



# Communication Strategy 2023-26

# Introduction

This document outlines our strategic approach to how we communicate with the members of Bucks Students' Union. It is intended to provide staff and stakeholders with an informed plan, that is guided by member-led research, outlining the strategies we use to engage with our membership and how we intend to talk to them. We recognise that we operate in an environment that is constantly changing, with a diverse membership that consumes information in different ways and this plan aims to outline the different audiences and relevant channels to ultimately increase member engagement.

## Strategy 2023-26

Everything we do is underpinned by our Strategic Plan which has been created through member and stakeholder research. Our plan is ambitious, but fully aligned to the needs of the membership and helps us *make life better for students at Bucks*. The plan is built around inclusivity, accessibility and kindness, whilst creating valuable, meaningful opportunities and a sense of belonging for our members.



We have six core strategic themes alongside being committed to maintaining, and, where possible, exceeding the high standard we have set and will put in place robust measures to ensure that we use our current performance as a platform in building a better Union:

- **inclusivity and belonging**
- **employability and life after university**
- **student success and wellbeing**
- **community and sustainability**
- **people and development**
- **resourcing and responsible governance**

## Our core values

**Dynamic**

**Inspiring**

**Tenacious**



# Key aims and objectives:

The aim of this Communications Strategy is to assist in the day-to-day communications decision-making within the organisation. In particular, the strategy aims to help us:

- achieve our overall strategic aims
- engage effectively and establish two-way communication with our members
- grow the proportion of students developing member-led content
- engage effectively with other key stakeholder groups
- ensure people understand who we are and what we do
- communicate our successes and the benefits of engagement with us
- encourage broader and deeper engagement
- increase participation.

# Challenges and opportunities:

Through various feedback mechanisms and the wider Union staff team, we have identified several key issues surrounding communications:

- There is a lack of understanding of certain groups of students that might have limited engagement with the Union.
- Although our social media channels are growing in consistency, there is still room to improve and specifically look at our tone of voice. There are certain, more traditional channels, where we get limited reach and where they are less effective.
- Emails are still a popular communication channel but there is an opportunity to focus on content and make them more tailored to different audience groups.
- We don't share and celebrate our successes enough which could help improve our visibility and reach within the student body.
- Sometimes the content we produce is not diverse enough to engage with our audiences.
- Awareness of the Big Deal, prior to joining the University, still remains limited with research from the Big Conversation project indicating that students are not fully aware of it before arriving at BNU.



# Research shows that:\*

- 96% of our members agree that we make life better for students at Bucks.
- Over three quarters of students recognise themselves as being members of the Students' Union with just over 10% saying they are not members with the remaining 9% saying that they are unsure.
- Over three quarters of students agree that the Students' Union has a real impact on their student experience.
- Almost 65% agree that the Students' Union has helped develop the skills of our members.
- Around one third of our members feel a sense of belonging to the wider University community due to their involvement with the Students' Union.

# Success stories:\*

- The Students' Union is seen to embody some key values: friendly (64%), supportive (50%), accessible (33%), fun (30%) and reliable (24%).
- The Students' Union is recognised as an avenue for building key skills with a large proportion of students wanting to learn new skills for both their career and for life, gain independence and confidence and to challenge themselves intellectually.
- There is evidence that targeted communication has been effective with over 90% rating our communications as good or very good. Email communication is still ranked as the most common way of our members hearing from us.
- 90% agree that the Students' Union has the power to create change and make things happen at the University.
- Over 70% say that they know how to engage with the Students' Union with over 60% saying that they know how to contact the elected officers.

\*Research taken from the 2024 Membership Survey for taught students



# Objectives

To help us deliver this plan, we've split it into five strategic objectives:

- 1. Rediscover our brand**
- 2. Understand our members**
- 3. Invest in technology**
- 4. Broaden our communications reach**
- 5. Celebrate our success**



# Rediscover our brand

Our brand is what sets us apart from the University and signals what we deliver on behalf of our members. However, the University brand has started to morph towards our brand and may lack a clear level of differentiation between the two brands. As such, we are in the early stages of looking at a brand refresh where we rediscover our brand and evolve it into the next stage of our history.

## Refreshing our brand

Our brand is important to us and is what sets us apart from the University. It's crucial that our members know exactly what services we offer and that every activity, event, session or workshop, organised by us, is funded and provided through the Union. As the University brand has morphed more towards our brand, we feel as if it is time to refresh and rediscover our brand. We are in the early stages of working with an external agency to redevelop our brand and move it to the next stage of our history.

