

# Impact of Student Opportunities

## Project briefing for Students' Unions

This document outlines the activities that students' unions and NUS will be undertaking to measure and articulate the impact of Student Opportunities.

### Rationale

Those of us working in the student movement can see first-hand the positive impact that Student Opportunities (sports, societies, volunteering, fundraising and media) have on individuals, e.g. increased confidence, development of skills and building relationships. We can also see the positive impact Student Opportunities has within our communities, e.g. building bridges between student and non-student residents. However, we currently have limited data on both the local and national level on the impact of Student Opportunities.

This means that we can struggle to make the financial argument for additional funding of our student opportunities and the lack of evidence can also undermine our students' unions as organisations - given that delivering student opportunities are often a key part of our function. We need to be able to demonstrate our impact through student opportunities both on individual students and on our communities.

### What is impact?

"The difference you make" (NCVO)

"The demonstrable contribution" (Research Council)

"An effect on, change or benefit to..." (REF)

Impacts are the 'what happens' as a result of your organisation's activities, services or

products. Impacts can be good, or bad, and expected or unexpected. Impacts can also affect a range of different audiences, from individuals to communities to the environment. Impacts can be 'hard' (usually involving numbers e.g. the total raised through RAG fundraising activities) or 'soft' (for example changes in confidence, skill level or development of relationships).

Impacts are different to your outputs, or activities, which might be monitoring the number of societies you have, or the percentage of students taking part in those societies. Evaluating your impact means focusing on what happens as a result of those activities.

### What have we done before?

Looking at impact isn't new; over the last 4 years the Union Development and Membership teams at NUS have been working with different organisations like the New Economics Foundation and NCVO to try and help us to work on this. Students' unions have been working hard too and we've already got some fantastic case studies to consider.

One of the key areas of work was [Prove Me Wrong](#), which found eleven statements that we believe to be true about Student Opportunities. These were flipped to be made into negative

statements, with the challenge being to prove these wrong.

## Keeping it simple

We recognise that trying to cover all of the above is a large undertaking, so at Students' Unions 2018 event we asked you to choose the top three statements that were the most interesting, useful or achievable and that aligned with your SU's impact goals for the year(s) ahead.

So the plan is, for 2018-19 we will look at:

1. Students participating in clubs and societies are less likely to complete their course of study.
2. Taking part in clubs and societies doesn't make a difference to the employment prospects of students from disadvantaged backgrounds
3. Taking part in regular physical activity through the SU doesn't have an effect on students' personal psychological wellbeing

What we're encouraging students' unions to do is choose one or two (or even three!) of these statements and try and prove it wrong using data and storytelling. How do you know that for your SU, the statement isn't true?

Collect the data, pull it together with some case studies/stories and send it to NUS. We can then compile all of the data and present a fuller story about the national picture.

We're interested in sharing the impact you're having, but also understanding what you need to do to know this. We hope it's easier than we think to demonstrate and articulate our collective impact.

We've already started some of the impact work, looking at how you can collect and evaluate the self-reported changes in individuals (skills, knowledge, experience and beliefs), the benefits for charities through calculating the funds raised nationally by student fundraisers, and the relationship between engagement with student opportunities and retention (whether a

student remains on their course) and attainment (their academic achievement).

## 1. Changes in individuals

In the appendix below we've provided some questions that are designed to be used at the start and end of a student's time engaging with your student opportunities within an academic year. These can be incorporated as part of your overall students' union impact survey (routed so that only those who are engaging with student opportunities answer them), or they can be used for a specific survey for those who are taking part in student opportunities.

The questions look at the changes in skills, knowledge, experience and beliefs of those engaged in student opportunities. They have been created drawing on various sector bodies' impact questions. The hypothesis for these questions is that there will be a positive change between the start and end of a student's engagement with student opportunities – for example students report feeling more confident about working with other people in a team at the end of their year being a member of a society than at the start.

There are also some questions provided that can be used just at the end of their time engaging with student opportunities which look at the self-reported benefits to the individual.

You can of course use any questions that suit your union environment and student body - there is no obligation to use the questions in the attached document. The most important thing is that every students' union starts evaluating the impact of their student opportunities. However, it would be very useful for students' unions to consider using these questions so that we can compile the UK-wide responses in aggregated format at the end of each year in order to build a picture of the national impact of student opportunities.

## 2. A national student fundraising total

NUS and [NaSFA](#) (the National Student Fundraising Association) have been working with student fundraisers, charities, and the Institute of Fundraising to work out a standard methodology for calculating a national student fundraising total. Currently, RAGs/student fundraisers and the students' union often aren't calculating their totals in the same way, and if they are, there isn't consistency across students' unions. Whilst we have a good idea of a total based on information from the annual students' union survey (around £7.9million), we aren't confident of this figure and want to ensure it is correct.

This methodology will be presented to student fundraisers at RAG Conference 2017 during the NaSFA AGM and will hopefully be approved as a useful tool. We can then work with student fundraisers and students' union staff to input the data and calculate a national total.

We will also be asking charities that work with student fundraisers to submit their annual student fundraising impact reports, and will collate this information to demonstrate the impact that students have on a huge number of charitable activities. This will be presented alongside the total and launched to celebrate [Giving Tuesday](#) 2017 on 28th November.

