

The Descriptors

1. Strategic planning

Excellent

The union has a published strategic plan that has the needs of its members, both current and future, at its very core. Knowledge of the plan among the members and other stakeholders is good and they may be able to cite some of its key elements.

The union also has a statement of its fundamental purpose, often in the form of a mission statement presented in a format that is accessible to all. The union has an inspirational vision that defines an aspirational principle or an overall impact. The union's strategic plan embodies these beliefs/values, which are clearly translated into practice. As a result, the union can demonstrate how its vision and values are an integral part of its day-to-day activities.

The union's overall strategic documents define how its mission and the vision will be delivered. Typically, these strategic documents will include a number of separate documents that build layers of detail in how the union's vision will be worked towards.

This will often be summarised in an operating or business plan, which clearly describes how the union's vision, values and strategic priorities will be enacted and delivered. As a result the vision, values and strategic objectives are clearly and unambiguously linked to the actual current context in which the union operates.

The union's overall strategic plan is fully understood by its elected officers, staff, members and stakeholders. These stakeholder groups feel they have been closely consulted in the development of the plan and can describe how they were involved in developing the strategy. As a result, members and other stakeholders have an understanding of how the plan was developed. Additionally, as a result of this partnership approach, the union's strategic plan has high levels of credibility.

The union can demonstrate that its plan sets out priorities for the union and helps to determine how resources are allocated. The plan is holistic and encompasses all activities of the union in a way that promotes synergy and sustainability.

Very good

The union has a published strategic plan that is aligned to the needs of its members and is linked to the current context in which the union operates. The union's members are aware of the plan.

The union has some kind of definition of its fundamental purpose, often in the form of a mission statement. The union has also identified its overall direction, often in the form of a vision. The union has a statement that outlines its fundamental beliefs, normally as a set of values. These values will have been considered when the plan was written, but evidencing the translation of these values into the union's activities may not always be possible.

In addition to a strategic plan, the union has an additional document or series of documents that detail exactly what it plans to do over a fixed time period. These documents will often take the form of an operating or business plan. Although the operating plan exists, it is difficult to understand how it links the union's vision, values and strategic priorities into activities and actions.

The union can demonstrate that the majority of its strategic objectives are consistent with the context of the union and therefore the specific needs of its members. But it may be less clear how the vision and values have been developed.

The overall strategic plan is understood by the union's elected officers, staff, members and stakeholders and has been developed in partnership with all of these groups. These groups feel that they have been consulted in developing the plan and can describe how they are/were involved in developing the strategy.

The union can demonstrate that its plan sets out the union's priorities. The plan is generally holistic, covering all of the union's main activities but may not include resource or people planning.

Good

The union's leaders can demonstrate that it has a clear purpose and vision, which is supported by a strategy to improve its outcomes on an annual basis. The union may have a vision/purpose statement or some other kind of central statement(s).

The union may have a statement that outlines its fundamental beliefs, often in the form of a set of values. However, it may not be clear how these beliefs or values are translated into the union's activities and it is difficult to demonstrate the impact of these beliefs.

While the strategic plan is in place and the union's priorities are identified, there may not be a document that details exactly how the strategic plan (and therefore the union's vision) is translated and enacted in its practices and activities.

The union can demonstrate a link between its plan and the broad needs of its members. This link may be based on broad generalisations about the members' needs rather than empirical data. Documents such as the union's vision, values and purpose/mission may have been developed in isolation or adopted from the past. The currency of these statements may be difficult to demonstrate.

Understanding of the union's overall strategic plan may be limited to the author(s) or senior members of staff and elected officers. The plan may have been developed by senior staff or elected officers in isolation, with limited input from other stakeholders.

The union can demonstrate that its planning covers all of its major activities and sets objectives at a high level.

2. Relationships and partnerships

Excellent

The central importance to the union of its relationships and connections with its members is apparent and implicit through everything the union does. The union can demonstrate that it invests in constantly improving these links, with clear decisions being made about allocating resources to forming relationships with unengaged members and deepening relationships with engaged members. There are specific strategies to form relationships with hard-to-reach and/or under-represented groups. As a result of this work, the union has built strong relationships across its entire membership and members feel an affinity to the union.

The union always considers how key stakeholders perceive it, and how this perception is managed – this may take the form of a written reputation management strategy. As a result, there is a

strong and beneficial relationship or partnership between the union and some or all of its stakeholders. There are a number of clear synergies between the union and its key stakeholders.

The union has proactively built and maintained strong relationships or partnerships with all of its stakeholders, which provides benefits to its members. This is reinforced by effective networking beyond the student movement – the union has developed strong and highly beneficial relationships with other, non-stakeholder organisations. As a result, there are numerous examples of partnerships that have provided real and tangible benefits to the union's members.

Internal relationships between departments and between staff and officers are strong, resulting in significant inter-working and demonstrable synergies.

