



university of stirling  
students'  
union



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2021

**MAKING  
STUDENTS'  
LIVES BETTER**

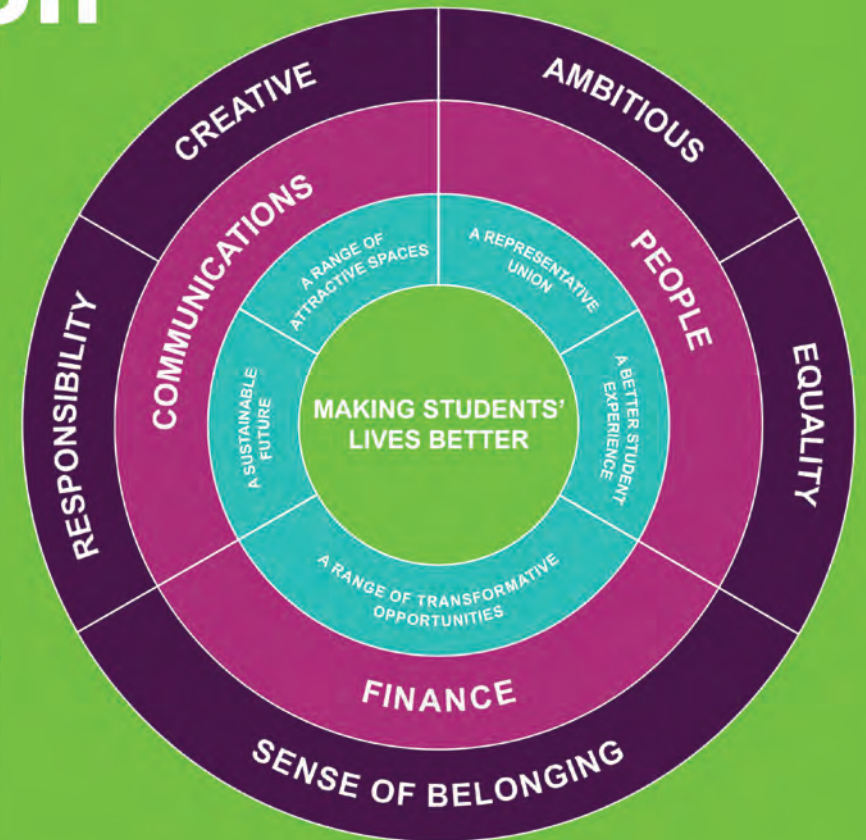


# Building a better Union

The next three years look set to be a transformative time at the University of Stirling, with the launch of a number of ambitious and redefining capital projects that will transform the look and feel of the campus. Working in synergy with the University, we will undertake a significant review of our brand and physical spaces during the life of this plan so that by 2021 the Union is in a strong position to deliver for all University of Stirling students.

As an organisation we are committed to responsible and sustainable development and have identified that our five priorities align directly to many of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This alignment to the global perspective is reassuring as delivery of the Union's priorities will ensure the student community's contribution to wider societal goals.

Our ambition to Make Students' Lives Better is at the very heart of our work. Through the successful delivery of the priorities we will, by 2021, be one of the Top 4 Students' Unions in Scotland working with the University to deliver a Top 4 Student Experience. As an organisation we will build our resilience and be better equipped to adapt to and tackle the unexpected opportunities and challenges that will inevitably lie ahead.



*A Smallenbroek*

Astrid Smallenbroek, Union President

*Mary Allison*

Mary Allison, Chair of Trustee Board

**Top 4 Students' Union**

**Top 4 Student Experience**

**Improved Organisational Resilience**



# Executive Summary

Over the past three years the Union has grown its activities exponentially, tripling the number of student representatives we recruit and train, increasing our range of Clubs and Societies by over 40% and offering hundreds of volunteering opportunities within our award winning environmental projects and many more in the Stirling community.

In the run up to 2021 we will focus on consolidating and reinvigorating our activities, ensuring we continue to run impactful and relevant projects, programmes and campaigns that deliver for students. In the process some initiatives we have identified that are no longer delivering outcomes for students will come to an end. This will allow us to prioritise our people and resources where they are needed most, remaining flexible in order to capitalise on any opportunities to extend our reach and grow our impact.

