforce demographic reflective of the membership. Our fair and robust selection procedures will fit the organisations values and behaviours whilst remaining cost effective.

## Retain our team

We will actively seek opportunities within the structure for succession planning and retention of important skills and experience and identify key talents with potential for development and progression within the organisation. The promotion of a culture of feedback where employees are recognised for work well done, performance issues are addressed in a timely manner, total reward packages are regularly reviewed and positive health and wellbeing is encouraged. This will promote employee loyalty and commitment.

## Perform to high standards and deliver great results

Through a highly engaged, well-supported and properly equipped team of staff and volunteers operating in a positive environment, underpinned by robust management systems and structure, we will encourage and maintain a culture of high-performance.

# Being fit for purpose

Ensure the Students’ Union is relevant and fit for purpose by planning effectively for our future, managing our resources and taking a dynamic approach to the development of our offer to members.

## Ensure the organisation remains relevant to our membership

We will proactively engage in research and benchmarking and will welcome innovation to meet the expectations of our diverse and evolving membership. We will identify priorities to ensure we remain relevant and will be critical in satisfying our members’ expectations.

## Manage our resources effectively for the best return on investment

Ensure the Union secures the best possible value and return on all purchases and contracts in which we are involved. Take an active approach to maintain our facilities and manage our resources, in the most effective and efficient manner, to guarantee the best value for our members.

## Maintain strong governance

Robustly review the effectiveness of our governance structures to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation as we grow and develop. As a democratic organisation, we need a simple but effective structure
that enables student leadership, promotes collectivism
and encourages a professional approach to working
within the Union.

## Grow the Union in a sustainable and responsible manner

While we look to grow and develop the organisation we will be forever mindful of our environmental impact, ensuring we are working within best practice, promoting Fairtrade and sustainability throughout our communities. We will commit to operating our services ethically and responsibly in line with our values.

## Diversify revenue streams and grow our income

The Union will proactively explore opportunities for new income streams and commercial activity whilst working to deliver the best possible results from our existing services. We will make new connections with local businesses and community organisations to identify mutually beneficial opportunities and we will maximise the potential of our available resource. We are committed to developing our own financial stability and grow our income to continuously improve our offer.

## Investment in our infrastructure

Through building redistributable surpluses from our trading ventures to winning investment from the institution we will endeavour to upgrade our facilities and physical resources to remain competitive, fit for purpose and an attractive proposition whilst ensuring our people have the best possible tools with which they can contribute to our
shared successes.

## Effective planning and risk management

The Union will actively review our strategies and business plans, welcoming contributions from our stakeholders and scrutiny from the membership. We will dedicate time to analysing and identifying risk and deploying all available resource to mitigate against it, ensuring the sustainable operation of our organisation.

# Developing and sharing an understanding of our value and impact

The Union will constructively engage with the students at Bucks to improve the understanding of the benefits of membership as well as sharing with our wider stakeholder groups the positive impact of our work.

## Build relationships

We will work to demystify the Union’s purpose and motivation in order to foster more constructive working relationships with key stakeholders. We will use all the resources at our disposal to promote the contribution of the student body to the local community to nurture a more progressive environment in which our members can become valued citizens.

## Continue our drive to fully embed our brand and values

We will continue to promote and establish our brand and values, protecting our position as a trusted advocate of the membership and a reliable practitioner of first-rate services that add real value to the student experience.

## Share success

We will proactively share the successes and achievements of the Union and our members in order to promote what we offer, attract higher levels of participation and increase institutional pride.

## Grow capacity and expertise in research and data management

We will also explore and engage with varied avenues of consultation and research, managing the data available to us and enabling a thorough understanding of the requirements of our membership, the impact of our work and opportunities available to the organisation. We will work to grow capacity within the organisation to support valuable research and data analysis so that our decision-making and planning is well-informed and our lobbying is compelling.

