

UBSU celebrate bronze SUEI award

Bedfordshire Student Union's achievement is rewarded, but work to improve services and activities continues. Vice Chancellor Professor Les Ebdon, pictured, explains



LAST MONTH THE University of Bedfordshire Students' Union (UBSU) celebrated after scooping a bronze Students' Union Evaluation Initiative (SUEI) award at the House of Commons.

I felt proud and privileged to witness Students' Union executive officers and staff pick up the Government-backed prestigious prize which recognises continued commitment to improving student services.

The award allows Students' Unions to benchmark themselves against each other and share best practice. The initiative takes two years and obtaining a bronze award is an excellent achievement and testimony to the hard work and commitment of Bedfordshire's dedicated team.

UBSU was part of the second cohort to work through this initiative and one of the first eight Students' Unions to have received an award. I have been proud to support our Students' Union throughout this exercise and look forward to watching them build on this success in going forward. Like all initiatives the work doesn't stop once you have picked up the prize!

The aim of the SUEI is to improve the services and activities offered to students. It helps Students' Unions achieve better results through a framework or model which asks questions that highlight what makes a Students' Union unique,

what are the aims and objectives and, most importantly, what are the positive outcomes for the students of the University.

It would be easy to measure this internally but the value of SUEI is that it is an external quality exercise measuring exactly where the Students' Union is now and what improvements have been made over the course of the scheme. Equally importantly, it provides constructive criticism and advice as to how to further increase effectiveness in the future.

Our Students' Union has come a long way on this journey and I am extremely grateful to our team, particularly former presidents Kelly Paul, Miriam Hubbard and Tom Phillips who were vital in pushing the initiative forward and General Manager Martin Davey who provided guidance and continuity throughout.

Improvements have been made in all key areas. The numbers of students engaged in Students' Union activities has increased significantly. The number of candidates running for election has jumped and the number of students voting has risen.

UBSU has developed a strong Vision statement – it will promote an inclusive and diverse community which will reach out to its

Welcome to over 60 Students' Unions working to achieve Students' Union Evaluation Initiative accreditation and to readers from the wider higher education sector. We hope you will find this newsletter informative and a source of new ideas and good practices, and insight into the change that SUEI is able to support to improve outcomes for students.

SUEI is a catalyst for change to ensure Students' Unions have continued relevance to members and play a major role in the overall Higher Education experience. It enables Students' Unions to remain member focussed and requires participating Unions to measure the impact they have on the lives of students whilst they are at University.

In this edition you will find articles on performance management at RUSU and NUS department managers.

➤ continued on page 2



The SUEI conference

21 January, Maple House, Corporation Street, Birmingham

The SUEI conference exists to showcase and disseminate good practice, developed by working through the SUEI framework. On this day SUEI participating unions, Student Officers, staff, friends and supporters are joined by external speakers to run 25 different workshops to stimulate ideas and discussions across all five SUEI Themes. Around half of the currently 60+ unions involved in SUEI are expected to be ready for their final audit by the end of this academic year – the conference offers all unions the opportunity to see what other unions are doing and to share what has been identified as good practice. Unions not yet SUEI participants are welcome as are members of University staff who might like to find out more.

● To find out more or to register contact george.yeorghaki@nus.org.uk

from p1... UBSU celebrate bronze SUEI award

members actively representing their views. It has devised a strategic plan and all departments now have objectives and yearly plans.

It is a professional organisation which is well managed with a robust finance system in place. It works in partnership with the community and has effective communications channels. These are areas for which SUEI provided the necessary focus and support to enable

improvements to be driven ahead.

In the final report the auditors said: "There is no doubt that the Union's Values are displayed in the actions of its staff in that they genuinely strive to satisfy their members."

The challenge now is how our Students' Union can make further improvements to enhance the student experience. The new Chief Executive will play a vital role

in this when he or she joins us next Spring supported by the current President Julie Sadler.

I am confident the fantastic work the Students' Union does at Bedfordshire will go on and look forward to returning to the House of Commons to celebrate more success in the not too distant future.

● Professor Les Ebdon CBE
Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive
University of Bedfordshire

SUEI award ceremony

On 12 October the second SUEI award ceremony took place in the Strangers' Dining Room at the House of Commons, pictured



At the second SUEI award ceremony three unions received their bronze SUEI awards on that day – Bedfordshire, De Montfort and York St John.

SUEI was fortunate to be able to present the awards at the House of Commons thanks to Natasha Engel MP who acted as sponsor.

The three union delegations included Vice Chancellors, current and past Student Officers and Union staff. Also present were NUS Officers and staff, Will Spinks (Chief Operating Officer at Loughborough University and SUEI Advisory panel member), and representatives from a wide range of Higher Education organisations.

Natasha Engel gave a welcoming speech

and Wes Streeting, President of the National Union of Students set the awards in context and congratulated the award winning unions. He encouraged the Officers present, many of whom had not visited parliament before, to go in after the event to see the House of Commons in action.

The awards were presented by Peter Williams, the recently retired CEO of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education who praised the work of SUEI, congratulated all the award winning unions and gave special awards to each union's SUEI project manager.

It was an enjoyable event in a unique venue, and a great culmination to a long period of hard work by the three unions.