Very good

The union can demonstrate that it values its relationships and connections with its members highly. The union has considered forming relationships with unengaged members and deepening relationships with engaged members. It may have also made some decisive efforts to improve these relationships, but evidence to support the success of this work may not yet be available. In many cases unions will have plans in place to allocate time and resources to improving relationships with its members.

The union is aware of how it is perceived by key stakeholders and has a degree of self-awareness. The union will have supported this by undertaking some kind of opinion-gathering work that specifically tests perceptions. It may also have considered how it can manage and improve these perceptions, but the impact of this has yet to be felt.

The union can demonstrate that it has beneficial relationships or partnerships with a number of stakeholders and NUS. As a result, there are examples of union services or activities that have been delivered or undertaken in partnership with others. The union has also dedicated time and resources to effective networking beyond its immediate stakeholders. Internal relationships are managed to promote the delivery of union activities and the achievement of planned outcomes.

Good

The union understands the importance of having a strong connection with its members and can demonstrate this. While the union may have strong relationships with sections of its membership, there is little evidence of its work to broaden these relationships beyond engaged members.

The union understands the importance of how it is perceived by its stakeholders. It may also have formed an opinion of how it is perceived by others, but may not have evidence to support that opinion.

The union can demonstrate a working relationship with its parent institution and other key stakeholders. There is little evidence that internal relationships are actively managed.

3. Governance

Excellent

The NUS Good Governance Guide is 'fully achieved'.

Or

The union can demonstrate that it has a clear governance system to generate, review and update its policies, processes and structures. Additionally, it has governance systems in place to ensure that policies, processes and procedures are rigorously followed. Knowledge of this within the union

is very strong and the union can evidence numerous areas where this is communicated effectively to the entire membership and key stakeholders.

The union can demonstrate how it has selected external trustees to bring high levels of profession and/or specialist knowledge to its governance structure, to support a high level of scrutiny. The union may also be able to demonstrate how these trustees have been able to develop challenges for senior staff.

The union has very strong financial controls embedded in a set of dedicated financial procedures. These procedures include, but are not limited to: expenses policies; accounting processes; purchasing policies; stock control; a capital planning schedule; and cash flow forecasting where appropriate. The union has robust scrutiny and audit processes via these governance structures.

All of the union's accounts are externally audited or independently examined in line with the union's legal structure at least once a year. The union has a risk register that is updated appropriately. The union has an effective health and safety management system in place. The union can demonstrate that it has processes and procedures in place to ensure full compliance with relevant legislation.

The union has structures in place, including a strong board, trustee body and/or representative bodies with clearly defined responsibilities and accountabilities, which actively enhance its ability to deliver strong, wide-ranging outcomes. The elected or appointed officials are specifically and effectively trained, continually developed and feel very able to undertake their role(s).

The union can show clear statements about how its governance, democracy and operations inter-relate and clear knowledge about which decisions must be made by the board and those that members can make.

The union is able to demonstrate that its constitution and by-laws are current, relevant and reflect reality. The union widely communicates its strategic plan annually in a way that is accessible and understood by its stakeholders. The union's members have strong awareness of its plans and are able to link the plan to their own needs.

The union produces a (SORP compliant) annual report that summarises its structure, aims, activities and effectiveness. The annual report is a fair review of the union, links KPIs to the strategic plan and includes balanced and comprehensive analysis. The annual report also details areas for improvement.

Very good

The union has achieved measures outlined in the NUS *Good Governance Guide* to an 'Acceptable standard'

Or

The majority of the union's policies, processes and structures are current and generally adhered to by all. The union can evidence how it has appointed trustees with previous knowledge of higher education and/or governance.

The union has robust financial controls and financial procedures that are closely adhered to, but these policies may not be fully documented. At a very minimum the union has established protocols for records on income and expenditure, financial and accounting, VAT and employment. There is scrutiny through the governance structures. All of the union's accounts are externally audited or independently examined in line with the union's legal structure at least once a year.

The union has risk assessments in place (including a fire risk assessment) for all of its activities, which will have identified risk removal/reduction/control measures. The union has a specific health and safety policy and has identified responsible people. The union is able to demonstrate that it has processes and procedures in place to ensure full compliance with relevant legislation.

The union has structures in place that help it to deliver strong, wide-ranging outcomes including a board, trustee body and/or representative bodies with clearly defined responsibilities and accountabilities, including the scrutiny of officers' performance. The elected or appointed officials are trained and they feel well able to undertake their role(s) effectively.

The union can demonstrate that it has considered how its governance, democracy and operations inter-relate but may not have written statements to support this. The union is able to demonstrate that its constitution and bye-laws are current, relevant and reflect reality.

The union communicates its strategic plan annually, resulting in its members having some awareness of its plans. The union produces an annual report that is SORP compliant. This report is a fair review of the union and links KPIs to its strategic plan and includes balanced and comprehensive analysis.

Good

The union has achieved measures outlined in the *NUS Good Governance Guide* to a 'Minimum standard'

Or

While the union has policies, processes and procedures, they are generated on an ad hoc basis in response to need and may not be consistently applied. Knowledge of the policies, processes and procedures within the union is good, but knowledge of them among its wider membership and stakeholders is less complete.