This strategic plan presents a new collaborative framework to deliver on five key priorities; **a better student experience, a more sustainable future, a more representative Union, a wider range of transformative opportunities and a range of more attractive social spaces.** These priorities come directly from the voice of our students, who have given us a clear steer on the issues they are passionate about and that they would like us to address.

We will deliver these priorities and represent student interests at the highest levels, be value driven in our approach by embedding equality, diversity and inclusion and be committed to our overall ambition to Make Students' Lives Better.

*A C Burns*

**Audrey-Clare Burns (Chief Executive)**



Making Students' Lives Better





**CREATIVITY**

**SENSE OF  
BELONGING**

**AMBITIOUS**

**OUR  
VALUES**

**EQUALITY**

**RESPONSIBILITY**

All the work that we undertake as an organisation will be delivered within the scope of our values framework. Our research with students re-emphasised the continued significance of ambition, equality, responsibility and sense of belonging to our work as an organisation. A new addition to our core values is creativity. This reflects the growing need for the Union to ensure it is both creative with the resources we have and in the way in which we respond to challenges. We'll work to further embed our values into our organisational culture, helping our staff and student officers better articulate how they are delivering the changes our members want to see, in a way they wish to see it.





**A BETTER  
STUDENT  
EXPERIENCE**

**A MORE  
REPRESENTATIVE  
UNION**

**WIDER  
TRANSFORMATIVE  
OPPORTUNITIES**

**OUR  
GOALS**

**A MORE  
SUSTAINABLE  
FUTURE**

**A RANGE OF  
ATTRACTIVE  
SPACES**

We will progress our mission to 'make students' lives better' through each of our five strategic goals. Each of these outlines a specific area of work that our research highlighted as a key priority. By 2021, we aim to have achieved: a more representative Union, a better student experience, a wider range of transformative opportunities, a more sustainable future and a greater range of attractive spaces. Sitting underneath each of these goals are several objectives which will support us in achieving the impact that students identified as needing to happen. Attainment of these goals will be measured by each of our success criteria, which are underpinned by a set of internal and external impact indicators.





# Representing the views and rights of students to the University and beyond

You told us that you felt we should do more to project the voice of students to the University and beyond. As a Union, the representation of students' interests is at the very heart of the Union's work. As such, we'll work to build and develop the effectiveness of our student representative systems, ensuring we can represent the views of all students, regardless of their level, location, mode and subject of study. By doing so, we can ensure all students feel enabled to use their voice, and that this is heard and reflected in decision making within the University and the wider community.

## How we'll achieve this



Expand our capacity and reach, to effectively represent the views and rights of all students; across all levels, locations and modes of study including through 1:1 casework



Increase the visibility of our representative work, expanding student understanding of how we facilitate the student voice and evidencing its impact in creating change



Develop our capabilities to make increasing use of evidence when advocating for, or on behalf of our students, to support the enhancement of the student experience and to influence institutional decision making



Continue to provide effective and relevant training to our student representatives, supporting their development and recognising and rewarding the contribution they make



Grow engagement in the Union's democratic processes, ensuring all barriers to active participation are removed or minimised as far as possible

## Our success criteria



All students will have access to effective representation at module, programme, faculty and institutional level



Students will know who their representatives are and how the feedback they provide has affected change



Our reps will feel equipped to make evidence based suggestions for enhancing course design, content and delivery



Our reps will feel appropriately prepared for undertaking and engaging fully in a representative role



Students will increasingly engage in our democratic opportunities and annual electoral processes



# Enhancing the Student Experience through campaigning for positive change and social justice

You told us that we needed to be working to create a better student experience at Stirling, actively campaigning to address the key challenges students face in accessing and engaging with their studies. As such, we'll work to ensure that we run timely and effective campaigns that tackle issues our students care about. We'll give all our students the opportunity to shape our work to challenge the status quo, present new ways of thinking and offer innovative solutions that will help secure positive change and enhance the student experience.