## 3. Student Opportunities, attainment & retention

"At Teesside we've been working on graduate outcomes for students involved in our student opportunities which has led to our publishing it here as the 'TUSU Premium.'

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<sup>1</sup> Teesside made a conscious decision to run this for the 3,000 (ish) students involved and not just those in leadership roles

<sup>2</sup> The metrics are widely used in league tables (see the Complete University Guide for an example).

In short there is a good correlation between participation and the students' completion and attainment. We know correlation doesn't prove causation so we asked students what they enjoyed about SU involvement and how it helped them at university, with the resulting quotes explaining the benefits the students experienced". – Jon Berg, Chief Executive at Teesside SU.

### How to calculate your SU 'Premium'

- Identify all students involved in your SU-run student opportunities<sup>1</sup>
- Give a list of the unique identifier e.g. student number or library card number for each student to your University Registry or stats people (befriend them first!)
- Explain to the University Registry or stats people that you are interested in seeing the HESA/HEI metrics<sup>2</sup> for this group of students to compare to the University averages<sup>3</sup>
- We had the results for our students and the whole population segmented into age bands, domicile, UCAS points, ethnicity, etc. That also allows you to calculate the % uptake for different groups – checking participation rates and SU positive impact so no student group is missing out
- Please remember any correlation you see between SU involvement and academic performance does not prove causality in either direction!

The bases are different:

- Progression/completion is the % of that year's intake who have achieved the intended award or are continuing their studies towards it

<sup>3</sup> You'll find 'Completion' and 'Good Honours' most helpful if you want to copy the TUSU Premium headlines

- Good Honours is the percentage of honours degrees awarded that year that were 1st and 2.1's

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# Changes in individuals: question bank

## Impact on individual questions <sup>4</sup>

**These questions are to be asked at the start and end of the academic year so that the responses can be compared.**

**Here we briefly describe some people. Please read each description and think about how much each person is or is not like you.**

Please select one option only for each statement  
(Very much like me – not like me)

- It is important to me to help the people around me. I want to care for other people
- I think it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. I want justice for everybody, including for people I don't know and future generations
- It is important to me to listen to people who are different from me. Even when I disagree with them, I still want to understand them
- I strongly believe that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to me
- It is important to me that people have opportunities to participate in decision-making that affects them. I like to contribute to making sure people's opinions are heard fairly
- It is important to co-operate with other people, groups or organisations with similar goals. I believe we can achieve more if we work together
- It is important for me to be rich. I want to have a lot of money and expensive things
- I think people should only take action if they will get something back in return. I don't like doing things which don't benefit me

- I don't think it matters what 'every day' people think or do. As individuals we can't have any impact on problems facing our community either locally or globally
- Being known for being successful is important to me. It is important that people recognise my achievements

### **How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Please select one option only for each statement  
(Strongly agree – Strong disagree)

- I feel able to have an impact on the world around me
- I feel I can make a difference when working with others.
- I understand the organisations and people that have influence in my local area

### **How do you feel about the following things, even if you have never done them before?**

Please select one option only for each statement  
(Very confident – not confident at all)

- Meeting new people
- Having a go at things that are new to me
- Working with other people in a team
- Putting my ideas forward
- Being the leader of a team
- Explaining my ideas clearly, verbally and in writing
- Identifying key goals for projects and other things I'm working on
- Asking for help or advice when solving a problem
- Communicating with different types of people

### **How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Please select one option only for each statement  
(Strongly agree – Strong disagree)

<sup>4</sup> These questions are largely based on the questions we ask in the Sabbatical Officer survey and are based

on questions that the National Citizen Service use to measure impact on 'self'

- I can usually handle whatever comes my way
- I stay calm when I face problems
- I find it easy to learn from my mistakes
- I like to finish things once I've started them
- I am adaptable and flexible in my thinking and ideas
- As a leader, I motivate other people well when tasks need to be done
- I think about the long term and short term when making plans
- I look at information from different subjects, disciplines or perspectives when solving problems
- I consider the diverse needs, views and feelings of others when solving problems
- It gives me a sense of personal achievement
- It gives me a chance to learn new skills
- It gives me experience of leadership or responsibility
- I feel part of the university community
- It gives me more confidence
- It helps to improve my employment prospects
- It makes me feel less stressed
- It helped me complete a specific course of study
- It contributed to my decision not to drop out of university
- Other (with open text option)

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Please select one option only for each statement

(Strongly agree – Strong disagree)

- I know how to participate in decisions that affect my life, both locally and nationally
- I can negotiate to find a suitable way forward when confronted by people with conflicting opinions
- I can identify and build support from individuals and organisations to achieve a common goal

## Benefits questions<sup>5</sup>

**These questions are to be asked at end of the academic year.**

**What have you gained from taking part in student opportunities in your union?**

Please select as many options as you like

- I've met new people and made new friends
- I get satisfaction from making a difference
- It gives me the chance to do things I am good at
- I just really enjoy it
- It broadens my experience of life and other people

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<sup>5</sup> These questions are taken from the NUS Volunteer Engagement Survey