The union is able to demonstrate that it has external trustees who aid scrutiny within its governance structure. The union has control over its finances and complies with accounting requirements that are appropriate to the union's legal structure. All of the union's accounts are externally audited or independently examined in line with the union's legal structure at least once a year. The union can demonstrate that it has processes and procedures in place to ensure full compliance with relevant legislation.

The union has structures in place that help it to deliver strong, wide-ranging outcomes including a board, trustee body and/or representative bodies. The definition of roles and/or training of appointed officials may be incomplete. How the students' union's governance, democracy and operations inter-relate has not yet been considered.

The union is able to demonstrate that it has a constitution and by-laws. While the union may distribute its strategic plan in some form, awareness or understanding of the plan is difficult to demonstrate. The union produces an annual report that is SORP compliant.

4. Democracy **Excellent**

The union can demonstrate that it is established as a democratic organisation that fundamentally exists to represent the opinions, and serve the needs, of its members. As a result, members are at the heart of the union and the democratic principles of inclusiveness, student control, considered judgement and transparency are fundamental to everything the union does.

Fair and open cross-campus ballots are undertaken for all major office positions in line with the requirements of the 1994 Education Act. The union has put in place a number of effective initiatives to ensure that members from under-represented groups become engaged in union elections and decision-making. As a result, the candidates and electorate at the most recent election reflect the diversity of the union's membership – as does the makeup of the union's central decision-making body and those who participate in it.

Through the democratic system students are able to set the political, financial and strategic direction of the union. In each of these three areas, members are enabled to participate in identifying problems, analysing options, selecting solutions and implementing their decision. Furthermore, the union can evidence that the decisions made by members are acted on and realised in a timely way.

The Information given by the union to its members is a fundamental component of ensuring that the union operates as a democracy. This information is accessible, relevant and timely to ensure that members can contribute to the union's decision-making processes in an informed way. Members are therefore able to make considered judgements when voting in elections and making decisions. The union is able to demonstrate that it enables members to consider the views of other members before making a decision.

The union's members feels that they fully understand how to participate in union democracy, including but not limited to, voting, standing for election and submitting a proposal to be considered by the membership. Those who choose to participate are trained and supported through the process to understand both the terms and consequences of their participation. Members are able to scrutinise the actions of the union and its elected officers through clear communications and a process for members to raise their objections if they don't feel represented.

The democratic system is sustainable in terms of its demands on union resources, but also appropriate in terms of its demands on the time and participation of its members.

Very good

The union can demonstrate that its membership is at the core of the majority of its activities and that the democratic principles of inclusiveness, student control, considered judgement and transparency are important to everything the union does.

Fair and open cross-campus ballots are undertaken for all major office positions, in line with the requirements of the 1994 Education Act. The union is able to show where it has attempted to ensure that members from under-represented groups become engaged in union elections and decision-making.

Through the democratic system students are able to influence the political and strategic direction of their students' union. In these two areas, members are enabled to participate in identifying problems and selecting solutions as part of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the union can demonstrate that decisions made by members are acted on in a timely way.

The information given by the union to its members is a fundamental component of ensuring that the union operates as a democracy. This information is accessible, relevant and timely to ensure that members can contribute to the decision-making processes of the union in an informed way. Members are therefore able to make considered judgements when voting in elections and making decisions.

Most of the members feel that they fully understand how to participate in union democracy, including but not limited to, voting, standing for election and submitting a proposal to be discussed and decided upon by the membership. Those who choose to participate are trained and supported through the process to understand both the terms and consequences of their participation. Members are able to scrutinise the actions of the union and its elected officers through clear communications.

The democratic system is sustainable in terms of its demands on union resources, but also appropriate in terms of its demands on the time and participation of the membership.

Good

The democratic principles of inclusiveness, student control, considered judgement and transparency are important to everything the union does.

Fair and open cross-campus ballots are undertaken for all major office positions, in line with the requirements of the 1994 Education Act. Through the democratic system students are able to influence the political direction of their union. As part of this decision-making process, members are enabled to participate in identifying problems and selecting solutions.

The information published by the union about its democratic decision-making processes may be limited to key dates and logistics. Knowledge of how to participate in union democracy is limited to standing for high-profile roles such as sabbatical positions and voting in cross-campus ballots. Those who choose to participate are supported through the process by being given key logistical information.

5. People Excellent

The union has current Investors In People status at 'Gold' standard.

Or

All staff have an opportunity to review their progress and to direct their training at least twice a year so that they develop in their role. This is valued by staff and may be seen as a wider organisational ethos that embraces coaching and mentoring.

The development and allocation of people resources is a fundamental component of the union's planning. The union has a culture that welcomes continuous learning and development of all staff equally. There are development opportunities for staff at all levels and all staff are actively encouraged to develop their skills and knowledge.

Succession planning has been considered and may be outlined in a formal written document. As a result, succession plan training and development has been delivered to individual members of staff across the entire range of staff positions.

