



**BIRKBECK
STUDENTS'
UNION
HERE FOR YOU**

Birkbeck Students' Union Strategy

2022 - 2025





Introduction

Birkbeck Students' Union faces two key challenges: raising the esteem of the organisation and increasing awareness of the Students' Union and what we do. Both are linked and making progress in one area will likely aid the other. However, the key takeaway from students is that they want their Students' Union to be more proactive in engaging with them, removing the onus from them to engage with the Students' Union, and be an organisation which can confidently demonstrate its place within their student experience.

Our key opportunities span a number of different areas, from wellbeing to social experience, from education to representation. Yet, how we create solutions in these areas needs to consider that Birkbeck students report being particularly time poor and care predominantly about their course success. When framing our work which aims to meet these opportunities, we should consider how this will contribute to students' academic success and ensure that this is well communicated to the student body.

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OUR VALUES

Inclusive

We aim to create an environment open to all.

Advocating for change

We represent our members to bring about positive improvements in their lives.

Student focused

We place our members at the heart of everything we do.

Collaborative

We believe our greatest strengths are our members, staff and partners, and that it is only by working together we can achieve our goals.

Supportive

We provide encouragement and help to our members.

Empowering

We increase our members ability to influence the world around them.

Championing Diversity

We support and defend diversity in all its forms.

Our Objectives



From 2022/23 through to 2024/25 our four strategic objectives will be:

- 1 Supporting student wellbeing
- 2 Enhancing students' social experience
- 3 Representing the views of students
- 4 Representing academic interests



Objective 1 Supporting Student Wellbeing

Supporting students' wellbeing is our top opportunity to improve satisfaction, and providing students with independent help, advice and support is the second most popular expectation of the organisation. However, meeting this expectation also has wider implications with almost one third (32%) of students who consider dropping out doing so because their mental health was too poor to continue (the joint top reason students consider dropping out). Ensuring that we meet expectations in this area has the potential to contribute to college-wide KPIs and the attainment and success of our members.

Focus 1
Three issues that students were concerned about related to their time: 57% - academic workload, 57% the effect of my other responsibilities on academic achievement, 53% my sleep habits. In addition, 31% of those who have considered dropping out did so because they were concerned about how their other responsibilities were impacting on their ability to do their course.

Focus 2
Over a third of students are unaware that the Students' Union offers an advice service. The topics most people are aware of are only known by around half of students (complaints: 50% of students are aware of; mitigating circumstances: 49% of students are aware of).

Focus 5
In addition to concerns about their course, students aged 25 and under are also concerned about: 67% - being able to pay for the things I need, 63% - career prospects. When asked what they would do differently, students noted the costly financial aspect of attending a university and felt like they could have either saved more prior to starting their course, improved their budgeting or sought out scholarships or bursaries to support them. Also, 42% of students disagreed that the food outlets on campus are value for money, with hot meals (56%) being the most popular type of food which students feel there could be a greater offering of on campus.

Focus 3
34% of those aged 26 and over said they would turn to the Students' Union if they needed help and advice (the sample average), however in the open comments, older students felt that they had no need for a Students' Union or the advice/information it offers, suggesting that the offer from the Students' Union for advice and information is perceived to be somewhat irrelevant to this group of students.

Focus 4
Students referenced the opening times of the Students' Union advice services as prohibitive, with many unable to attend between the hours of 2-6pm due to other commitments.

We will focus on:

Objective	KPIs	How we will measure this?
1. Developing relationships with different partners to support and enhance students' academic experience and their welfare.	1 new partnership per year to be created with the College or external organisation to better support student wellbeing.	Termly meeting with partners
2. Increasing and signposting wellbeing opportunities throughout all Students' Union activities.	20% students agree that we have had a positive impact on their wellbeing. 13% in 2022.	Annual student survey
3. Increasing participation in our activities by ensuring our opportunities consider barriers to students.	50% of events should be free of charge.	Event evaluations and the number of wellbeing related events

Objective 2

Enhancing Students' Social Experience

Enhancing students' social experience is the second ranked opportunity to help improve overall satisfaction with the Students' Union. This area is particularly relevant as 31% of Birkbeck students were concerned about loneliness when surveyed, and 22% of those who have considered dropping out did so because they are not getting the social experience they expected.



Focus 1

Very low proportions of students are involved in what is on offer from the Students' Union, from its events (10%), to its societies (15%) and sports (3%); 21% of students who are not involved in societies or sports clubs say their reasons for not doing so is because there is nothing that interests them on offer. In terms of events, this which had the highest levels of interests (as determined by those who were not neutral regarding or not interested in the type of event) were: 55% - talks/lectures, 54% - theatre/plays, 53% - film screenings, 47% - live music. Whilst of interest to fewer students, higher levels of dissatisfaction with the availability of the following types of events were observed, and the Students' Union will consider how it could provide these events: 15% - club nights, 15% - pub quizzes.