## Develop our tone of voice

Whichever group or member we're speaking to, we should always sound like us. Through research, we have been able to generate a bank of keywords that our members best associate with us. Our tone of voice should be aligned to these keywords and, if applied consistently, our members are more likely to recognise us and understand what we're about. We would also intend to work with the same agency for the brand refresh to help further the existing work around our tone of voice and align this more towards our values and strategic objectives.

## Be clear and consistent

Everything we say should be as clear and simple as possible, as well as respectful of the fact that that our membership is incredibly diverse. We should not overcomplicate key messages and should try to keep everything jargon free, where possible. This should be applied consistently across everything that we do and should never come across as patronising or unfriendly.

## Objectives / key targets:

- members are able to recognise and easily identify our core values and to respond positively through the membership survey
- members are able to associate the cornerstones of the Union and rate them highly
- 90% of our members are able to say that our communications are sufficiently detailed and informative





# Understand our members

Our members are the backbone of the organisation and understanding their needs and behaviours is vital to our continued successes.

## Log all interactions with our members

Using our website and customer relationship management (CRM) system, we will log all interactions with individual members. This will help us build a detailed profile of each member and can be built up to span their entire time as a student at BNU. We will log all engagement, including all activities, events and workshops, and will detail elections they have voted in. Logging this information will allow us to explore trends and analyse engagement at a granular level and will also help deliver the required content for additional initiatives, such as The Bucks Award. It will also enable us to broaden our offer to different groups and explore ways to interact with members that are not engaged in any of our services.

## Understand needs, behaviours and attitudes

As a dynamic organisation, that is member-led, we need to evolve to enable us to remain relevant and meet the needs of our members. We will work hard, and use all available tools, to expand our insights into the membership to better understand the behaviour and attitudes of our members. This will be primarily driven through data insights through surveys and other mechanisms.

## Measuring engagement

We will provide departments with the tools, resources and support to equip them with member engagement data through demographic reports. This will enable departments to have a better understanding of engaged members and highlight less engaged groups. Additional reports will also be produced that will analyse engagement across the broader Union – benchmarking figures against the total student population. We will remain agile in our approach to reporting and remain open to broadening our scope to any future data requirements.

## Member value

A core part of what we do is ensuring that students fully understand the depth of services that we deliver. We add a great deal of value to the overall student experience and aim to ensure that all students know they are a member of the Students' Union. We will utilise all communication channels at our disposal to maximise awareness and recognition of membership and demonstrate how we can add value to the student experience.

## Objectives / key targets:

- a total of 20% equivalent, of the full-time undergraduate student body, to complete our annual membership survey
- 80% to respond positively on satisfaction of the Union
- maintain an average of 65% in the question on membership across both the Big Conversation project and annual Membership Survey
- complete all service level demographic reports on a monthly basis and to provide a full breakdown of stats, compared to the full student body, on an annual cycle.





# Invest in technology

We should invest and fully embrace technology to harness the power of data and gain a deeper insight into our membership.

## CRM solution/website

We have invested both in software and staff resources to work within a CRM system. This system is fully integrated with the University's student records and gives us full access to the data of our members. From this, we can monitor and track the touchpoints of our members and build up an engagement profile – spanning the entire academic lifecycle of every member. Our website can fully analyse the make-up of specific groups and can produce demographic reports, enabling us to adapt and tailor our offer/message to different segments of the student body.

## Tailored communications

Using our website, we can group together our communications and send tailored emails to different groups based on several demographic aspects. By sending tailored communications, we will strengthen our engagement as the information will be personalised to that specific group who should be more inclined to sign-up or read through the email. We will also remain nimble in our approach to this and look at adapting this concept to further streamline the digital content we send to our membership.

## Digital resources and new trends

Our website is an important tool to help drive this strategy, but it should remain fully up-to-date. A key part to this is ensuring that it's continually updated and that our staff team have the appropriate level of training to deliver this. As such, the Communications and Marketing team will provide regular training sessions and briefings to all staff so they understand how the site works and have an appreciation and in-depth knowledge on the functionality of the system and the benefits of keeping it updated.

