

# Development planning

## Using development plans to improve the quality of student opportunities

This guidance document explains strategic development planning and identifies ways in which you can build tools for student leaders to use to develop their groups.

### The value of high quality opportunities

As students entering university have higher expectations of their course and the facilities available, they also expect more from their extra-curricular activities. This has led to many students' unions designing ways in which to improve the quality of such opportunities.

Many unions have adapted strategic planning tools to create development plans for the student leaders to use to improve their club/society/team/group.

### Principles behind strategic development planning

Strategic planning is often associated with commercial activity, but there is great value in adapting the key principles for the purpose of improving student opportunities.

The main things to include:

**Vision** – the 'headline' for the group. Summarises where they are heading and their guiding principles.

For example, have a look at the NUS Vision, [here](#).

**Mission** – the key action(s) for achieving your Vision.

**Aims** – your main goals for the group/organisation. These are achieved through your objectives. For example, a union society could have an aim to 'increase members in the society'.

**Objectives** – it's a good idea if you make objectives S.M.A.R.T. (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, **T**imed).

The objectives to make the above aim actually happen could be:

Have 10 more members than last year

Organise 1 activity per term designed to increase membership

Survey members once per month about their experiences in the society.

**Unique selling point** – what makes their club/society/volunteering group unique? Why should someone join them instead of another group?

**Stakeholder engagement** – who are the main stakeholders for the group? Student groups rely on active members, so they are an important stakeholder. It's important to consider their expectations and needs when thinking strategically. Also, it's useful for student groups to consider the Union, the university, and external organisations as stakeholders, too.

## The value of strategic development planning

- 'Timed' objectives can result in plans for short, medium & long term. This often doesn't traditionally happen in student-led activity and thus the activity can become inconsistent between years.
- Member consultation should lead to better attendance at events, more active volunteers and more satisfied members.
- Student leaders gain skills and experience. Strategic planning increases their commercial awareness, as well as their organisational skills, their teamwork, and problem solving.
- Development planning can involve financial management which is beneficial for more financially sustainable activities.
- Student leaders can better identify their achievements and can learn from their mistakes.
- The students' union can identify success and promote this.

## Introducing strategic development planning

Based on the principles of strategic planning you can design a format and content to suit your union and your students.

Options for administering development planning:

### Compulsory part of club/society/volunteer group registration paperwork

Benefits: easy for you to collect plans in as it will be at the same time as essential registration/handover forms.

Additionally, it's less time-consuming for the committee.

Potential problems: Committees create their plan with little understanding of the principles or the importance of doing so. The plan then loses value as it lacks buy-in from those delivering it.

### Separate exercise completed at the convenience of the committee, once they

### have had time to meet and establish themselves

Benefits: More flexible for the committee.

Potential problems: without your guidance there is still a risk of no buy-in from committee.

### Main committee training

Benefits: committee training is often compulsory – they have to be there and will probably spend more time thinking about their plans.

Better opportunity for you to offer advice and some explanation of the principles of strategy.

Potential problems: those who miss training will miss out on the exercise.

### 1-1 meeting with SU staff/officer

Benefits: Allows you to give support and ensure they understand the importance of the process.

Committee can ask questions and really engage with the plan.

Potential problems: not enough staff time to do this with all groups.

Groups could see it as a waste of their time.

## Ideas for your development planning tool

When creating your strategic development tool it is important to ensure that it contains useful and relevant exercises.

The main principles of strategic development should be included:

- Vision
- Mission
- Aims
- Objectives
- Unique selling point
- Membership engagement

Optional extras could be:

- Constitutional agreement & space for group's own constitution

- Finances:
  - Membership cost
  - Sponsorship
  - Planned expenditure
  - Affiliation fees
  - Grant funding
  
- Members
  - Number of members in previous years
  - Aim for membership figures this year
  - Objectives for reaching aim
  - Plans for retaining members
  
- Communication
  - Website/social media
  - Plans for communicating with members
  - Plans for communicating with other stakeholders

- Past year review by old committee
  
- Committee
  - Job descriptions
  - Internal communication strategy

## Further information

This briefing was created following a Student Opportunities Lunch & Learn webinar that took place on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2013. The slides from this [webinar](#) are available on the Student Opportunities pages on NUS Connect.

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