Active processes are in place to manage the performance of all staff. Staff have good awareness and access to these processes and may contribute to their development. A network of support is available to all staff who are not achieving their capabilities, and a clear process exists to protect the union if this support fails.

Staff are deeply engaged in many aspects of the union beyond their job role. They feel that they have a role in the union's development, are consulted and their opinions are responded to. As a result, staff feel they are an important stakeholder in the union.

Staff feel that internal communication systems work well and as a result they are knowledgeable about what is happening in the union and how to contribute. There may have been some monitoring of internal communications that demonstrate their effectiveness.

Recruitment processes embrace equality of opportunity and detailed scrutiny so that the workforce is talented and diverse, with shared values that can be demonstrated.

Knowledge about career progression and internal promotion is strong across all staff. The union has responded to the need to ensure work/life balance for its workforce. The union is likely to actively promote from within, which will have resulted in a measurable response from staff.

The union has a culture that recognises and rewards attainment and high performance by staff. Performance measurement will generally be in line with the union's development (e.g. attainment of KPIs). The recognition and reward process is written and widely understood by all. Rewards are often innovative and always cost-effective. Staff feel that praise is a regular feature within the union and that recognition of staff performance is a motivating factor.

The union can demonstrate that voluntary staff are a very important aspect of the organisation and are highly valued. Appropriate systems that are in place for career staff are also used for volunteers. The union is able to demonstrate how it trains and develops volunteer staff and in some cases how it reviews their performance. Voluntary staff feel valued and engaged in union beyond their job role.

The expenditure on staffing in its entirety is reported through the governance structures. Improvements brought about by investments in staff training and development are routinely explained and linked to the achievement of strategic objectives. Expenditure on staffing may also be explained to other external stakeholders.

Very Good

The union has current Investors In People status at 'Silver' standard.

Or

All staff have an annual opportunity to review their progress and discuss their training needs so they are developing in their role. There is a culture that welcomes continuous learning and the development of all staff equally.

The union's strategic plan includes the development of staff in appropriate ways to achieve its strategic aims. The union's leadership can identify how they have created a culture for continuous improvement. Processes are in place to manage the performance of all staff. Staff have access of these processes normally in the form of a staff handbook. There has clearly been an attempt at, or thought given to, succession planning.

Staff are engaged in the organisation. They feel they have a role in the development of the union and that they are consulted. The union's leadership feel that internal communication systems work well. As a result, they feel that staff are knowledgeable and able to contribute.

Recruitment processes are monitored to ensure equality of opportunity. However, there may not be proactive steps to report or act upon this information. Internally, managers have a good understanding of career progression and promotion. The union has responded to the need to ensure work/life balance for its workforce.

The expenditure on staffing in its entirety is reported and explained to stakeholders. The union will have some kind of reward and recognition process in place, however it may not be written and

staff may feel that its implementation is inconsistent or inappropriate. It is difficult to identify how this process contributes to the motivation of all staff.

The union is able to demonstrate that voluntary staff are important to the organisation. The union can demonstrate that it ensures volunteers and appropriately trained for their role. There may also be evidence of development opportunities for volunteers; however this may not be available to all. Volunteer staff feel valued within their role(s).

Expenditure on staffing is reported through the union's governance structure in a way that is clear and understood. There may be a limited number of examples where training can be shown to have had an impact; however this may be in a minority of cases.

Good

The union has current Investors In People status.

Or

All staff have an annual opportunity to review their progress.

There is an allocation of resources to staff training, which may take the form of a training plan. Links between the training plan and the union's strategic plan may be limited.

Processes are in place to manage the performance of all staff; however these processes may not be widely adopted or up-to-date. Staff are engaged in the union at specific points of the year, for example via an annual staff opinion survey. This staff engagement may be limited to their own areas of work. The union's leadership can identify examples of internal communication methods that they feel are effective.

Recruitment and promotion processes are secure and robust. As a result, union staff and other stakeholders are confident of the equality and transparency of recruitment and promotion. The union has given some consideration to acknowledging high performance, however formal systems may not be in place. Staff often have little awareness of these systems or, where there is awareness, feel that acknowledgement of high performance is ad hoc.

The union is aware of the agenda around work/life balance for its workforce. It may have plans in place to formally consider or implement flexible working arrangements.

The union either does not make use of volunteer staff or, where volunteer staff are employed, they are not formally trained for their role. The union's expenditure on staff is monitored but is not widely reported or linked to planning.

6. Communication

Excellent

There is a communications strategy as part of the union's strategic plan, which has the overall aim of promoting member engagement, participation and transparency or other priorities in the union's strategy. Key messages are conveyed using a range of communication methods over extended periods of time. As a result, members feel that the union's communication methods give them the appropriate knowledge to enable them to actively participate in the union.

The membership as a whole has a detailed understanding and widespread knowledge of the union's activities, operation and key messages. As a result, members are able to identify a number of the main roles of their union and feel the union acts in a way that is open and transparent.