## Digital resources and new trends

We recognise that our membership is continually evolving and is incredibly diverse. To ensure a wholly appropriate level of communication, we should always be exploring new and different ways to engage with our membership and monitor their effectiveness. Whilst traditional channels of communication can still work, we should always be looking into new digital trends and expanding our communication channels to grow our reach into the student body. Some of these channels could also be used to create two-way communications, encouraging us to engage with members through these channels and respond or act on any requests.

## Objectives / key targets:

- grow the number of visits to the main Union website to 600,000
- 50% open rate on tailored e-shots
- 90% of our members are able to positively rate the overall quality of our communications
- 90% that classify our website as good
- all operational staff will receive full training on our website as part of their induction process



# Broaden our communications reach

Effective communication is central to what we do as a team. Alongside this, we need to ensure that we are using the right channels for the right audience, ensuring engagement and maximising the potential of what we are trying to achieve.

## Effective campaign planning

There should be a purposeful reason for each campaign that has a key message behind it. Each campaign should be properly thought out to ensure the best results and that it fully engages the student body or a specific demographic. The Communications and Marketing team will work alongside departments to produce a communications plan for campaigns that will outline the core message, timescales, relevant communication channels along with setting of measurable targets.

## Right tone of voice for the audience

When planning a communication message or campaign, it's important to think about the target audience and how they will engage with it. It's important to keep the message as clear as possible but to also ensure that it's applied consistently across all channels. The Communications and Marketing team will work with teams within the Union to provide advice and support to ensure the right tone of voice.

## Utilise effective channels

We have a multitude of channels available for communicating to our members, but picking the right ones is vital to the success of any campaign. The Communications and Marketing team will work with teams to select the right channels and help tailor the communication, based on the target audience. Where possible, content-rich material should be used to help communicate campaigns in different ways and to broaden our reach within the student body. We will work hard to make campaigns and messages as unique as possible so they really stand out and ensure maximum exposure and awareness.

## Measure the success

Throughout all campaigns, we'll use analytical tools to review and enhance further communication messaging. At the end of each campaign, we'll measure success against targets and fully evaluate which channels have worked effectively. This will not only help measure the success of the campaign, but also inform future campaigns and enable us to further improve insights into our communications channels.

## Communicating our offer and The Big Deal

Communicating what the Students' Union offers to our members is central to them understanding the benefits of membership. Alongside this, The Big Deal continues to be a core part of our offer and enables members to take part in everything we do for free. We will continue to work hard, and use all available channels including open days and working alongside the University, to further promote The Big Deal, generating awareness and driving participation.

### Objectives / key targets:

- 50% of students are able to say that the Union effectively represents their views
- produce and communicate a set of style guidelines and a tone of voice guide for all Union staff to follow
- 70% of our members will be able to say that they have heard of The Big Deal

# Celebrate our success

Sharing and celebrating our work will make us a more transparent organisation and demonstrate the value of membership and getting involved. This also includes working alongside our members to help them in creating member-led content.

## Generate more news-based articles

We'll share and celebrate our successes across all channels to raise awareness of the different work that we do. This will lead to a better understanding of our organisation and make us more transparent. We'll also work alongside the University to share our successes beyond the University community and raise our profile within the local area.

## Member snapshot videos

We'll produce a series of short videos, showcasing the benefits of getting involved in different areas of our work. These will be story-based and will try to ignite an emotional connection with us. We will use these videos in a targeted way to either raise awareness of the work we do or to encourage our members to get involved.

## Produce content-rich material

Content-rich material should be a consideration when launching any campaign or message through our digital channels. A video or simple animation will draw attention a lot quicker than a standard post and offer something back to the audience other than a simple image or actionable link. This will be further extended into podcasts and where we release short, bite-sized, audio clips that can be shared across our various platforms and engage our members in different ways.

## Member-led content

We will continue to work alongside our members and other teams in building and strengthening member-led content. Some of this content can then be repurposed across multiple channels and stretch right across the organisation, including events such as the Athletic Union Dinner and Union Awards.

## Objectives / key targets:

- 60% of students are able to say that they have a good understanding of what the Students' Union does on a day-to-day basis
- to achieve a total of 1,000 responses through the More Than A Bar campaign by 2022, per year
- to publish at least one 'good news' story on our website every fortnight that is widely shared across our social media channels
- to introduce a range of podcasts throughout the year that are relevant to the annual student lifecycle or other key events





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