Focus 2

Few students attend events during the week; the Students' Union will ensure that we concentrate events on days when students may prefer to attend, such as Friday (65%) and Saturday (58%).

Focus 3

48% of people who are not involved in societies or sports clubs state the reason is because they do not often go to the Students' Union. The Students' Union will consider how we can remove the association between the physical space it occupies and being involved with the organisation. This links to students' desires for the Students' Union to be more proactive and reach out to them in space they are already occupying, such as the library and teaching spaces.

Focus 4

Large proportions of students are unaware that the Students' Union offer events (26%), societies (28%) and sports clubs (36%). In addition, over a third of students (37%) who are not involved in sports clubs or societies cite being unaware of what the Students' Union has on offer as a reason why they are not involved.

We will focus on:

Objective

1. Increasing engagement and satisfaction with the SU Events programme
2. Increasing student group membership numbers and satisfaction
3. Increasing awareness of the Activities section

KPIs

- 30% of members have attended a Students' Union Event. 10% in 2022.
- 75% of these members had a positive experience.
- 25% of members have joined a club or society. 18% in 2022.
- 75% of these members had a positive experience.
- 80% of members know that we run clubs and societies. 60% in 2022.

How we will measure this?

- Bookings made via our website
- Annual student survey
- Memberships purchased via our website
- Annual student survey
- Annual student survey

Objective 3 Representing the Views of Students

Representing the views of students effectively is our third largest opportunity to increase overall satisfaction with the Union. Further, representing students' views to the College is the top chosen priority for the Students' Union (32%)



Focus 1

Some students felt that they were not as well represented as others, particularly postgraduates and mature students. There was a perception that the Students' Union, and the issues that it is focussing on, are more relevant to younger, undergraduate students.

Focus 2

Students are unaware of what the Students' Union does to represent students. In particular, only 17% of students know who the Officers are, what they do (24%) and are unaware of what the Officer team are achieving for them (10%).



Focus 3

Few students are aware of the Students' Union's positions as representatives of students; only 20% of students knew that the Students' Union is separate from the College, and 41% erroneously believed the Students' Union and the College to be the same organisation.



We will focus on:

Objective	KPIs	How we will measure this?
1. Ensuring that our members feel they are represented in our work	70% of students know how to influence change at BBKSU.	Annual student survey
2. Engaging more students in our representation opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All paid Officer and Student Council elected positions are contested. 10% of members vote in our elections. 4% in 2022. 	Elections data from our website
3. Centring student voice at the heart of the design and delivery of our work	50% of members participate in one student consultation	Student voice data collected
4. Rewarding and recognising our student representatives	All representatives receive reward and recognition for their work.	Student voice data collected

Objective 4 Representing Academic Interests

Our final opportunity for increased focus is on the representation specifically of students' academic interests. Students feel strongly that we should be doing more to improve the academic side of student life, as fewer than a third of students believe that the Union effectively represents students' academic interests.



Focus 1

17% of students agree that they know what the Students' Union is doing to represent their academic interests, and 43% actively disagree. Students want a greater focus on course issues and alluded to perceptions that the Students' Union is currently focused on more social issues.

Focus 2

A key area in which students felt their lives at Birkbeck could have been better relates to getting a head start on their academic life. Students referenced being particularly busy due to managing competing priorities (e.g. a full-time job, parenting responsibilities) and being able to prepare for university life earlier would have helped them to adjust more easily, such as access to reading lists, course materials and study skills support.

Focus 4

A key area for improvement mentioned was to better inform students of who their course rep is. Increasing the knowledge of who students' course reps are should have positive additional consequences for the Students' Union. Only 35% of students who are unaware of who their course rep is believe the course rep system is effective; when students know who their course rep is, this raises to 65%.

Focus 3

17% of students said they are dissatisfied with the organisation on their course and 16% were dissatisfied with the feedback on their work.

Focus 5

When asked how concerned they have been about a range of issues in the last two weeks, the two issues students were most concerned about both related to academic issues: 71% - exams/assignments, 64% academic achievement.

We will focus on:	Objective	KPIs	How we will measure this?
	1. An awareness campaign to improve students' understanding of our services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% of students are confident in recognising our work. 50% of students agree that the Union represents their Academic interests. 17% in 2022. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audience and engagement growth statistics Annual student survey
	2. Lobbying the College for greater consistency across departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrow student satisfaction scores between departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Office for Students are introducing a metric to monitor consistency across departments Advice Service data Module Evaluations
	3. Transforming the Course Rep scheme into an effective change-making system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% of course rep places are filled 40% of members agree that their course reps work on issues that matter to them 80% of members know who their course rep is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student voice data Annual student survey



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