Knowledge of, and access to, one or more feedback mechanisms is strong across the entire membership. There is a clear link between members' input/feedback and action. As a result, members feel they can effectively contribute to their union.

The effectiveness of the union's communication is clear and measured. The union has also set targets for communication, and performance against these targets is scrutinised by the governance structure. The union may have considered benchmarking its performance against others both inside and outside of the movement. As a result, the union has a strong understanding about which communication methods work and which do not. This knowledge may also help the union to make informed decisions about investment in communications.

The union's communications are dynamic, proactive, innovative, responsive and specific to the needs of its membership. Typically, the union uses tailored communication methods based on contexts and messages specifically designed to reach different groups of students, including methods to target hard-to-reach members such as placement students and distance learners. These mechanisms include face-to-face communication.

The union is effective in its communications with all its other stakeholders and is able to demonstrate effective two-way communication and demonstrate that its key messages are widely known and understood.

The union can demonstrate that it understands the value of its brand. It is able to show that its brand has been considered in its strategic plan/communications plan. The union has very high levels of consistency in the messages that it communicates, which continuously reinforce its brand. This is seen throughout the union.

Very good

The union demonstrates that it gives information to, and seeks the views of, its members and stakeholders in a considered way. The union may not have a written communications strategy but has a section within its strategic plan that specifically addresses communication. As a result, communication is planned and conveys key messages. Members feel that that know what is happening in their union.

The membership as a whole has an understanding and knowledge of the union's activities, operations and key messages. Across the entire membership this understanding is notably stronger among engaged members. Additionally, this awareness is often far stronger in some area than others, typically around events.

There is widespread knowledge among the union's members of its feedback mechanisms. As a result, members feel that the union acts in a way that is mostly open and transparent and that their views are listened to and generally acted upon.

The effectiveness of the union's communication is apparent due to level of general awareness among its members. However, this effectiveness is not quantified or measured against any targets. As a result, knowledge of the value of particular communication mechanisms or the success of particular messages is not known.

The union typically uses tailored communication methods based on contexts and messages designed to reach different groups of students. There are examples of the union planning or trialling new methods to improve its communication with 'hard-to-reach' and/or under-represented groups.

The union is able to demonstrate effective and constructive two-way communications with its key stakeholders. There are definite consistencies or patterns within the union's communications, indicating that thought has been given to the union's brand.

Good

The union can demonstrate that it communicates with its members and is receptive to communication from them. Outgoing messages are almost always be associated with a specific activity or event and are unrelated to other messages. As a result, members feel that messages from the union tend to be somewhat inconsistent or ad hoc.

As a result of the union's communications the engaged sections of its membership understand parts of what the union does. These members are aware of a mechanism for giving feedback to the union but the majority of them have not used it.

The union actively communicates with its members but it is difficult to ascertain how effective this communication is. The union's communications tend to use a limited number of channels and/or are not routinely tailored to a specific audience. The union is able to demonstrate that it has two-way communications with its parent institution.

The union brand has not yet been developed.

7. Services

Excellent

The services offered by the union, either directly or through a partner, are intrinsically linked to the current needs of its members and the union context. This link has been planned for through the union's strategic planning process. Where the union has space, economic or other restrictions to key services identified by members are delivered in alternative ways. In some situations this may be in the planning stage and not yet in place but a board-level commitment has been made.

As a result of the union's approach all the services it provides are well used and highly valued by its members. The union can demonstrate that it delivers effective, high-quality services. Staff in each service area are aware of feedback and KPIs have been set. The union is able to demonstrate that in all areas it is focused on providing the very best service it can to members (and other consumers). This high level of customer service is very apparent. As a result, members are very satisfied with each service.

There are mechanisms in place to consider the best delivery mechanism for services, to ensure that the highest level of quality is achieved. As a result, there are often examples of the union opting to work in partnership within other organisations or companies to further develop the quality of its services.

The union has clearly defined the outcomes it is striving to gain from each of its services. These outcomes are often targets that directly address the union's strategic priorities or detailed financial targets. There may also be examples of services that deliver both. Each service has multiple and carefully selected measurement mechanisms that allow performance to be monitored. As a result, there are clear success criteria for each service that support effective management and enable the union's governance structures to monitor performance. Knowledge of how each service is performing is high. In all cases, services are in line with, or exceed, their targets. Where this is not the case, the union can demonstrate remedial actions. In some cases the union will benchmark its performance against other comparable organisations.

Where the union has sought to deliver services to its members through a third party within the union building there are formal control mechanisms in place to ensure the service is delivered to the highest possible standard. Additionally, where these services are provided outside of the building the union can demonstrate clear attempts to influence the quality of the service where appropriate.

The union operates its services in a complementary way that prevents internal competition or conflict while promoting a strong brand. Services that are provided in conjunction with, or solely by, a partner also comply with this complementary ethos. As a whole there is a sense that each individual service, however it is delivered, is cohesive with all other services to bring about an overall synergy.