## How we'll achieve this



Review and relaunch our Student Partnership Agreement to provide an effective framework for the ongoing enhancement of the student experience



Develop our capabilities to make increasing use of evidence to influence institutional decision making in support of the ongoing enhancement of the student experience



Improve our listening; empowering and embedding the voice of our student body and student communities to directly influence the campaigns we undertake and the outcomes we set out to achieve



Helping students understand the changes achieved and the impact we've made by enhancing our approach to assessing and communicating the impact of our work



Embed the aspirations of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, and associated strategy, to ensure we address the barriers students face in engaging with any and all aspects of our work

## Our success criteria



Our students will benefit from and understand the nature and achievements of our partnership approach to working



Our staff and student officers will be able to make effective use of a range of evidence sources to advocate for and achieve improvements to the student experience



All students will feel the Union listens to their views and actively reflects these in its campaign agenda



Students will increasingly understand and recognise the role of the Union in creating a better student experience at Stirling



All students, regardless of background or social demographic, will feel able to engage with the Union



Making Students' Lives Better





Making Students' Lives Better

# Empowering students to develop their resilience and wellbeing through participation in co-curricular activities

You told us that our Clubs, Societies and Sports Teams continue to be one of the best things about University and that we needed to be doing more to cater for students' health and wellbeing. As such, we'll work with our partners to ensure we provide valuable opportunities to our students that allow them to become capable and resilient individuals supporting their personal and professional development, and encouraging the development of positive physical and mental wellbeing, leading to empowered and well-rounded individuals.

## How we'll achieve this



Develop a Mental Health Strategy in partnership with the University to ensure adequate and effective provision of support for all students when they require it



Provide opportunities for students to develop key life skills through increased engagement and participation in clubs, societies, sports teams, volunteering and employment



Engage with national projects, such as Healthy Body Healthy Minds and Think Positive, to focus our efforts on delivering impactful work to improve student mental health and wellbeing



Improve our mechanisms for recognising and rewarding those engaging with co and extra-curricular activities, helping them better articulate to employers the impact these have had on their development



Provide effective peer-led support to ensure students are appropriately supported to transition into, through and out of University

## Our success criteria



We'll have developed and delivered an effective and impactful mental health strategy in partnership with the University



Students will recognise the range of activities on offer at the Students' Union and will increasingly engage with these



Students and staff will feel more equipped to address issues surrounding mental health and wellbeing



Students engagement and achievements will be increasingly recognised by the University and employers



Students will increasingly engage with our peer-led support initiatives, helping them feel part of a support community of staff and students



# Facilitating students to positively engage in environmental, ethical and sustainability issues

You told us that environmental sustainability should be a growing priority for the Union and that we should be working to ensure our and the University's activities had minimal impact on the environment. As such, we'll work to embed positive, lifelong environmental, ethical, and sustainable practices into the University and wider community. We'll provide opportunities for students to get involved in our projects and activities which focus on environmental and sustainable issues. By doing so, we'll create positive impacts to student health and wellbeing and contribute to changing and challenging community attitudes and behaviours to the impacts of socio-economic development and climate change.

## How we'll achieve this



Embed sustainability within all organisational activities, utilising Green Impact as a framework to work with the University to achieve Fair Trade accreditation and Green Impact Universities



Continue to minimise our environmental footprint through operational changes, investments and campaigns, explicitly linking the benefits of strong CSR leadership to enhancing the student experience



Expand our current range of sustainable development projects and campaigns, providing meaningful opportunities for students to develop new skills, social networks and contribute to creative wider societal change



Advocate for embedding sustainability in the curriculum across all degree programmes and increasing use of the University landscape as a resource for student research



Increase the accessibility and quality of sustainable travel options within the University and wider community, highlighting their benefits to physical, environmental and economic wellbeing



## Our success criteria

Students will become increasingly aware of the impact our environmental work is having and the importance of our commitment to sustainability

We will increase carbon savings and reduce the environmental impacts of our operations

Students will be aware of, and will increasingly engage in, the wide range of voluntary opportunities within our environmental work

