Reward and Recognition

Using a reward and recognition scheme to improve the quality of student opportunities

This guidance document explains how reward/recognition can be structured for your student groups. It also considers why this is important and how it is part of good volunteer management.

Volunteer Management

Students' Unions have a variety of volunteering opportunities that are unique to them. Staff and officers in unions manage the opportunities and the teams of students who lead them.

Volunteer managers are expected to:

- Provide training so that the volunteers can perform their role
- Reward volunteers
- Recognise their efforts and achievements
- Offer constructive criticism, advice and coaching to encourage improvement
- Provide role descriptions
- Outline your expectations from them and theirs from you
- Build the work of volunteers into the wider work of the organisation
- Support volunteers to gain skills and experience
- Provide a safe working environment

If you are interested in improving your volunteer opportunities and provision, it may be worth suggesting that your union applies for the Investing in Volunteers status.

It is interesting to consider Frederick Herzberg's motivational theory, and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs when thinking about volunteer management.

Key to successful volunteer management is reward and recognition. A number of students' union have designed schemes where their groups (usually clubs and societies) fulfil certain criteria and are rewarded with prizes or certification.

Creating your reward and recognition scheme

Currently there is no standard format for such schemes but there are some common ideas:

- Workbook – can be online, downloaded document/excel spreadsheet
- Checklist – printed or online
- 'Leader board' – in union on wall with all clubs and societies listed. Points awarded or items ticked off when achieved.

It is important to consider when and how often you will allow the groups to submit evidence. This can be done once at the end of the year, continuously, or at set points across terms.

Think about what will work best for your union.

It is also important to consider the rewards and recognition the groups will receive.

Some ideas currently being used in students' union are:

- Certificates
- Premium position at Freshers' fair (for following year)

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- Printing credit
- Access to grant funding
- Logo design
- Advert on SU website
- Premium spot in SU newspaper/magazine/blog/radio
- Extra funding
- Better room hire choice
- Physical award
- Club or society with most points wins Club/Society of the year
- Nomination to NUS Club/Society of the Year
- Committee prize (experience)
- Special training
- Discounted tickets to SU events for members
- Free social
- VIP access at events for committee
- Merchandise
- Logo to use on promotional material saying they are a 'bronze' society (EG)
- Better spot on SU website
- 'Hall of fame'
- One of prizes (gift items)

Key Questions

Below are some questions that are worth considering if you're designing a strategic development tool and/or reward and recognition scheme:

- Who is it for? Clubs/societies/volunteering committee/academic reps/student media? Spend some time thinking about who the volunteers are in your students' union and consider how each will engage with this process.

- What do you want your clubs and societies to gain from the process?

- What do you want the SU to gain from the process? Why are you doing it?

- What are the minimum requirements that you hope for your clubs and societies to meet?

- How will you reward and recognise their activities and achievements?

- Will the scheme be compulsory or optional?

- What may the potential stumbling blocks be?

Problem Solving

We've identified a few issues that have been encountered by students' union introducing new systems.

Staff capacity
Introducing anything new takes time and effort from staff. You don't have time to do either of these things!

Solution: consider where your current processes are inefficient or just hard work. Could they be improved with a new structure? For example, many staff spend much time chasing health and safety paperwork. Could this be introduced as an essential requirement for the basic rewards?

No buy-in from student groups
The clubs/societies/groups don't like change and they're not happy about this new system.

Solution: could you introduce it as optional for year 1, and then highlight the successes of those groups who tried out the system?

Perhaps speak to the committees and ask what rewards and incentives would convince them to get involved?

Poorly planned and not successful

Solution: use this briefing to guide your research and design, and consider your students' needs and expectations. This can't guarantee success but it will help!

No funding – we can't afford rewards!
Your union doesn't have the funds to provide expensive rewards or to give away prizes. Without rewards, committees won't bother doing the activity.

Solution: create a funding bid and ask the university or an external organisation to fund the scheme.

Offer rewards that you already provide. For example if you already offer free logo design or discounted tickets for societies, re-package this as part of the reward scheme. The committees will soon change over and they won't know that it wasn't always part of the package.

Further Information

This briefing was created following a Student Opportunities Lunch & Learn webinar that took place on 17th September 2013. The slides from this webinar are available on the Student Opportunities pages on NUS Connect.

Reading

Investing in Volunteers

Skills Third Sector advice on managing volunteers

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If you have any questions about this guide or would like to suggest any amends please contact studentopportunities@nus.org.uk