Very good

The union offers, either directly or through a partner, a number of services to its members. Most of the services offered by the union have developed over time and are consistent with services offered by other students' unions.

While not all services have been aligned and systematically realigned to meet members' needs, there are examples of services that have been created, adjusted or developed in response to member feedback. As a result, a minority of services are consciously operated in direct response to member needs.

Where there is a space, economic or other restriction within the union it has considered alternative ways of offering services. As a result of this alignment, the services that the union offers are well used by its members.

The union demonstrates the quality of its services by using user or income data that is routinely recorded and reported. There may also be some user feedback on the overall quality of a service or elements of a service but there is only limited evidence of substantive actions in response to this feedback. User feedback data is not typically used as KPIs for services.

There are examples where the union has opted to work in partnership within other organisations or companies to develop the quality of its services. As a result, the union is able to demonstrate that its members receive a better service.

The union monitors the performance of most of its services but this is often limited to measuring hard indicators such as income or participation numbers. The union has set out some expectations for the performance of its services based around these hard indicators. As a result, there is scrutiny of performance through the union's governance structures, which has ensured appropriate remedial actions where services were failing to meet expectations.

The union is able to demonstrate some level of input over the quality of services that it has passed over to a third party within the union building.

There is a degree of connection between the majority of services and activities that the union operates directly and facilitates indirectly. It is however difficult to demonstrate how these services complement each other to create an overall package of services.

Good

The union offers, directly or through a partner, a number of services to its members. These services will have often developed over time and are in line with services offered by other student unions. As a result, it is probable that the services generally serve the current needs of the union's members but this has not been tested and cannot be evidenced.

In some cases the majority of the service offering has been static for some time. The union believes that the services it delivers either directly or through a third party are of a good quality but is unable to demonstrate this empirically. As a result, targets for quality of service have not been set.

There is some recording of data, primarily from the union's income-generating services. There may be an expectation for performance but this may be largely limited to year-on-year comparisons. The union is aware of the performance of its income-generating services and is able to demonstrate appropriate remedial actions where these services were failing to meet expectation.

Where its services are delivered by partners or other third parties, the union typically also passes on quality control and therefore has little additional input. There may, however, be opportunities for members to feedback directly to these service providers.

Services are generally operated in isolation. There may be links within commercial services and within member services but they are unlikely to cross over or complement each other.

8. Participation

Excellent

The union is able to demonstrate that it has dedicated time and resources to developing participation opportunities and promoting exciting opportunities to all its members. The union also has specific strategies to promote participation opportunities to under-represented and traditionally hard-to-reach groups. As a result, a broad range of students actively participates in the union. Additionally, there may be examples where this promotion of participation has led to an individual members engaging with the union for the first time.

The union can demonstrate that it has a highly innovative range of opportunities for its members to contribute to union decision-making. The union is able to demonstrate decisions that have resulted from these opportunities. Union members fully understand how to contribute to union decision-making processes.

The union actively encourages its members to volunteer and supports them in doing so by providing training and support. The union also understands the two-way process of volunteering and the benefits it brings. Where there are volunteering opportunities, the union has achieved the Investors in Volunteers award or complies with its criteria.

The union has clear strategies to improve the scale of participation in union activities and develops its members to enable them to participate as effectively as possible. The union can show that it proactively supports its members to participate in national campaigns, encouraging and facilitating individuals and groups of members to take part. Members feel very strongly that the union is 'their' union and know how they can participate in all aspects of the union.

Very good

The union can demonstrate that it provides a wide range of participation opportunities to its members and actively promotes them. As a result, members have a good awareness of participation opportunities.

The union can show a range of opportunities by which groups or individual members can contribute to its decision-making processes. Most of the union's members have some understanding of how to contribute to these decision-making processes.

The union assists members to volunteer and supports them in doing so by providing training and support. While the union may not have achieved the Investors in Volunteers standard, there is evidence of its achievements in some of the indicator areas.

The union can show that it has considered improving the quality of member participation but isn't yet able to demonstrate an impact. The union can demonstrate that it supports members who wish to participate in national campaigns. Members feel that they have a strong input into aspects of the running of the union.

Good

The union is able to demonstrate that it provides a range of opportunities for members to participate in its activities.

The union can demonstrate opportunities by which groups or individual members can contribute to its decision-making processes. However, members' knowledge of these opportunities may be low.

9. Representation and campaigning **Excellent**

The union has a comprehensive training programme for course representatives and provides on-going support and guidance to them. In some cases, a member of staff may be assigned to have a specific role in supporting the course representative system. As a result, members becoming course representative feel they have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively represent union members' views to the institution.

The union can show evidence that its elected officers have an input into every major institution committee. These formal representations are reinforced by contacts between key institution staff members and the union's elected officers.

The union can demonstrate that its elected officers are able to make highly effective, accurate representations/interventions at institution committee meetings. This effectiveness is due to thorough preparation including an evidence-based understanding of the views of union members on major issues.