Students will have an increased understanding of the significance of sustainability to all subject disciplines

Students will be better informed about the environmental and social impacts of travel options, leading to increased responsible decision making



Making Students' Lives Better





# Providing secure and attractive spaces for students to study, socialise and relax

You told us that a key priority for the Union should be ensuring we provide a range of spaces that allow students to study, relax and socialise. As such, we'll work to ensure we provide attractive, flexible and welcoming physical spaces for our students to come together, to build friendships and communities and to engage in shared interests. By providing appropriate products, services and facilities, we'll support our student communities to achieve success in their respective activities, creating a sense of belonging and a shared Stirling identity.

## How we'll achieve this



Maximise the potential of our commercial spaces through the development of the campus capital projects, continuing to provide reliable and attractive services



Invest in our commercial services and spaces, ensuring they support the delivery of high-quality services, offering a wide and varied range of branded products that meet the changing needs of our customers



Provide effective administration, support, and training for Clubs, Societies, and Sports Teams to assist them in achieving success within their respective activities



Increase the engagement of hard to reach students with our work, creating a vibrant and inclusive campus environment which fosters a shared sense of belonging and community amongst our staff and students



Grow engagement with our Freshers Week activities, providing a diverse range of events to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, supporting a better sense of campus community

## Our success criteria



Students will increasingly make use of our commercial venues, through the transformation of the campus



We'll be able to provide modern, attractive facilities and high quality services that students will actively choose to purchase from



Our Clubs and Societies and Sports Teams will be increasingly satisfied by the quality of service offered by the Students' Union



All students, regardless of their background, will feel welcome in the Union and able to engage in any aspect of our work



All students will feel comfortable with and benefit from attending and engaging with our Freshers Week activities, including demographic specific and all-student sessions





# OUR ENABLERS

**PEOPLE**

**COMMUNICATIONS**

**FINANCE**

Successful attainment of these strategic objectives is however contingent on us ensuring we remain financially sustainable as an organisation and that the organisation's three enabling functions (People, Communications and Finance), work effectively and efficiently. Over the next three years, we'll invest in the management of these functions to ensure they continue to deliver for the organisation. Each of these areas also have high-level objectives until 2021, with a set of key indicators that will underpin organisational performance and attainment of the relevant success criteria.



# People

Successful people are fundamental to our performance as an organisation. We'll seek to develop, nurture and empower our people to achieve success across all aspects of their remit and role, making a significant contribution to the development of the organisation as a whole. We will embed our core values into our organisational culture, creating a welcoming, vibrant and attractive work environment which will ensure we can attract and retain talented individuals.

## How we'll achieve this



Grow our brand and presence as an employer of choice, supporting the attraction of highly qualified and capable candidates



Develop and nurture our staff in line with individual and shared objectives, helping individuals realise their full potential and the organisation retain the brightest talent



Review our arrangements for performance management, ensuring staff are provided with, and have the opportunity to provide, regular and timely feedback on their work, embedding a culture of continuous improvement that recognises, rewards and celebrates staff achievement and success



Ensure appropriate resource is dedicated to supporting the operation of effective and streamlined People Management processes and systems



Foster a culture of mutual respect, professionalism and service excellence within the organisation, grounded in our core values



## Our success criteria

We'll be able to attract significant interest in our vacancies, allowing us to recruit talented individuals to join a dynamic workforce

Our staff will recognise and benefit from the wide range of learning and development opportunities and will feel supported to increase their skill set

Our staff will feel comfortable engaging in a constructive dialogue around their role, and be empowered to achieve and recognised when they go above and beyond

We'll be able to deliver an effective HR service within the organisation, supporting the timely resolution of problems and addressing staff concerns

Staff will feel a valued part of a supportive and dynamic organisation. They will feel empowered to contribute to our wider impact as an organisation



Making Students' Lives Better





Making Students' Lives Better

# Communications

Maximising the impact of our work requires us to adopt a strategic and targeted approach to communications and marketing, using powerful imagery and emotive content to tell the story of our work. With staff and Officers as content creators, and utilising the expertise in our Communications, Marketing and Events Team, we will drive advancement in our approach to communication across our operational areas, delivering relevant and targeted content that engages students, keeping them aware of our activities, the outcomes we achieve and the impact we're having as an organisation.