## Maintain effective two-way communication with our stakeholders

We will commit to holding constructive two-way communications with the student body and our wider stakeholder group so we have a deep understanding of their needs and requirements - using all available channels and platforms to establish a fruitful dialogue which will build a trusted relationship with our members.

## Communicate our goals and values in a clear and effective way

We will ensure that we have built, and are effectively using, the most appropriate channels to properly express our values, embedding them in everything we do, sharing our vision and our goals and effectively communicating the impact of our work to all stakeholders. The Union will expertly promote the benefits of engagement with Union activities, growing the base of deeply engaged members.

# What does success look like?

We have consolidated our top 10 ranking in the NSS and became widely recognised as one of the very best organisations of our type.

We engage in fruitful and constructive relationships with all our major stakeholders.

Bucks Students’ Union enjoys employee engagement that outperforms our comparative set.

Extracurricular development opportunities with the Union, such as The Leadership Academy, the Bucks Award and engagement with Big Deal programmes, are recognised and promoted as valuable and important parts of the university journey and positively contributing to student success by the membership and the wider University community.

Our lobbying, constructive engagement and partnership working has had a demonstrable positive effect on the University’s performance.

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Expenditure on staffing of the Union equivalent to no more than 50% of our total income.

We have secured investment in Union run facilities to ensure they are attractive to our members and fit for purpose.

The local community sees us as an important and valuable partner and resource, regularly seeking our support, utilising our services and providing varied opportunities for the membership.

We have recorded top-level performance in independently audited accreditations across the breadth of our service provision.

We can effectively and persuasively demonstrate how the work of the Union makes life better for students at Bucks.

New income streams are established, adding value to what we do, and are delivering consistent redistributable surpluses in our commercial service ventures.

The Union can report sector leading levels of student participation in Union run activities.

We are an organisation that celebrates diversity, reflective of the community in which we operate, and are widely recognised as living our values.

Bucks Students’ Union are the champions of a culture that supports a safe and inclusive environment at the institution

Membership engagement levels are fully representative of the student body’s demographic.

# What our members say

My involvement in Bucks Students’ Union made my entire University experience. Participating in all the free activities and being elected as Student Trustee and AU Chair gave me the confidence to succeed as a student leader. With the continued support of the Students’ Union, I feel like I’m gaining skills for life.

Christina Demetriou
2019 Vice President Student Involvement

The Union is proof that you can be whoever you are and succeed in whatever you do. Before becoming Vice President Education and Welfare I’d spent a lot of time working within the Union, as both bar staff and a team leader; elected as a student rep and RAG Ambassador. The role has pushed me way beyond my comfort zone and moving on from Bucks will be incredibly hard.

Georgia Nosal
Graduate

During my time at Bucks, I took part in almost everything I could possibly do within the Students’ Union. I was a member of the Cheerleading teams, Yoga Society and Ballet Society, and took part in a whole range of additional skills sessions and recreational activities. During an interview, talking about the many training sessions and activities I participated in impressed my future employer so a big thanks to Bucks Students’ Union for these amazing opportunities.

Emilee Platts
Graduate

Being part of the Students’ Union has been the highlight of my time at University. Being part of so many different clubs and societies and the free nights out has really enhanced my Bucks experience. I have been able to use my course skills by having the opportunity to film big Union events such as Varsity and being a Fresher’s Helper has provided me with invaluable employment skills.

Tom Featherstone
Current student

Without the Support of Bucks Students’ Union I wouldn’t have completed my studies and been able to take on my current role as Vice President Education and Welfare. I’ll always be grateful for such a fantastic Union and urge others to make the most of the diverse range of opportunities that the Union offers.

Brooke Pilbeam
2019 Vice President Education and Welfare

The Union was the height of my University experience, namely thanks to The Big Deal. It provided me with countless opportunities to experience so many different things such as being a member of various sports teams and societies, a financially rewarded student rep and building my skill set thanks to the vast array of additional skills courses.

Jimi Adeyinka
Graduate