In response to members' views, the union is able to demonstrate that its elected officers proactively raise issues at committee meetings or through informal networking. As a result, student perspectives are accurately communicated and considered when major decisions are made and key issues affecting students are brought to the attention of the institution. The union can demonstrate a number of impacts that have been a direct result of this representation. The union can also show that its elected officers and other members participate in NUS events and represent the views of the union members to NUS.

The union proactively encourages individual members and groups of members to run campaigns. The availability of this support is well communicated. The union can demonstrate robust mechanisms to improve the effectiveness of member-led campaigns, often by providing training and/or advice. Union-supported campaigns have a defined objective or impact and the union is able to point to successful past campaigns.

Very good

The union has developed training materials for course representatives that communicate the main aspects of the role. As a result, course representatives are aware of the main aspects of their role.

The union can demonstrate that its elected officers input into a number of institution committee meetings. It can also demonstrate that its elected officers are able to make strong representations at these meetings as a result of preparation, including research into the issues under discussion. However, this may not include an evidence-based understanding of the views of union members. As a result, student perspectives are communicated and considered when major decisions are made.

The union can show evidence to demonstrate that its elected officers participate in NUS events. The union supports individual members and groups of members to campaign and can demonstrate examples of where it has helped to improve the effectiveness of member-led campaigns.

Good

The union facilitates a course representative system and in some cases may provide some support when requested by an individual.

The union can demonstrate that its elected officers have an input into at least one institution meeting to present students' perspectives. The perspective presented will often be limited to that of the elected officer or a small group of members.

The union can show that its elected officers attend NUS events. It can show evidence of when it has supported individual members or groups of members to campaign.

10. Review and evaluation

Excellent

Review and evaluation are clearly demonstrated as a fundamental aspect of the governance, leadership and management of the union. The union is fastidious in its approach to evaluation, constantly measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of its activities. As a result, the union has a strong understanding of its own performance and how it impacts upon its members.

The union uses sophisticated evaluation tools that provide detailed information on performance and areas for improvement. These tools are accessible and aid detailed scrutiny and opportunities to challenge actions through the governance body.

The union can demonstrate the process it has used to identify the most important and informative KPIs for external communication. To assist transparency, the union will have typically identified what is key, and selected KPIs accordingly. The union uses these KPIs in conjunction with narrative reporting to provide a clear assessment of its performance. Additionally, the union selects KPIs that allow the assessment of progress against objectives stated in its strategic plan.

Internally, the union makes highly effective use of well-presented KPIs supported by a narrative reporting to enable effective governance. While there is some consistency in the KPIs it uses, the union is able to demonstrate its flexibility to modify KPIs to reflect changes in strategic priorities. The union uses both qualitative KPIs (such as satisfaction), together with external benchmarking, in at least some areas to enable the review and evaluation of soft impacts.

The union's members have a detailed understanding of how their union is performing, how this performance relates to them and the areas in which it could improve.

Very good

Review and evaluation is an aspect of the governance, leadership and management of the union. As a result, the union has an understanding of its performance in key, strategically important areas such as finance.

The union can demonstrate that it has mechanisms to collect data and create comparisons over set time periods to enable effective governance.

The union uses KPIs or other comparable measurement tools in conjunction with narrative reporting to provide an assessment of its performance, both internally and externally. The union have given consideration to developing mechanisms to identify, review and evaluate its soft impacts.

The union's members feel that they understand how their union is performing overall.

Good

Review and evaluation is an aspect of the governance, leadership and management of the union and the union demonstrates that it has mechanisms to collect data in a way that can be scrutinised.

The union can demonstrate that it promotes effective governance through the consistent use of some form of measurement or indicators.

The union's members have some knowledge of the areas in which the union is performing well.

11. Context

Excellent

The union has a range of mechanisms in place to continually examine the wants, needs and perceptions of its members. It has developed ways to canvass the opinions of its members and has specific strategies to target traditionally hard-to-reach groups. The union specifically examines how it has impacted on its members in the past. As a result, the union feels confident that it understands its entire membership as far as practically possible.

The union has also considered other outside factors that will affect its current and future members. These may include the availability of housing, employment and finances.

The union is able to show that it has a clear understanding of its current capacity. It has also given consideration to how it can develop its capacity in the future to continuously meet the needs of its members. Typically, the union has made assessments of the space it has available, its finances and the skills of its staff.

The union can demonstrate that it has dedicated time and resources to forecast the needs of future students. It may also have evidence of the results of this foresight being incorporated into its strategic plan. The union is able to clearly show that it is able to react and adapt to changes in its members' views and needs. The union's structures, procedures and processes have inbuilt flexibilities that allow the union to continuously evolve to meet the future needs of its members.

The parent institution's strategic plan has been taken into consideration when the union considered its context. The parent institution's operating environment/context is embedded within the union's plan and a number of synergies can be clearly seen between them.

Very good

The union has mechanisms in place to routinely analyse its members' wants, needs and perceptions. These mechanisms typically range from large-scale opinion polling to the informal gathering of individuals' views. As a result, the union has a detailed understanding of the majority of its members, rooted in evidence.