## How we'll achieve this



Invest in redeveloping our website to create an engaging, functional, and modern online platform to showcase and serve the student-relevant activities and the impact of the organisation



Grow our social channels and platforms through strong content and meaningful engagement with students, supporting subsequent growth in our advertising revenue and client base



Increase our engagement with prospective and current students, helping them understand the role and purpose of their Students' Union and the value we add to the student experience at Stirling



Embed the 'Making Students' Lives Better' strapline across all our operations, uniting all Union activity under one brand with the ambition of reviewing and revitalising our brand



Expand our utilisation of social and digital analytics to drive improvement in our approach to communication

## Our success criteria



We'll be able to provide accurate information and impactful content to our students and stakeholders, via an intuitive platform that supports enhanced communication



We'll increase our digital traffic and levels of engagement, allowing us to expand our options for advertising and client base



Our students will be more aware of the role of the Students' Union when arriving at University, allowing us to engage them in our work earlier



We'll be able to project a simple and clear message that unites various, disparate areas of activity, increasing brand awareness



We'll be able to adopt a strategic approach to communications across the organisation, staying informed of what content is working and why



# Finance

Underpinning the success of this plan is the requirement to have appropriate resource in place to finance our ambitions.

We will work to ensure the financial sustainability and resilience of the Students' Union, utilising the experience and knowledge within our Finance Team to ensure appropriate and effective management of expenditure and the operation of effective and transparent processes, supporting further sustainable investment in our facilities and the services we provide for our members.

## How we'll achieve this



Review, monitor and enhance the effectiveness of our financial accounting and reporting procedures on an ongoing basis



Grow and diversify our revenue streams, ensuring we capitalise on appropriate opportunities to attract sustainable sources of income, thereby increasing our resilience



Improve our management of costs within the organisation, employing effective strategies to ensure efficiency and effectiveness across the organisation's operations



Build and maintain unrestricted free reserves, in line with the requirements of the Union's Reserves Policy