Performance management at RUSU

Improved performance management follows SUEI at Reading

The SUEI process prompted RUSU to review its strategic objectives and how we measure our performance.

A starting point for this process was establishing a clear understanding of what we are trying to achieve. The union contained a number of strategic documents, business plans and objectives which were dusted down on an annual basis as part of the appraisal process.

Following consultation with staff, Student Officers and student groups these documents were refined to develop a three year strategic operating plan which now underpins performance management at every level of the organisation.

Performance management for staff

The annual performance management process starts with a 360 degree appraisal of my performance as Chief Executive. This includes submissions from the Trustee Board and the Senior Management Team.

Appraisals traditionally took place in April but these were moved to July to coincide with the academic

year, the financial year, the Student Officer year and the milestones within the operating plan.

Appraisal objectives are set that link to the strategic aims for the next twelve months. At this stage each strategic aim is allocated to a senior staff member and/or a Student Officer.

The next stage of the process is appraising senior managers, line managers and front line permanent staff. Each staff member receives targets that link directly back to the operating plan.

Monitoring performance through the year

Performance against the objectives is formally reviewed at least every six months to ensure that we are on target to achieve our objectives and that any remedial actions required are highlighted.

The monitoring of performance against objectives also forms part of my report to the Trustee Board which highlights any progress. This report is then discussed at the subsequent Managers Meeting and Staff Representative Forum.

Reporting on performance

Performance against our objectives is reported on an annual basis through the Annual Report and the Annual General Meeting in November this allows members to judge our performance and also contribute to our plans for the coming year.

Each strategic objective within the plan also highlights the key internal and external stakeholders involved with or interested in performance against the target. As an example areas relating to the community are feedback as part of the monthly Neighbourhood Action Group meetings and areas relating to sports development are discussed at the Sport Federation meetings.

Student Officers

Student Officers are involved in every stage of developing the strategic aims of the organisation and all receive an informal 'exit interview' at the end of their term of office to review the performance of the organisation and to contribute the development of plans in the future.

Officers have also been involved in voluntary performance appraisals at the end of the year to highlight their strengths and areas for development in the future. These meetings have been particularly useful in helping student officers to focus on the employability skills and personal development opportunities that a year in office provides.

Conclusions and next steps

The process of engaging staff, student officers and other stakeholders in the process of setting and monitoring the performance of the organisation means that these aims become embedded in the day to day activities of the organisation. This makes the process of formal appraisal less onerous and also means that the majority of objectives are achieved as part of the normal working day.

The next stage is to involve student supervisors and ultimately student staff in the performance management process.

● **Richard Silcock,**
Chief Executive, Reading
University Students' Union



NUS department managers



Name: Ben Ward
Position: Membership Development Manager
I think a good students' union is one that...
 Involves as many students as possible in activities relevant and important to them. One that really adds value to the overall student experience in partnership with the university

My team helps local students' unions by...
 Providing up to date advice and support on governance and charity law, developing learning and development programmes for student officers and running national projects for use on the ground by unions. We also work with national agencies to raise the profile of students' unions as organisations.

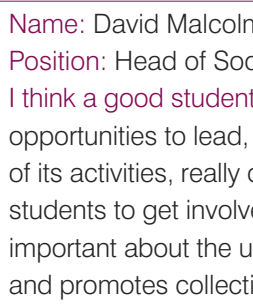
Name: Alex Bols
Position: Head of Education and Quality
I think a good students' union is one that...
 actively engages students in shaping and improving their learning experience; knows and represents its members; and is a positive force for change in their institution.

How my team at NUS can help local students' unions... by providing information and research into a range education issues; bringing together experts from the sector and good practice from students' unions in a series of events and conferences; and articulating and representing student interests in the sector.



Name: Vic Langer
Position: Head of Political Strategy
I think a good students' union is one that...
 picks up on issues that are deeply and widely felt across campus and responds by running relevant campaigns that secure positive change.
How my team at NUS can help local students' unions... by providing advice,

support and guidance on how to run hard hitting effective local campaigns. We can also provide advice and support on how effectively lobby your local council/MP, how to get coverage in your local media and how to engage your students in national campaigning activity, for example through the 'Funding Our Future' campaign.



Name: David Malcolm
Position: Head of Social Policy
I think a good students' union is one that... gives students opportunities to lead, not only as sabbaticals but across all of its activities, really opens up opportunities for all of its students to get involved, and communicates what's really important about the union in a way that engages students and promotes collective values. And also one that stocks really cool stationery products in the shop.
How my team at NUS can help local students' unions...
 Social Policy at NUS covers issues relating to student finance, welfare and liberation, and we can help local SUs across all of these areas. We produce research and policy

documents for you to use in your campaigns, help you to develop local activists (particularly where liberation is concerned) and provide information resources to assist your advice work. We also try to bring together some of the excellent work that goes on across the country, for example through good practice guides and with our involvement with the national casework project being developed with AMSU and RAWs. And if you have any thoughts about something you'd like us to do we're always open to suggestions.



NUS is pleased to be a supporter and funder of the SUEI project for over 60 unions across the UK, developing strong and active unions that make a difference to their members.

If you want information about SUEI please contact george.yeorghaki@nus.org.uk
 Please visit the SUEI website at www.suei.co.uk