The union is able to demonstrate an understanding of its current capacity and how this may need to be developed to meet the needs of future members. The union can show that it has also considered the needs of future members.

The union can demonstrate a number of occasions when it introduced new or significantly adapted existing services in direct response to a shift in members' views or needs.

The union is able to demonstrate that the parent institution's plans have been taken into consideration during the union's own planning process.

Good

The union has mechanisms in place to help understand its members' wants, needs and perceptions. As a result, the union understands the broad needs of its members and this is rooted in evidence.

The union is able to demonstrate an understanding of its capacity and the limitations that this may impose on its members.

The union can demonstrate one or more occasions when it has made a change to a service it provides in response to members' needs.

12. Impact

Excellent

The union has a strong focus on delivering impacts for its members. Everyone in the union is mindful of, and focused on, the impact(s) they are trying to achieve. The union fully understands its impact and is able to draw clear links between its impact and its strategic plan, therefore demonstrating how its vision is being delivered.

The union has an understanding of how the culmination of activities creates impact at a higher level and is able to demonstrate detailed examples. The union may be able to quantify the degree to which individual activities contributes to its overall impact.

The union is aware of its soft impacts and often reports on them. While the union may not quantify these soft impacts, there is evidence of plans to do this in the near future.

The union makes use of simple measurement tools to determine the scale of each impact. As a result, the union has detailed knowledge of where its activities have been most effective and created the greatest impact.

The union assesses how well its activities meet planned impacts during delivery as well as afterwards. Where the planned impact is income generation, the union has very robust measurement tools and multiple indicators in place. As a result, the union has very detailed, accurate data on the performance of its income-generating activities. Everyone involved in these activities will have knowledge of their activity's performance. There is significant evidence of where this knowledge has influenced on-going management and planning.

The union's members are able to identify a number of ways in which the union has positively impacted upon them individually. As a result, members understand how the union makes a positive contribution to them personally as well as to others. This means that the union is able to demonstrate that its activities and actions add value to individual members and groups of members in a significant number of ways.

The union makes widespread use of impact targets where there is need and their use supports effective impact reporting. The union can demonstrate impacts that have enriched its parent institution, its local community and the national movement. This enrichment is of a very high quality and adds real tangible value.

There is clear evidence that impact data is used as a primary tool in the union's planning process. The union can demonstrate detailed and considered understanding of the unplanned or negative impacts its activities may have on the local community and the wider environment, and can demonstrate that it proactively manages them. This may be demonstrated by one of more written impact management systems.

The union has an environmental management system that includes an environmental impact assessment and a mechanism to control identified impacts. The union can demonstrate continuous improvements in this regard. In the preceding year, the union has won, or is operating a level where it could win, accreditation to the Green Impact Gold Award and the Best Bar None Award.

Very good

The union has an awareness of its impacts although this isn't a main driver of its work. Officers and senior staff may be focused on achieving impacts. In the majority of cases the union's impacts are not related back to its strategic plan or vision.

The union is aware of how a culmination of activities creates higher-level impact but is not able to evidence detailed examples. It is aware of its soft impacts but does not yet quantify them or widely report on them.

The union uses measurement tools to demonstrate the majority of its impacts. However, in most cases, the union does not have knowledge of the areas where its activities are most effective and create the greatest impact. In the majority of cases, the union only makes impact assessments at the end of an activity.

Where the planned impact is income generation, the union has measurement tools and indicators in place and produces data for scrutiny. This data has sufficient detail to allow an understanding of the union's performance.

The union's members are aware of a number of its impacts and as a result they feel that their union does have a positive impact on its membership. The union is able to demonstrate that a number of its activities generate an impact for individual members and groups of members.

The union either makes limited use of impact targets and/or has little evidence to demonstrate how its targets support effective impact reporting. The union is able to indicate examples when it has positively impacted on its parent institution, its local community and the national movement. It is also able to demonstrate that it has considered, or is considering, impact in its planning processes.

The union can demonstrate an understanding of the unplanned or negative impacts its activities may have on the local community and the wider environment. It has in place appropriate management systems. In many cases the union has won, or is operating a level where it could win, accreditation to the Green Impact Gold Award and the Best Bar None Award.

Good

The union's focus is primarily on activities and outputs. As a result, the union does not currently consider its impact in most of its activities.

The union does not routinely measure the majority of its impacts. Where the union's impacts are considered, they can only be described with unqualified statements.

Where the planned impact is income generation, the union has systems in place to record income and expenditure. This data is available for scrutiny.

The union's members are aware of its activities and outputs but are generally not able to identify any impacts.

The union does not make use of impact targets. It is able to demonstrate where union activities have engaged its parent institution, its local community or the national movement. The union does not currently consider impact in its planning.

The union has an understanding of the impacts its activities may have on its local community and the wider environment. The union can demonstrate the steps it has taken to control and positively influence these impacts. Typically, the union has achieved a Green Impact award, and has an effective environmental management plan or other impact management system.