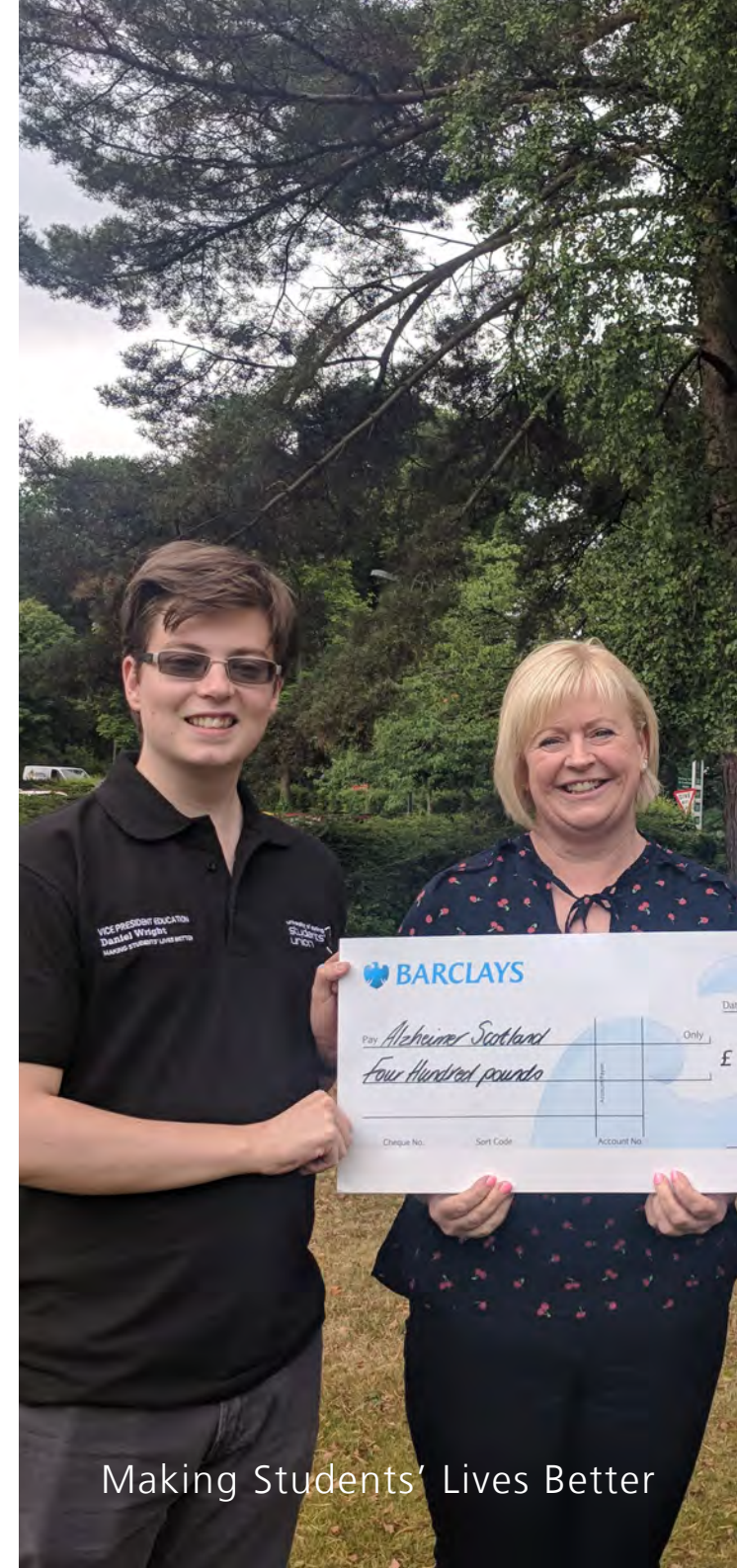
## Our success criteria

Our financial processes and procedures will continue to meet the requirements of the organisation and of our external auditors

We'll achieve an ideal funding mix that supports our business activities

Our functional areas and budget holders will manage their costs effectively to ensure alignment with budgeted out-turn

We'll achieve, or make progress towards achieving, a sufficient level of reserves to increase business resilience



Making Students' Lives Better



# Evaluating impact

The Students' Union is committed to continuous improvement. In July 2017, the Union achieved 'Very Good' accreditation in Quality Students' Union, a quality mark for Student Unions which is externally verified. We are due to be audited again within the life of this plan and our aim is to be accredited as an Excellent Student Union.

In order to achieve this overall excellent rating we need to focus and improve on two key areas in which we achieved a Very Good rating; Democracy and Impact. To achieve excellent for Democracy, we must continue to engage and communicate effectively with our membership. This will be evidenced through increased participation in elections, zone meetings and general meetings ensuring that democracy is at the core of our activities.

To achieve excellent for Impact, we must make use of evidence to assess the impact our work has in achieving our ambition of 'Making Students' Lives Better.' As such, supporting this plan are a bank of internal and external impact indicators which will be used to qualify achievement of the success criteria attached to each of the objectives.

We'll use our annual impact planning exercise as a means of reviewing progress against indicative targets and revising them where appropriate, ensuring we remain ambitious but realistic in our strategic aspirations. We'll report on our progress regularly, both through our governance committees and to our members and other stakeholders through our communication channels.





# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS





# Sustainable Development

As an organisation we're committed to responsible and sustainable development. This commitment permeates all our operations and involves us working towards building an inclusive and resilient future for our people and planet. As such, we'll ensure we continue to meet the needs of today's students without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In 2016, the United Nations launched their 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which call for global action to promote prosperity and protection of the planet whilst addressing some of the most fundamental challenges facing people, communities and societies.

All organisations, regardless of their size or purpose, can utilise the Sustainable Development Goals as a framework to achieve sustainable and responsible development. We'll be embedding these into our work, helping us to articulate the wider benefit our actions bring to society.







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